

Showing Up Naked



Peeling Away
the Layers
to Your
Authentic
Self

Erica Boucher
Creator of EMPATH YOGA



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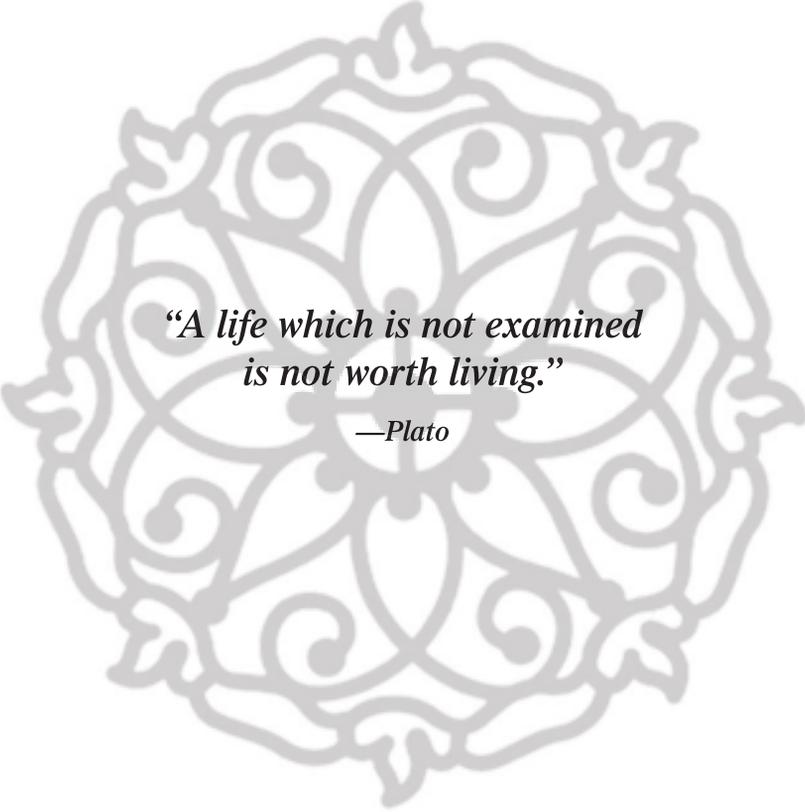
For Information Address:
Earth Harmony Publishing
7330 Cherry Laurel Drive
Orlando, Florida 32835

The author can be reached at erica@empathyoga.com,
www.showingupnaked.com or www.empathyoga.com

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*“A life which is not examined
is not worth living.”*

—Plato

Introduction

I'll never forget the day, more than 10 years ago, when something inside of me finally let go. I was in my late twenties, a graduate of a prestigious college and working in a corporate environment in which I felt completely out of place—miserable, really. I was married with a comfortable home, a nice car, trendy clothing and lots of friends. I had everything I was always told I would need in order to be happy. And yet I wasn't happy. Participation in numerous leadership training programs did little more than build me up so I could get better at playing the corporate game. Something deeper was missing. One day, after working so hard to get somewhere and feeling like I was spinning my wheels, I finally had enough.

That day, as I drove home from work, I put my hands on my steering wheel, looked up at the sky, and prayed, honestly prayed, for the first time in my life to a God I wasn't even sure existed. "Ok God, I give up. I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing here. If you exist, and if I have a purpose on this earth, please show me because I obviously don't have a clue." I realize now looking back that I was letting go, admitting to myself and to Life how much I didn't know. Although born and raised Catholic, I was never a religious person, and that direct, heartfelt communication was the most honest, sincere conversation with God I had ever had.

I started searching for a meaningful job that would allow me to feel passionate and alive and purposeful. So when I was offered the opportunity to work at a shelter for homeless families—at a hefty cut in pay—my hesitation lasted only briefly. My responsibility was to create a comprehensive rehabilitation program for homeless adults. I was given very little direction—just instructed to create a 4-week program that would teach life and leadership skills to homeless adults to help break their cycle of dependency. This greatly appealed to me, for up to that time I felt my career, and my life, lacked creativity and inspiration. Finally, I could sink my teeth into something exciting and meaningful.



