

Sarasota Oral History Project
New College of Florida, Fall 2016

Interview with: Helen Kesler

Interviewer: Miles Iton

Interviewed in December 2016

Helen Kesler is a yoga instructor, massage therapist, and spiritual healer based in Sarasota, Fl for over 30 years. Born in Tokyo, Japan, she has been a part of the Sarasota community since the 1970's when she attended New College of Florida. With the mentorship of the late Peggy Bates, Helen went on to graduate and teach the following generations of New College students the practice of good health and the art of maintaining it. Now a revered alumni, she has since traveled the world and collected a breadth of knowledge on body work, nonviolent communication and spiritual wellness with which she continues to enrich the lives of her yoga students at New College and beyond into the greater Manasota population.



Legend: *M - Miles, H - Helen Kesler*

Interview #1

M: Hello, my name is Miles - I'm sure you know. As you have seen in the [consent] forms, I will be doing this sit-down interview that is going to go online as part of the Sarasota.gov [website] in conjunction with the Sarasota Water Project. It doesn't have to be a water related subject topic; it's totally up to you as for the direction and where we go. Just to also back up any forms, if you could please state your name and, you know, where you're from and some introductoryies?

H: Okay, my name is Helen Kesler. I've been living in Sarasota since 1979, but I was originally born in Tokyo, Japan, and raised in the Middle East and North America.

M: How'd you find your way to Sarasota?

H: I came to Sarasota to attend New College, specifically. And I chose New College from all the colleges that were courting me because every other college sent a huge packet with a pamphlet and an application and lots of wasted paper, and New College sent me a tiny postcard that said on the front, “In the final analysis, each student is responsible for his own education. New College, Sarasota, Florida,” and that’s all it said. Then I went to the library and looked in the Barron’s book and it was in the most competitive category, and it was in Florida and it was near a beach! So, that was... no more conflict about where to go (ha ha).

M: So when did you first come to New College; about how long ago?

H: I came as a freshman in 1979, straight out of high school.

M: What did you study?

H: I started as a creative writing major. I was a poet. And when I interviewed for admission to New College my senior year, I flew down here from New Jersey with seven manuscripts of writing [ha ha]. But I learned upon coming here that we had only one poetry professor at the time: Mac Miller. And I was not real crazy about the Mac Miller scene, and if you didn’t like the one poetry professor, you had to switch your major! So I ended up moving to philosophy first, studied a lot with Berggren, then I almost lost my mind... and then I ended up in International Affairs with Peggy Bates.

M: Is that the degree you ended up graduating with?

H: [in International], yes. And I did a multidisciplinary thesis on transnationalism and nonviolent resistance.

M: Now, knowing that you eventually found your way back to New College, and helping make it how awesome it is now... what was the journey like as soon as you graduated?

H: Umm... well, when I graduated, I graduated both from New College and massage school one month apart from each other. So I graduated from New College in May then I graduated with my massage degree in June. So I kind of started out with two degrees when I graduated. And then went on and did Master’s at USF in Tampa before there was really distance learning, so for my graduate degree I would drive 4 days a week to Tampa for classes. You know... I think four days a week for two years, the third year it was, like, three days a week. But I always worked as a student. I was living in New Jersey. I finished out high school... and then as soon as I graduated I came to Sarasota.

M: [...] You weren't in Sarasota at this time, right? When you left home?

H: No, I was living in New Jersey. [I left] My junior year of high school; I finished out high school living [there]. And then as soon as I graduated I came to Sarasota.

M: Where do you see Sarasota now looking back to how it was then? Main differences?

H: Hm... it's a lot bigger, a lot busier... It used to be - well certain things. Well things that have changed around Sarasota? The weather has changed. It used to be, in the summer, it would rain at the same time almost every day. You could predict what time it would rain. And as we move through the summer into the fall, the time it would rain would get later and later. So in the middle of the summer it would rain at noon; by September it would rain at 4:00 every day, and all of that - it was like you could predict it. And all of that changed with El Ninos: when El Ninos came in, the weather pattern totally changed. And then... umm, let's see... Sarasota's a lot bigger! It used to be that, at least at New College, we didn't have food service 7 days a week, we had it five days a week, and so you were on your own on the weekends. [And] unlike now, nobody had a car then; everybody has a car now. I see Beamers and Jags in the parking lot, ya know? [Ha ha] Nobody had a car when I was a student, so we were hitching a lot to Trail Plaza to get our food, ya know? Umm, let's see... there was one TV I think on campus when I was a student, so we never watched TV or did that kind of stuff. Um, but Sarasota has just basically gotten a lot bigger over time, you know, it still managed to remain beautiful. It used to be a really well kept secret, Sarasota, but I think the secret kinda got out when 9/11 happened, and when 9/11 happened the president was talking to the [elementary] school in Newtown.

