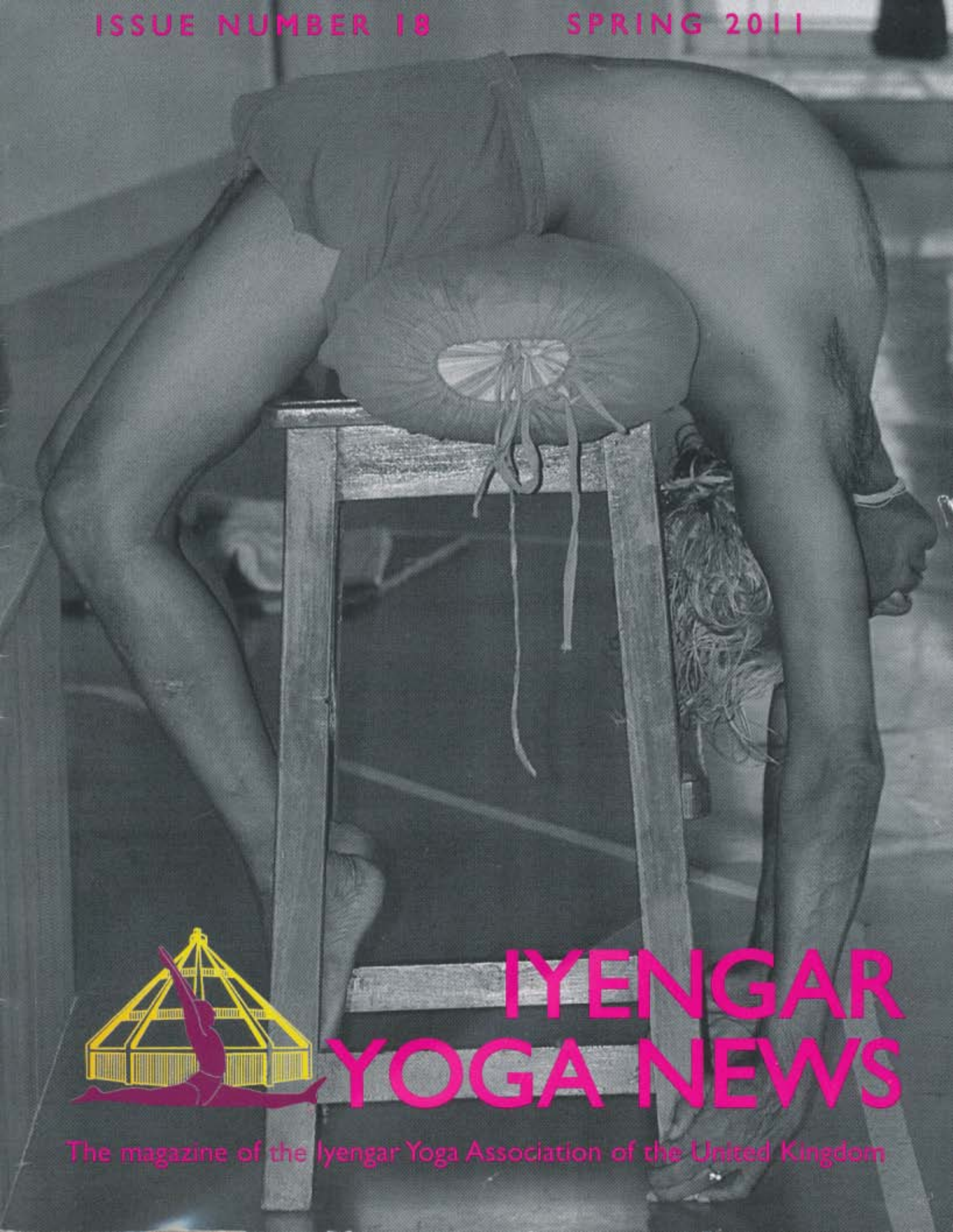


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Garth McLean's visit to High Wycombe June 2010

by Sheila Haswell

In September 2009, when Stephanie Quirk was teaching the remedial course at Sarva, she mentioned that Garth McLean, from the USA, was the guest teacher at the French Teachers Convention in October. My ears immediately pricked up as one of my brothers had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in November 2008 and Garth also has MS. He controls his condition with Iyengar Yoga and diet and so I was very keen to meet up with him to see how he works and copes with MS and I hoped I would get a chance to have a chat with him. I managed to get a late place at the convention and it was definitely worth it. His approach to the subject was impressive and he was very easy to talk to, so I invited him to teach at Sarva. He came in June 2010 and was very well received.