I spent my first three months behind closed doors brainstorming about what to teach, in what order, and to what end. I ventured outside of my office only to interview guests at the shelter for insight into what they thought would be most useful to them. I toyed with the idea of teaching typing skills, showing them how to use a register, and other marketable skills. I had almost complete creative license to teach them the skills I believed would most benefit them. In the end, with some coaxing by the executive director and program manager, I streamlined my approach. My objectives became to boost their self esteem, motivate and inspire change, and open the door to a new way of life.

On January 3, 2000 the first 120-hour Adult Leadership Program was launched. I walked into a room with 13 homeless adults who had just been informed they would be required to attend this program before looking for a job. Most of them were angry and resentful—both for being homeless and jobless, and for being “forced” to attend a program that would only delay their goal of leaving the shelter. I spent the first hour overcoming my own self doubts about a program that had yet to be taught—all the while accepting everything from grumbled complaints to angry outbursts. After hearing them out and validating their concerns, I offered another way to perceive the situation—as a tremendous opportunity to get to know themselves and some of the habitual patterns of behavior that may have contributed to their current situation.

By the first break (a mere hour later) the faces looking back at me were much more open and interested. Somehow, by acknowledging their concerns, standing my ground and making the argument to give it a chance, I got through to them. From that moment on we were a room of fully-invested adults.

The program met for four weeks, five days a week from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. We started by exploring questions like, “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” We wrote in journals, engaged in small group discussions, read excerpts from books and watched movie clips as I sought creative ways to motivate and inspire them to be more conscious of the lives they were living. Everything became an opportunity to learn, and I sought volunteers and guest speakers who could

offer a fresh perspective. Looking back I realize my primary goal was to raise their self-esteem. It seems they got that, and much more.

A month after our aggressive and even hostile first morning together, we were all excited and motivated about completing the program, and we chose to celebrate with a graduation ceremony. Everyone dressed up in their new duds (which we all picked out together through the clothing provided by another local non-profit organization) and looked fantastic. The local newspaper came out to take pictures and there was a story aired on the evening news. One by one each participant came up to receive their certificate of completion and share how the program affected them. There wasn't a dry eye in the house, which was quite literally filled to overflowing. Something truly amazing had happened in that classroom.

For most, it was the first time anyone had invested any time or energy in *them*, to truly listen to and see them, and their hearts were full and open. We bonded, we saw each other, we accepted each other, and we knew and accepted ourselves on a deeper level than ever before. It was a beautiful experience.

I was shocked and amazed by the success of the program, and felt incredibly humbled by the students' and their families' gratitude. I'll never forget Rodney, the muscle-bound, 6'4" black man who was the most disgruntled that first morning, as he stood in front of the room during graduation, tears streaming unabashedly down his face as he expressed his appreciation. Hearts had been opened wide in four short weeks and the love that came pouring out was something to behold.

Exhibiting the generosity of the human spirit, this small group of homeless men and women had gathered their pennies, along with the help of their friends and families, and gifted me with flowers, homemade cards and poems written and read aloud. I was humbled, for I knew that something magical had happened during our time together, and I couldn't take responsibility for it. I was as surprised as everyone else at the depth of emotional healing that had occurred, and knew I had been nothing more than a facilitator. Somehow the sum total of everyone and everything coming together had resulted in magic—a miracle really—and I was as surprised and grateful as everyone else. So much so that when the next program began



the following Monday, I decided to participate in every exercise and assignment right along with the participants. I became both the teacher and the student.

This is when I fell in love with people—and myself—and my whole life changed. I realized I was carrying around much of the same pain they did. Even though I was educated, supported by friends and family, and appeared to have my life together, I too held a deep-seeded belief that I was alone in this world. For me, too, a pervading sense of guilt lay just beneath the surface, and I spent much of my life looking outside of myself for validation, acceptance and love.

It was while working with these incredible men and women I realized that regardless of our background or where we come from, regardless of our education level, the clothing we wear or the material possessions we have, *we are all the same*. The questions that led me to this were the same questions with which they struggled. Who am I? And why am I here? Over the course of the next two years, I became personally invested in the coursework and every month had a new group of men and women enthusiastically embarking on the journey with me.

Word got out. The program was a success. So successful that new arrivals at the shelter would tell me that they couldn't wait for the next class to begin. People in the surrounding community sought the opportunity for themselves or family members to participate, and those seeking to break addiction, overcome depression or improve self-esteem found us. Other agencies started hiring me to offer similar workshops at various abuse and recovery shelters throughout Central Florida.