M: Oh, that was in Sarasota!

H: Mhmm, and he was staying at Longboat Key at the Colony Beach & Tennis Resort. So he was in Sarasota when he was alerted of 9/11, and Sarasota - everyone in the world knew that he was notified while he was in Sarasota, so Sarasota got to be world know from the 9/11 thing. But gradually over the years it's been... the secret [has] been out: it's no longer a well kept secret. You know, it used to be kind of a private place nobody knew about, where... you know... things were very relaxed and easy. And it used to be that at Thanksgiving the cars would triple, and then at Easter everything would die down, and during the summer it would be like a ghost town! But now we have tourists all year 'round; we have a lot of tourists in the summer that come from other parts of Florida that do resident discount specials, you know? Um... so it used to be a very seasonal tourist season but now it's kind of 24/7.

M: So what is it about the charm that Sarasota has, and I'm assuming it's held [throughout], that's really drawn you in and kept you?

H: Sarasota is one of my favorite places in the world. I think that here - maybe a little less so than before - but here you can live a healthy life that's not gonna be exorbitantly expensive, you have an opportunity outdoors in nature a lot. We have a culture that supports the arts. We have a number of small subcultures: you know, there's LGBTQ subculture, there's very much an artistic undertone, there's always been health, healing and spiritual undertones. Supposedly, Sarasota and Sedona are big spiritual centers in the United States. And um... it's not so overt in Sarasota, it's more kind of under the surface. If you go under the surface, there's all kinds of networking going on between holistic healers... spiritual healers, body workers, fitness people, psychologists/psycho-therapeutic types. So there's kind of a *mélange* where all these different groups come together.

M: And in knowing your history a little before this interview, it kind of seems like you wear all these hats at the same time.

H: Yeah.

M: So how do you see your... I don't wanna say your role necessarily, but... I guess a better way to phrase this [is] after you graduated and came back [for] all the contributions you made to both Sarasota and New College, what was the goal and intention?

H: Hm... well, at an earlier point in my life, when I was deciding what to do with the rest of my life, and I was evaluating what kind of person to be, and thinking very strongly in terms of ethics, values, and chakras and energy, I decided that even though it's a very virtuous thing to have a child, in a way it's kind of a selfish thing to have a child. Because this child has your name, this child looks like you, this child is supposed to emulate you. Often if parents have an offspring that doesn't emulate them it's a big problem. So... the childbearing could be a very altruistic thing and a very selfish thing at the same time. And then I came to a point where I thought "Wow, having a pet is kind of selfish thing too," because you're making another being completely dependent on you. And then I thought "Well, how do you give to the world if you don't create population and hand your values down to the population you created?" So then I started thinking in higher spiritual terms, in my opinion, and I decided that you could have children without bearing them, and that, um... if you did have children without bearing them, you wouldn't have the possessiveness [over] them that parents have - the ownership of their children. And if the child didn't do exactly what I wanted or look like a carbon copy of me, it wouldn't make any difference because they're their own person anyway, which is the way parents should feel about their children. So I just kind of went super spiritual and made a conscious decision to devote the rest of my adult life to spirituality. I decided the rest of my life I could be an agent of change, and an agent of support, and I would be an educator. And so, I would reach out to as many people as I could and create community, and as I age relinquish all the material possessions I have, so that theoretically in a perfect world on my deathbed I'd have

nothing left... even though that'd be kinda hard to calculate [ha ha]. But still I just decided that, you know, there's so much growth in giving. So if you can be a good giver, it can be a good life, and um... I decided that the highest form of spirituality was - I decided that the biggest point of life, or the biggest reason we're here, is to learn how to let go. It's not to make a lot of money, it's not to procreate, it's not to leave buildings or history for oncoming generations: as an individual, each one of us, our highest spiritual calling is to become a master of letting go. So you have to let go of the past, you have to let go of fear, you have to let go of anger, you have to let go of possessiveness of things or people or offspring or family, you have to let go of material possessions. So basically, if the only force of life that is constant is change, and we can... the only thing we can bank on is that everything change; that basically everything you are holding on to and familiar with will one day become... [it will] not be in your grasp, and no longer be familiar. So if everything is always changing we better get pretty adapting, you know? And we better learn how to let go of stuff to make room for the new. So I think one of the highest spiritual callings is to become a master of letting go, so I've let go of my children before I had them!

