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THE 50 DIARIES

The 50 Diaries: September

In her latest column for British *Vogue*, contributing beauty editor Kathleen Baird-Murray sets herself the goal of learning how to do a yoga headstand.

by KATHLEEN BAIRD-MURRAY

2 days ago



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CREDIT: WILL DAVIDSON

The Wellness Tally So Far

Sporting activities that scare me No 1: The dive into the pool. What if I break my neck as per book read to us at school (“happy” ending: she became a nun)?

Sporting activities that scare me No 2: The handstand. What if I fall all the way over the other side and break my neck (see above)?

Sporting activities that scare me No 3: The yoga headstand. What if I break my neck etc...

“It’s a shame you didn’t put ‘win the lottery’ down as one of your objectives instead of ‘do a headstand’. I mean, couldn’t whoever is the PR at the Lottery just make that happen for you? For the column’s sake?”

“Learn how to do a yoga headstand.” It’s there in black and white, if Elspeth would only hit the link to the **January column**, and it’s a box that has to be ticked. To be fair, Elspeth’s lack of spiritual empathy for my quest to become a more evolved human being at the tender age of 50 comes less from an appreciation of the headstand as being excellent for circulation, and more from the annoying fact that she’s been able to do them with ease since she was a child.

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But gliding through the lush Disney-esque countryside of the Bavarian mountains, cruising with ease up steep hills thanks to the electric bikes borrowed from the hotel, **Schloss Elmau**, with my yoga teacher, **Cherryl Duncan**, also borrowed from the hotel, I can't help but think this might even be better than winning the Lottery. The streams run so clear they look like they're flowing with mineral water, the green of the grass under the pine trees pops as brightly as the Emerald City in *The Wizard of Oz*; a bear ambles up to offer us a jar of honey (okay, I made up that last bit but given the Technicolor beauty of my surroundings, it's not entirely inconceivable that it might happen); and it's nature at its most priceless. Surely in this setting a simple headstand - even for me, the girl who just about passed her BAGA 4 in gymnastics and has been to yoga about twice a year for the last four years (yet talks about it as if she does it daily) - is possible?

The 50 Diaries: August

THE 50 DIARIES | 16 Aug 2018

I picked the Schloss Elmau to learn how to do a headstand after seeing a picture of a man (I later found out it's spa director Johannes Mikenda) in Salamba Sirasana pose at the end of a jetty, with an incredible, chocolate-box defying view in the background. With a Jivamukti yoga retreat offering twice daily classes plus private tuition, the hotel seemed the perfect place to learn.

"A headstand is a really good thing to learn at any age, not just 50," Duncan encourages me in one of our practice classes in the expansive studio at the hotel, before setting out to the jetty. "It stimulates the

pituitary and pineal glands, responsible for the endocrine system, which helps to keep our emotions in check.” And at 50, we could all do with some of that.

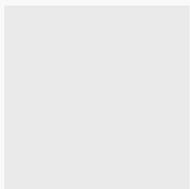
We arrive at the jetty and park our electric bikes. Two German hikers unpack a picnic and settle in for the free entertainment. Shoes off, Cheryl and I make our way out on the rickety planks and - just as she’s taught me - I form a triangular shape with my elbows, interlock my fingers, and with feet together, roll onto the top of my head.

“Now lift up your feet tucking them in by your waist, one then the other - don’t jump!” says Cherryl. I have no core strength - my stomach muscles seem to have followed my children out of my womb some 17 years ago, never to return (not sure this is biologically correct). But not to worry - she yanks me up so that my knees are now bent, feet heavenwards and she firmly guides them up into the sky, holding me steady by the ankles. The blood rushes to my head and the first thing I notice is the sun glaring intensely as it bounces off the lake into my eyes. The whole thing feels like an explosion of light, and I wish I could claim it was spiritual enlightenment but it feels more like a migraine coming on. I close my eyes and try not to notice the splinters pressing into my elbows. Then I collapse in laughter, thudding heavily down on to the deck. “How do they make it look so easy? All those Instagrammers?”

“Well, they don’t do headstands for a start,” says Cherryl. “They just whack on a thong and stand with their backs to the cameras, then spin their heads round to face the camera.” She persuades me to try a few more times - after all the German hikers haven’t quite finished their picnic yet and need a distraction to make up for their distinct lack of conversation. But even after repeated trips back to the lake over the next two days, although Cherryl’s grip is loosening on my ankles as my balance starts to improve, I still very much need her support, to say nothing about severe jetty-burns on my elbows. Why am I finding it so hard?

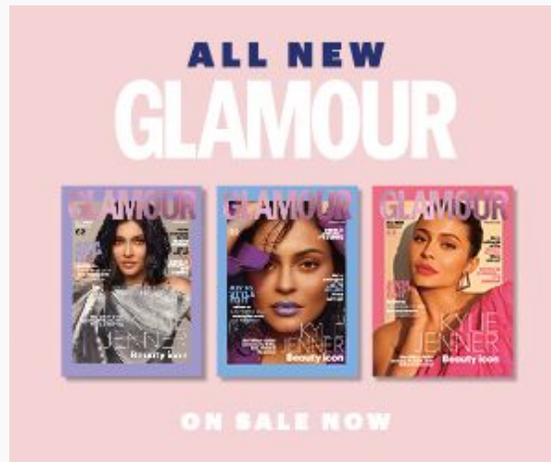
“An unstable, scratchy jetty isn’t helping!” she laughs. “Not having much time in which to learn to do it also doesn’t make it easy. But if you do a lot of down dogs to open the shoulders; train the core as you need these muscles to bring the legs up; and stay as enthusiastic as you are now, then you will do it.”

Back in London, I reflect on something else Cherryl said about how fear of going upside-down is essentially a fear of change itself: “Encouraging change, and looking at this from a different perspective physically introduces the idea first to our bodies, and because our bodies and minds are connected, this allows our consciousness to get more used to the idea of change - which is obviously a good skill to have given that we live in a constantly changing world.”



The 50 Diaries: July

THE 50 DIARIES | 18 Jul 2018



When I think of all the changes I've made over the last few years, and - no doubt - of the changes still to come, learning to master a headstand takes on an even greater significance. Surely if I can master this, I can master anything? And with Cheryl's words ringing in my ears, I make it to my first yoga class for about a year.

The headstand, Elspeth will be pleased to know, is coming along nicely. The Lottery, however, remains to be conquered.

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.co.uk; 020 3111 0819) offer a five-night Jivamukti Yoga Retreat at Schloss Elmau from £2,150 per person sharing. This includes transfers from Innsbruck, accommodation in a double room on a half-board basis, two daily group classes, access to the spa, hiking and group activities.

Try: When all the beauty planets align... my one-stop beauty pit-stop has to be Hershesons for waxing at Ministry of Waxing; nails by DryBy; and now the new Luxury Lift, Light and Glow facial at The Light Salon, £125. Fans of the LED express treatments will love this 70-minute version which is like a Greatest Hits of all the Light Salon signature elements - great cleansing, exfoliating and massage.

Buy: A little bit tingly, a little bit apothecary-y, L'Officine Universelle Buly's Transcutaneous Magnesium Underwater Energy is an oil that leaves a soft residue on the skin, before sinking in to imbue our bodies with magnesium's healing powers.

Do: Read *The Examined Life, How We Lose and Find Ourselves* by Stephen Grosz. This series of psychotherapist Grosz's case studies is both highly insightful and totally un-put-downable. Fascinating to see what makes other people tick - and in so doing, gain an understanding of our own emotional and psychological peculiarities.

THE 50 DIARIES

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