Right around this time I started writing, and my first article titled *The Search for the Authentic Self* was published in a local magazine. A college graduate with a degree in Communication, I always loved my writing assignments the most, but I had no idea if I was good enough to write for publication—and even if I could get published, would anybody read it? I decided to write the same way I taught, straight from the heart. More than a dozen phone calls resulted from that article from individuals commenting on the impact it had on them, and I realized that what I learned through my experience

wasn't just applicable to me and the homeless, abused or addicted. It seemed to resonate with everyone, from all walks of life.

With great humility and gratitude, I realized I had stumbled upon something, falling right into a niche that I didn't even know existed, and it happened only after I completely let go of my agenda and started listening to my heart.

After two years at the shelter, Life was sending me signs that it was time to move on. I had no idea what that was going to look like, but what I did know was that I would always work with people on that deep, honest, heartfelt level. I felt like I had been given a gift and now had a responsibility to share what I learned.

Again I prayed, asking for guidance and direction. Meanwhile, I was taking yoga classes at a nearby studio, and even had a volunteer come and teach at the shelter. One day at the end of a yoga class, I realized a sense of open, peaceful surrender that was similar to what I and my students had found after learning to let go of outdated beliefs, emotional holding patterns and old story lines. Seeing this as an opportunity to continue working with people on a very real, honest level while I figured out what I was going to do next, I researched the right program and shortly thereafter completed my first yoga training.

I planned to begin graduate school to seek licensure as a mental health counselor, and the yoga would be something I did on the side to support that process. The graduate program, while the best in the state of Florida, wasn't a fit, and I knew it on the first night of class. At the urging of a friend, I finished the semester only to get even more clarity with each passing day that the approach—with a strong focus on categorizing, labeling and diagnosing—was too clinical for me. The work I enjoyed doing with people went deeper than that.

Meanwhile, in my yoga classes students were having emotional releases as they opened up their bodies and freed themselves of stuck energy that had been accumulating inside of them, in some cases for a lifetime. With each new opening an opportunity for awareness presented itself, and it was just a matter of time before what I learned with the homeless made its way into my yoga classes. Still, the decision to withdraw from graduate school wasn't an easy one



for me, even though it felt right. My ego struggled with that change in plans, telling me people wouldn't understand my decision, and that I needed that piece of paper in order to establish credibility.

And again I was left with a space I wasn't sure how to fill. While dining out one day I again asked Life to show me what was next, knowing my journey wasn't finished. As I headed to the car only moments later, I passed a vacant store-front in the quaint downtown Orlando suburb of Thornton Park. The sign read, "For Rent", and as I peered inside at the open space and beautiful, natural pine wood floors I thought, *this would be a great space for a yoga studio*. In that moment the thought was born, and three months later I opened Yoga for Transformation and became a business owner for the first time. This came with its own lessons and growing pains, many of which I still work with to this day, but suddenly I had a forum and a space within which to do my work.

Yoga classes grew slowly and steadily, but at that point it was still the personal development work I loved most. And when I eventually offered my first 12-week program titled *The Search for the Authentic Self*, I had a full house.

While the program took place at my studio, it didn't include yoga. The truth is, while I thankfully attracted some wonderful instructors to teach with me, I still hadn't come into my own as a yoga instructor and was humbled by how little I understood the body. Before long this would become enough of a pebble in my shoe to motivate me to attend massage school, where I would eventually specialize in a unique combination of yoga and massage introduced to me as Yogassage. With my massage license came confidence in understanding the body and how it works, along with the legal permission to touch people beyond a simple adjustment during a yoga posture.

In my second yoga training, I deepened my level of awareness and understanding of emotional energy as it processes through the body, and how the breath and movement—combined with attention and intention—are part of a powerful healing combination. Although I was already developing a following for my ability to create and hold a safe and healing space, it was around this time I really started to come into my own as a yoga instructor.

Eventually the desire to lighten my load emerged, and while business was good at the studio and growing every day, I wasn't enjoying the administrative details of running it. That inner guidance system I was learning to trust was communicating with me again, and it was time for my work to shape-shift. After three years, I closed the studio and started doing even deeper work with individuals, couples and small groups. My communication, life coaching, yoga and massage backgrounds were all coming together in the most organic way in response to the needs of the people who were seeking me out. Finding and addressing those places where energy was stuck in the body—and in the mind—became almost automatic as my ability to listen to the words people used, and observe how they were holding themselves in their bodies, deepened.