M: But you've still had such a profound effect on the lives of, I guess, a lot of young people both in Sarasota and also in the college. How would you, I guess - not necessarily evaluate, but looking back on all these relationships you've fostered and had, what would you say were some of the brightest moments?

H: Wow. I've been gifted with a lot of miraculous moments. I've been - I feel very grateful that I've had a life full of a lot of joy, and there's been sad times too, but [mostly] just bursting with joy. I guess...

(Pause)

H: I think maybe the most satisfying thing in working with others is when I watch someone evolve into the person I always knew they would become, you know? And when I see... I see... fearlessness, that makes me really happy. When, um... when I see someone's consciousness raising, that makes me really happy. You know, for me this is the only point of life: it's not necessarily to hoard, or lord over, or screw over. You know, the point of life - there's a great quote and it says... umm... Oh, now I'm going to forget it, um... Oh, I forgot it. *(laughing)* Oh,"The point of life is not to see through someone, but to see someone through," so I think that's a little twist on our society. Our society is telling us to look through people, see through them, figure them out, get one up on them and be the winner. But in my world it's to see people through so that we can all arrive at the same place we're supposed to go.

M: And I imagine this is something you've... an ideology you've helped not only live in yourself, but spread through a lot of the things you brought up about, you know, learning and

learning to let go, but also through yoga knowing you are the official yoga teacher on campus. How does yoga, I guess, influence this mission you've had?

H: Yoga's been really influential. I was lucky enough to start studying when I was 10, so not only was yoga - were the philosophy and ethics of yoga a part of my awareness as a child, but as I went through different developmental stages: pre-pubescent, pubescent, high school. Since yoga was already with me from a young age, it was able to help me as I went through all these different changes. I think my development would have been vastly different had I not been exposed to yoga at such a young age. And so I say to [my] classes often [that] there have been many times that yoga saved my life, and I believe that it saves the lives of people every day, you know? So yoga is one of those things that umm... I remember when I was little, and I was envious of a material possession that someone else had. And I went back to my mom and I was like "Oh, I want that dress, that dress is so pretty! I wish I could have that dress. Will you buy me that dress?" And I was 5, and I remember my mom turned around to me and she said "No, I won't buy you that dress." And I thought - I was upset. And I remember my mom turned around to me, she said "I won't buy you a dress, or a material possession, or a thing. But if you want a piano lesson, or a voice lesson, or some kind of lesson, I'll buy it for you." And so what she was saying/she said was that, "If I buy you the dress or the thing, you could lose it, break it, ruin it... it could be damaged. But if I invest in music lessons, or drawing, or math, then that's something you'll have in you you can you'll never lose: it will never diminish and no one can ever steal it from you." So the idea of making investments in that way, and enriching in that way as opposed to buying someone a thing, you know? So I believe in making investments in individuals that signify their ownership, so I like to invest in people - not necessarily in things, but in experiences, or realizations, or ideas that I can invest in the individual that no one can take away from them. That will always be there. So I guess what makes me happy is when I see that the investments paid off.

M: How long have you been 'investing' in yoga lessons at New College?

H: I started teaching here in 1980, so it's been a while. And the only time I took a break was when my mentor, Peggy Bates, retired as the combination provost-president. She held both positions for three years when the school went through a period of huge transition. And they were looking for a new president and looking for a provost, [but] they didn't have either for three years. So Peggy jumped in and did both jobs at once, and after that three year stint she was pretty tired, and she retired immediately after that. So as soon as she retired, I kind of withdrew from campus a little bit and spent the next few years until she passed away just completely supporting her. So I'd see her two or three times a week, you know, until she did, and ultimately she passed away in my arms. So... that was one of the greatest gifts she gave me.

M: How influential has Peggy's presence in Sarasota and New College been on this entire community at large?

