

Q&A with Jolie Brooks

Yoga teacher to the bar and judiciary

By Christina Trahanas



Bar News (BN): *Currently, to which members of the legal profession do you teach yoga? How often do you teach? Where do you teach?*

Jolie Brooks (JB): I teach weekly classes that are attended by barristers. I usually teach in the common room, which the NSW Bar Association kindly gives me access to. Since late March 2020, I have and continue to teach classes to barristers in Zoom. I keenly await the return to the common room. I think my students do too.

I also teach twice weekly classes to staff of the Supreme Court of NSW, and judges of the Land and Environment Court, Supreme Court of NSW, Federal Court and High Court. These are provided by the Supreme Court as part of their commitment to their wellbeing at work. I usually teach these classes on Level 13 in the Supreme Court building.

BN: *What types of classes do you offer?*

JB: I offer classes that draw upon my varied background in the vast teachings of yoga that I've continued to explore for 30 years. I aim to offer a class that involves asana practice (the physical postures), some pranayama (breathwork) and meditation.

BN: *How long have you been teaching yoga to members of the bar?*

JB: I've taught for 15 years. The classes began when the then President of the Bar Association (Anna Katzmann) was looking at healthy opportunities to offer for members at the Bar. When I began, the common room still had an existing bar serving alcohol that was in use! It's been quite the shift in workplace wellbeing to replace it with yoga classes.

BN: *How did you get started teaching yoga to the bar?*

JB: At the time, I worked for Yogabowl. They ran the classes for corporations based in the Martin Place area, including the Bar Association.

BN: *What reasons have barristers given you for doing yoga?*

JB: This varies from person to person. Some barristers come to class as it's very convenient to come downstairs and fit it in their working day



if they happen to have chambers in the Phillip St area. To commit to a regular class outside of work hours can be challenging given extended work hours. Even if they don't make it every week, if they commit to the term they're ensuring it's on for when they are free. For others it may be a comfortable space to be in the company of colleagues in a relaxed atmosphere on a yoga mat. They may be seeking a tool to address the limitations and effects of their work which involves a lot of sitting and, on a physical and mental level, yoga addresses and provides an elixir of benefits to both of these things. Or it may be that they know someone who does the classes and they've been encouraged to attend as those who practise yoga often are in it for the long haul knowing the real benefits are way beyond the physical ones that we may be drawn to in the first instance.

BN: *Why do you think that yoga is good thing for barristers to do?*

JB: I love that yoga connects us beyond our vocations; that you're one of many on your mat and are out of chambers, meeting others in that same place. It's a comfortable place to meet, to befriend yourself where you are at.

Yoga is the sanskrit word for union, and references the union between our body and our mind. Yoga gives us the opportunity to bring our entire being into the same place at the same time where there is no finish line. In a profession where the very nature of the daily workload and subjects may be a big weight to carry, mentally and physically, committing to an ancient practice that addresses the mind-body connection can be key to keeping your mental health in check.

BN: *What are some memorable experiences*

from teaching yoga to the bar and judiciary?

JB: I have taught everyone from tipstaves, to barristers, to judges to the Governor of NSW. It's been a privilege to do so and to get to know people over the years through being on a yoga mat with them. I'd never envisaged being in a position that would link me to the legal profession and doing it through yoga is a complete joy.

BN: *What have been some notable features of teaching yoga in 2020 and 2021 during the pandemic?*

JB: Yoga lent itself remarkably well to continue throughout the covid period on Zoom. If the very nature of the practice is to not judge yourself among others then the nature of doing it in your room on Zoom magnifies the very essence of what yoga is. It allowed freedom for many that they need not rush to make it to class and just had to roll out their mats in the room. For those that practise regularly with me, hearing the instructions over the computer is almost the same as being in the room. It was especially beneficial for some of the judges who travel to Canberra who are regular practitioners – they could be there every week! Having said that the energy of being in a collective space with others can never be replaced and for some is the only way to get them on the mat. It is very nice to be back to regular business.

For anyone wishing to join in the weekly Zoom classes please feel free to enquire as you're welcome to join us. Email joliebyoga@gmail.com

We are dearly hoping in the near future to be allowed back in the building... **BN**