Men and women from all walks of life—from doctors, lawyers and CEO's to college kids, young adults and full time moms—sought me out for support with addictions, insomnia, anxiety, depression, grief and loss, low self-esteem and more. It was around this time I organized my first yoga retreat in Costa Rica, and I called it *Yoga & the Search for the Authentic Self*. The retreat was a success and drew people from all over the United States and Canada.

For years I had been becoming increasingly aware of the power of the mind, and while meditation had been coming in and out of my life for years, the untapped, raw power of the human mind still fascinated me. It was this fascination that inspired me to seek training and certification in hypnotherapy. My teacher was also a yogi, with a belief system similar to my own, and was an expert hypnotherapist with more than 10 years' experience.

I immersed myself in an intensive experiential training that allowed me to bring my understanding of the human body and emotion together with a deep appreciation and reverence for the power of the human mind. This training took me deep into the conscious and subconscious mind, and explained how beliefs are formed and the mind programmed. My already natural affinity towards meditation, guided imagery and visualization techniques was strengthened. I received new tools for unlocking suppressed memories, healing deep-seeded childhood wounds, and breaking habits to which we are otherwise enslaved.



Within days of completing my training, I was on a plane headed for the Philippines where I had volunteered to assist in the development of an experimental, integrative health program at a hospital high up in the mountains. Both in the hospital and throughout the community, I led yoga classes and healing meditations. High up in the secluded mountain province of this third-world country I found men and women who were thirsty for an experience unlike anything they had ever experienced. Many of them had never even heard of yoga. Still, the classes became popular quickly, and we outgrew our first two locations within the first couple of weeks.

Not wanting to return home and leave the community without a yoga instructor, I decided to test the yoga training program I had recently started to develop. It would be a pilot program, but certainly enough to educate and train a couple of local women so they could teach classes after I was gone. We picked a date a few weeks out, and I worked diligently to bring *The Search for the Authentic Self* and yoga together into one powerful program I called Empath Yoga.

Through it all, I stayed in constant communication with my growing database of yoga, massage and life coaching clients over the years. When I shared in one of my blogs my plan to facilitate an Empath Yoga training in Sagada, I never expected to receive so many responses from people expressing interest.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, all my labor pains up to that point were culminating, and I was giving birth to Empath Yoga right there in the mountains of the Philippines. Men and women flew across the world from the U.S. and China to join us, and along with Filipinos it was a healthy group of 12 that participated in that first ever training. The healing that took place, the bonds that were formed, and the transformations that occurred, within all of us, brought me back to the powerful work with the homeless. Although the material had been expanded upon, tweaked, tried and tested over the course of several years, much of the material was exactly the same. It was yet another reminder that underneath it all . . . *we are all the same.*

***“The same heart beats
in every human breast.”***

—Matthew Arnold

Inspired by this surprising, and yet not-so-surprising turn of events, I returned to the United States to an eager group of individuals waiting for an Empath Yoga experience of their own. Suddenly, Empath Yoga was on the map.

While I never set out to do this work, I am deeply humbled and grateful for the gift that I’ve been given. And that same inner guidance that so effortlessly brought me to this place in my life is nudging me again, telling me it is time to share what I’ve learned.

Through it all, in the background of my entire professional journey, was a tremendous amount of personal growth, and through a divorce, bankruptcy, and various relationships that came and went, I was being challenged to live as authentically as I could, and apply the tools and knowledge picked up along the way. Just like the awkward phases that come with learning—be it an instrument, dance or yoga—it wasn’t always pretty. I played the wrong string, tripped over my own good intentions and fell out of balance more times than I care to admit.

Yet each experience offered me a gift, if I was willing to see it. First I had to learn, and still to this day must choose to remember, that this is why I’m here. This is a human journey. And I, just like everyone else, am doing the best I can.

The Search for the Authentic Self (now known as *Showing Up Naked: Peeling Away the Layers to Your Authentic Self*), along with Empath Yoga, is a culmination of more than 12 years of my own personal evolution, the experiences of others with whom this was shared, and how the ripple effects of this work can have an impact on all of humanity.