H: HUUUGE. She's had a huge impression on me. Um... I think she has very deeply shaped who I am. But she's also had a big impression on the community: she was one of the founders of the Women's Resource Center, she was one of the founders of the Sarasota Institute of Lifetime Learning - the SILL program. She was on Sarasota University of Businesswomen's board, she was integral around UNIFEM, the United Nations... the part of the UN that is the women's group. Um... what other groups? I'm sure I'm missing two or three [other groups] that she was involved in, but she was very instrumental in creating a number of things that still exist in Sarasota. She always had a big eye towards women [and] supporting women, she was very much a hardcore feminist. And um... yeah, she definitely influenced my life a lot. [She] showed me what a strong, independent, self-sufficient woman can be.

M: And how do you transfer this message on to your students today?

H: I think the best way to teach is through example, because if you're teaching just by words, then your words and your actions may not add up and you would therefore be a hypocritical educator, so I think that rather than preaching on a soapbox, the best is to just do and be, and that usually is the best education.

M: So to get a little more personal now in your history of New College: after you came back once Peggy retiring was in the past, what, if there's anything that you see, might be different in the institution from when you came, when you returned, and even until now? Did teaching yoga remain as much of an edifying thing, even for yourself, over the years?

H: Yeah, yoga has been pretty consistent in terms of how satisfying it is to me. But you know, certain things in New College have stayed very similar, some things have changed a lot. You know, I guess the biggest change I've seen recently is [that] we're expanding so much larger, so everything that is incurred within that... you know? And I think the student body over the years has become a little more mainstream, you know, a little bit more towards the center. But I still think New College is weird, you know, and I think the community is trying to keep New College weird which is good. But you know, just like everything, it seems: the 70's were kind of wild, the 80's were kind of overkill, the 90's were kind of conservative, you know? So, the society at New College reflects the general society at large to some degree too. I think that all of society has got a little more repressed in some ways, and so... and freer in other ways. But the spirit of New College is consistent, it's still the same. One of the greatest and newest changes recently is the minorities on campus: when I went to school, there was one black person and she was the only black person for five or six years. Her father was the president of the Senate in Jamaica, under Manley's administration, so she was very British - she spoke very British as a Jamaican

and probably went to the best private schools, so she was their one token black. We didn't have any Hispanics, I don't think.

M: And being born in Japan, how did that culturally transfer over to living and going to school in America?

H: When I was growing up - I mean now we live in a multicultural world - but when I was growing up, I think I never met another kid who was half Asian and half American. You know, to be a mix of two different cultures was a very rare thing, and every once in a while you'd find another mixed [person], but it would never be your mix, you know? It would be black and white, or Indian and white, or... you know. And I was kind of one of the first generations - I was a post baby boomer, post WWII generation - so that was really one of the generations where there was a lot of inter-marriage, or an increase of racial inter-marriage. So I was a mixed baby, but there weren't many. By the time I got to be twenty, then I would find myself with other mixed-Asian white people, and by the time I was 40 [the] multicultural was in place. And now at 55, it's very common to see all kinds of racial mixes and not unusual to see that. But I was definitely a minority, and when I came to the United States I was really badly discriminated against.

M: How did that affect your college education? Moving to Sarasota and being in New College even though New College has historically been a very liberal institution, I can imagine still [that] the experience of being a minority - also a racial minority - especially on a college campus at this time must have...

H: As far as race goes, you know... I have Asian features but I'm not super Asian [presenting]. My sister is a little more Asian than me even though we have the same genetic makeup.

M: You mean presenting as Asian, right?

H: Yeah, she's got more of the Mongolian eyelid and less of a crease in her eye, um... she has a rounder, flatter face. You know, I have like this big Western forehead and oval face shape, that's kinda Western. So - And she has real short eyelashes, I have big long eyelashes - so we have certain physical traits that are different. But... I've always felt that being... well my argument was that science proved hybrids are stronger, so being a "hybrid" I always felt I was blessed and not cursed because I got the best of both and all the weak genes were gonna get killed off, you know [ha ha]. And then because I wasn't - I'm not super Asian looking, I would feel totally comfortable to be white and I would be totally comfortable to consider myself Asian. So I would, like... I could fence sit a lot and change depending on what group I was in. Once I got to college I found I didn't get a whole lot of prejudice: the most prejudice I think I've experienced in my life is not from race, it's from gender. [With] my race [it] has not been as bad as [my] gender.

M: And in all your leadership experience teaching yoga and leading fitness in New College, how did they handle that, seeing a woman, specifically, doing and mastering things of the body that a lot of men couldn't?