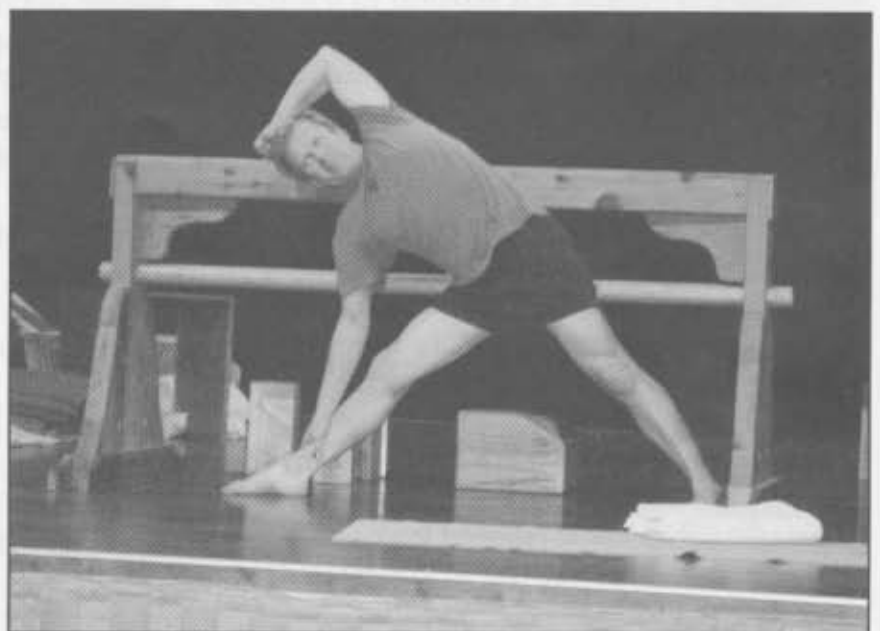
Being an actor, he had great presence and a good voice and his sessions were good fun and entertaining, as well as hard work. We did so much in the sessions that I can only touch on a few points here. We first had an introduction to MS and Garth let us know what many

and varied symptoms he has had to deal with. He told us that Guruji encouraged him to learn for himself instead of just giving him answers. Guruji told him "Every day walk the line between courage and caution".

Some triggers for symptoms of MS are heat (both inside the body and outside) and stress, so in asana practice Garth had to ask himself "What do I need to do?" His body had to be prepared to receive the restorative asanas, he had to find the archetype of the asana yet give the nervous system a break (working with courage and caution). He told us, "When

working with MS learn to move from the periphery to the core, move the femur into the socket, make connections. The nervous system is like an electricity cable and when the connection is, made the 'light' comes."

The key to using yoga as therapy is to "adopt and adapt"; the therapist has to be Sensitive, Observant and Sensible (SOS). First there is a need to get the nerves to calm down, then adopt asanas from a regular sequence adapting them to take account of the limitations of the student. There were so many asanas shown with props that it would be impossible to write





about them here but what was demonstrated is that there is so much which can be done to get the essence of the asana and thus the benefits.

Inversions are very important because of the health of the brain but it is essential to go for softness so that the student doesn't have eyes or throat bulging. For beginners inversions may first need to be done by just getting the legs in the air; proceed with caution. Some general points to bear in mind: Students should:

- Do standings supported (trestler, wall, chair etc)

Look down (for a cool brain)
 - Not hold asanas for too long
 - Do a full range of asanas using props where necessary

Therapists should note:

- If student shakes, switch to recuperative programme

- When helping, do so with compassion and friendliness and teach from your heart so that they have a good experience
 And in particular:

For yoga to be beneficial, it has eventually to become a daily practice.

My brother attended the classes and derived a lot of benefit. He was not a yoga practitioner but he is now doing little bits of what he learnt to keep himself stronger, more mobile and in touch with his body. He has already put the 2011 date in his

diary and has been in touch with Garth about changes to his diet. The classes we ran were attended by both students and teachers, mostly without MS but some had come specifically because of their MS or because they teach someone with the condition.

Editor's note: this article is written as a report of the workshop run by Garth and not as guidelines for teaching yoga to people with MS. No two people with this condition (or indeed any other medical condition) are the same and each student has to be taught as an individual by a teacher experienced enough to recognise what that student requires. Students with MS should **ONLY** go to classes taught by teachers qualified as yoga therapists; you can find therapy teachers in your area on our website:

www.iyengaryoga.org.uk.