This book is different in that it fills in what I believe to be a gaping hole in many of the self-help books out there today. While we’ve come a long way on our journey as human beings—as evidenced by the popularity of books and documentaries about the power of the mind, positive-thinking and self leadership—there’s a critical



element that seems to be missing. Where we used to be led almost entirely by fear, we are now pushed solely to be positive, allowing only room for that which feels “good” to be acknowledged in our lives. But this does not allow for a deep, rich inner life of self honesty and authenticity.

Everyone has an opinion, and they’re often willing to share it with great conviction. Choosing to live an authentic life isn’t always easy, and I find myself having to sift through not only old, outdated beliefs of my own—many of which have been passed down to me from generations past—but also through the beliefs of nearly everyone with whom I interact.

When everyone around us is claiming to know the truth with a capital “T,” it can be challenging to find the space, and the humility, to realize that it’s something we must be willing to explore for ourselves.

I’ve been warned not to talk about the spiritual aspect of my journey and how my own beliefs have evolved along the way, as this may conflict with someone else’s previously established beliefs. But to tell my story and leave out such a relevant piece would be inauthentic. It would be like making a chocolate cake without the chocolate, changing the very nature of what it is by removing the key ingredient.

I’m grateful for the differing opinions and suggestions of others, as they’ve required me to step back from any agenda I may have had and give this very sensitive topic further consideration. Careful reflection on this landed me back in the place I was when I gripped the steering wheel that day, when I finally admitted to myself, and to Life, that *I don’t know*. In the end, I concluded that only those who have already decided to open their minds would be inclined to read this book.

It’s not my intention to garner a legion of robotic followers now dependent on me for guidance and direction. That’s exactly the point of this work. It wasn’t until I started to look at what rang true for me—sometimes in spite of the well-meaning intentions of others—that I found peace.

Mine was and continues to be a search for authenticity, not popularity, and I share with you here, with great humility, what I know to be true for me. It's my hope *not* that the words you're about to read teach you what to think, but rather inspire you *to think for yourself*, free from the guilt of questioning outdated teachings, the interpretations and expectations of others, and anything that even closely resembles blind faith.

There have been many lessons along the way, and I share here what has allowed me to make sense of things in my own life, as well as the lives of hundreds of others with whom I've worked and grown through the years. These are the tried and true learnings, which time and time again have proven themselves to be of value and worth in my tireless search for authenticity. These principles have survived years of experiential application, and the study of various different disciplines has only served to strengthen my belief in them. They are *for me*, now, inarguable truths, having become such an integral part of my thinking that the very lens through which I view and experience the world has shifted to accommodate them.

I invite you to read this book with an open mind, and explore for yourself what is real. In the end, take what fits, and discard the rest.

At the conclusion of each chapter I include a yoga pose or two for your consideration. Whether you are brand new to yoga, or a seasoned student of this ancient art, it is my hope that these offer a different perspective on how you can “live your yoga”, and take the practice off the mat and into your life. Although I include these, as well as introduce some basic yoga principles throughout the following chapters, this isn't a book about yoga, nor was it written for yogis. This is a book about self honesty, love, and living an intuitive, authentic life.

I am passionate about the material presented in each chapter of this book, and as I wrote it was my intention that each one be powerful enough to stand alone. However, it became apparent that some themes would be repeated often and in different ways, both out of necessity and to help clarify a point. Because the concepts in this book are so closely intertwined, and since repetition is the mother of all learning, there will be some consistent threads present throughout the book to help deepen your understanding.



*“We are meant to
midwife dreams for one
another . . . Success
occurs in clusters.”*

—Julia Cameron

I recommend reading through the material first and allowing yourself to simply be with the words and mental imagery it conjures up, letting old holding patterns in the mind and body start loosening their grip on you. Then read through it again, participating in every exercise and journal-writing process along the way as you absorb the material on an even deeper level. You might even want to enlist a friend, or draw together others of like mind and start an authentic living support group with which to embark on this journey. Or visit www.showingupnaked.com or www.empathyoga.com to find out more about my upcoming workshops, retreats or trainings.

This is a soul’s journey, and there’s no reason why you have to go it alone.

*au•then•tic [aw-then-tik]:
not false or copied; genuine; real*

The word “Authentic” etymologically derives from the Greek, *autos* “self” + *hentes* “doer, being”. So it actually deeply means the self or individual doing and being. Or more simply, being yourself.