H: Yoga still, I think, has some hierarchal stuff going on where generally men are still a little bit higher on the totem pole than women are. Um... I just find that there is just so much institutional oppression, and cultural oppression, you know? And not only towards people of color, but women. And um... I think we're coming to the point in history where it's all coming to a head. We're seeing the end of the old white men paradigm [heh] and, you know, the right raising up of the multicultural paradigm or whatever it will come to be called, you know - because we don't know, we're in the middle of it right now. But it's kind of the end of a wave the end of one paradigm and the beginning of another, so I have a lot of hope for the future, you know. I think we may be moving into a time where women become really strong, that's what I'm hoping. I was hoping we would have one as president, but I will hope for one next time around. So I think we're coming into a time where women will be more empowered than ever before in history, we're coming into a time where blacks and Asians and other minorities are going to form a very cohesive voice, if they haven't already. So we're going into - I have hope we're going into - a time that is good. So many people have been bummed out about the election lately! I had three classes yesterday and I had to teach to a bunch of sad face. My rap to them was "They want you to be downhearted, they want you to be upset, they want you to be disillusioned and they want you to be immobilized." So if you know nonviolence, the philosophy of nonviolence tells us that if you have an adversary, the first thing you have to do is evaluate what is it that the adversary wants from you, and once you can discern what they want from you, as their adversary your job is not to give it to them. So if this is what they want from us and the result of this election, we're not gonna give it to them. And so I've been trying to encourage people instead of being upset, instead of crying, instead of feeling down, defeated, let's hope that this whole experience will be inspirational to us, and cause us to collaborate better, communicate better, organize better, understand better, [and] manifest better. Because crying, whining, complaining is simply not proactive enough. We have to choose a response that is proactive and positive however much we wanna feel badly about it. We can feel badly about it after the work's done.

M: So where do you see the future of, Sarasota specifically, their youth and the movement you've been watching them undergo in their classes and day-to-day, with all the students that you interact and form close bonds with?

H: Like I said, I feel very hopeful. I think that your generation is super intelligent, I think they're super enterprising, super creative. I have a lot of hope for the future. I think I always try with young people to encourage efforts at making dialogue, because so much communication is like *this* (*makes phone motion*) now, I think that young people in particular don't get as much

opportunity to develop how to communicate one on one and face to face and negotiate things and... you know, 'cause relationships [now] are so soundbite-y. So texty and soundbite-y that - and not that there's anything wrong with texting or soundbites, but you can only go to a certain depth of conversation using that medium, you know? It's a lot easier to go to a deeper depth when you can register someone's emotional reaction to what you're saying. So I really hope that young people will not lose that skill or find they have not developed that skill. So I try to do a lot of face to face talking with people.

M: Okay, so last couple questions to follow up: being in New College this long and seeing all the many different changes not only in the institution, but in the students who come by and also the changes in yourself and how that all manifested and developed - Have you kept up with all the students you invested and interacted with?

H: I couldn't say all, because from the beginning of my teaching year I've probably had hundreds, or thousands... I mean, a lot. But every year I teach here, there's always a handful of students that are special, and usually by the time a student graduates, there's always special students that stand out. And, you know, staying in touch isn't a one-way street, it's a two way thing. So, you know, I feel like I'm lucky enough that some of my best friends were former students of mine. It's just now they're grown up and the roles are reversed, much like the way I became Peggy's best friend even though I was her student. I went from being her student to being her equal, and then when she passed it was almost a role reversal where I was the older, or responsible, one taking care of the little old baby, you know? So roles reverse, and I love the friendships I have with former students. It great to see them go from being very innocent, open eyed kids to being doctors, lawyers and Indian Chiefs.

M: So last, last question: where do you see the future of Helen going?

H: Oh... I think I'm just moving more and more into spiritual directions, and probably moving more and more away from materialism and the material world, and more and more into the spiritual ways of being. Right now, I've just become involved in a lot of women's circling networks. I do a lot of work with Selah Freedom, the nonprofit that rehabilitates victims of sexual trafficking. I [had] just left them and came here. And I just started mentoring for Selah Freedom, so I have a mentee now that I see once a week. So, I just look at this whole life, this whole incarnation, is dedicated to soul charity, helping people in some way and making enough money to pay my mortgage and put food on the table, but beyond that it's not that important to me. Stuff beyond that gets recycled into the spirituality. I see myself - I'm just coming out of maybe a decade of being very hermit like and reclusive, so I'm looking forward to the next ten years being maybe a little bit less reclusive, and being more involved in community things instead of just a few projects of my own.

M: Any final comments, maybe something I might've asked you wanted to go deeper in, or anything else you want to add to the conversation?

H: I think one of the most important things in healthy relationships is respect, so I'm pleased we have such a respectful student body. I feel a lot of respect from students towards me, so I think that - I just advised one of my former students who graduated 8 years ago on the phone today, her loved one passed away, and she was having some challenges in her life. And I said "I'm sorry that I don't have any really good advice that directly speaks to what you're asking me now. The only advice I can give," and this goes back to respect again, "is as long as every time you have to make a choice in life you make it operating from the highest ethical level of integrity you can, then there is no way you can ever make a mistake. There is no way you can ever do anything that you regret, because if you make decisions from your highest chakra - from the highest self you can be - that's the best you can do. You can't do better than what you can do. So if you try to be your best and operate and move from that kind of a space and that kind of awareness, even if you err and make a mistake and even if things don't turn your way, you know you did the best you could and you know you did it from the highest self that you could. How could you be unhappy with that kind of an outcome?" So my advice to her was that even when people around you are operating and speaking or behaving from a lower chakra, don't let that pull you down. You can respond by coming from a very high place, and as long as you can do that - every time you try to do that it gets easier to do it next time. Every time you succeed in doing it, it gets easier next time. And then, at the end of life, you can turn around to look back on your life and say, "Wow, I've done a really good job! What a great journey this has been, I haven't screwed anybody over. I can sleep well at night." So that was the best advice I can give her: practice living in the now moment, from your higher self.

M: Perfect ending! Thank you very much for your time, Helen!

H: You're welcome, President Miles.

Interview #2: 12/18/16

M: Hey Helen, my name is Miles - again - I'm recording this as a follow up to our previous interviews, if you're all OK and good with that?

H: That's fine!

M: Awesome! So I wanted to ask just a couple follow-up questions based off of some of what I asked in our previous interview and even [to] further a couple of plot points: one thing I wanted to ask you about particularly was more of your adventures outside of Sarasota - there was that gap period in between the passing of Peggy Bates and when you came back - what was it that inspired the "homeward boundness" that kept you here?

H: I think I was always hoping at one point to come back to New College. I would just need the time to heal and rejuvenate after those experiences.

(tape pause)

M: Yoga was a consistent thing I'm guessing throughout even your break periods from New College?

H: Oh yeah, and other exercise too. I was also a massage therapist, and I still do some massages, but I did all kinds of exercise: I was a martial artist for a long time, a dancer, a diver, I ran track and field, so I've done a lot of sports things.

M: Which was the first? Was yoga the first form of body work that you entered and started doing habitually?

H: Yeah. Yoga I did for years and years, and then I did lots of other sports. And then, having been active my whole life, I learned about massage therapy and massage seemed to be an extension of yoga - a practice of nonviolence. It all tied back into my thesis.

M: And you got your massage therapist certification at East West [College of Natural Medicine], correct?

H: Nope, I got it at a school called the Sarasota School of Massage Therapy... and I'm not sure if it is still open any longer, but it was a long time ago.

M: Mhmm, [because] I've asked a lot of New College questions in these past interviews, but I wanted to get more into your work doing massage therapy and the more non-academic side of

what you've led and instructed at New College. What was the first course of instruction you've given in Sarasota related to anything physical: yoga or martial arts or etc.?

H: The first class I ever taught was a yoga class at New College, actually. And an aerobics class at New College. Before we had a Fitness Center, the Black Box [Theater] used to be a room called "The Fishbowl" because it had glass windows that looked out into Hamilton Center. So you could see everyone inside that room, and so it was called the Fishbowl where I taught my yoga and aerobics classes.

M: Are you still currently and were you the only one teaching these at New College? Did they leave with you?

H: No, there may have been different people at different times, maybe. My first teacher at New College was only here for a year, so there may have been people who come and go at different times - because when I was [first] teaching it wasn't setup through the Fitness Center. It was just... I was teaching and students would come.

M: I figure it would be a lot easier to arrange that way than to do all these official documents and signings, no?

H: I think at that time the Fitness Center would... I don't know if we even had [yoga] classes at that time. I may have started, then we first started doing - I guess we started getting really *regular* classes when we got a Fitness Center, because before then it was just a person coming in here or there and we did it wherever, so things then changed when we got the Fitness Center.

M: So if I can piece this timeline together a little bit, there was coming to New College, eventually going to and teaching these classes, and then the period of departure, and then-

H: But during that period of departure I still taught exercise, a lot of it. Maybe not the whole time because I taught around all kinds of different places Downtown. I was still doing body work; I've been doing body work and pretty much yoga nonstop through my whole life. There was never really a time I took a break from body work.

M: Has your approach changed since leaving and coming back to Sarasota?

H: Well I was in Sarasota the whole time other than going to school in London on the FSU program. I've pretty much lived here much of the time, but my departure [was] from New College and meant me not going back on campus much of the time and staying off campus more. But still, yeah my approach has changed because everyone evolves.

M: Can you describe a little bit to what extent maybe?

H: It's become much simpler, less stressed and more authentic.

M: On a side note here, you mentioned before the Presidency and - what's the phrase - Provostcy(?) of Peggy Bates, and I even discussed more about it with Douglas Langston by chance and he told me about her being both President and Provost as well!

H: Yeah, he's been here a long time, too.

M: - And with Peggy filling two roles meant for two people, it seems the way the structure was set up was... pretty... like...

H: Pretty flimsy, right? It was going through a lot of stress and transition. Yeah, they had a nationwide search out for President and Provost but for years it seems they couldn't find either so Peggy did both of those jobs, and it was while [New College] was still merged with USF. So she would have to do all her campus work and then once or twice a week she would have to go to Tampa. For her, with her health limitations, I think it was a stressful few years for her.

M: Did she live here? Was she from here?

H: She used to live on campus! She lived in 1st Court the *whole* time she was a professor here.

M: Wow!

H: We used to ask her if Palm Court Parties ever bothered her but she said, "No, I have my earplugs," and she'd always laugh. And her bedroom window used to look out on Palm Court, so we always used to joke that she was spying on us as we danced under the stars. And while she lived on campus, once a week she would have an open house where from like 6-10PM you could go over to her house and she'd serve Coca-Cola and coffee and water and cookies; and you could do her jigsaw puzzles or you could sit around the living room and have a discussion about anything, often political science and nature. Some people would come by just to grab cookies and some would sit - it was open to the community, it was such a nice thing.

M: How, in general, more open do you see the campus and community being towards things of a spiritual nature?

H: Um... it depends what you define as the community. I think the students are very open, and there are other elements on campus open to it, but I think by nature certain elements are not as

open. I think in general there is a hunger towards spirituality, and New College is not exempt from it.

M: And you still teach yoga now, correct?

H: Yes.

M: What do the range of experiences look like between the students you've taught in student classes and faculty in the faculty classes? How long have you been teaching faculty classes, actually?

H: Faculty classes [I've been doing] since the beginning of last year, this is the second year. The first year the class was sponsored 50% by the President's Office, and that was not renewed the second year, so the Union of Florida Faculty has sponsored the Faculty class this year. I guess... are you asking me the differences between student and faculty classes? (*laughs*)

M: Yeah, or I guess even the different vibes you get going in [with each]?

H: You know, the great thing with yoga students is that it doesn't matter who you are, where you come from or what you look like - yoga students are all the same. You are all on the same path; nobody skips any steps, you have to do the beginning work to make the middle of the work to get to the end of the work. So... I understand what you're getting at but I don't see it that way.

M: That's fair! Do you have a favorite yoga pose?

H: Oooh, that's really hard, [but] it might be Pigeon! We can do it one morning, not now! (*laughs*)

M: And last last question: In my tenure here, you're the only yoga instructor I've ever had or seen, but growing up it was still not something I was ever really present around or exposed to. What's the message you would give anyone you would have ever encountered like that, [who are] thinking about doing yoga or trying it for the first time?

H: I always tell people that - you know I'm biased - but I always say the most important thing in life is yoga. I always say that yoga is the basis of everything else, because yoga technically means *movement*, or half of yoga has to do with movement. I have been lucky enough to experience yoga and therefore I turn around and share it with others, and I feel like my gift of yoga to others is the very best gift I could possibly give someone else. I hold it in very high regard.

M: Alright, for the final time, thank you very much for your time and energy.

H: You're welcome, namaste!