

Good Times Home

Yogis Behaving Badly

E-mail

TUESDAY, 03 AUGUST 2010 13:42 LAUREL CHESKY NEWS - LOCAL
NEWS



Sexual misconduct by teachers is a growing problem in the yoga industry. Why are they getting away with it?

Put a man at the front of a room packed with adoring females and trouble lurks nearby. Churches, college classrooms and campaign trails notoriously breed sex scandals. Although a place of solace and growth for most, the yoga studio is no exception. From celebrity yogis having multiple affairs with students, to allegations of forced sex within global yoga franchises, to gurus getting grabby in class, yoga is no sanctuary from scandal.

Such un-yogic behavior often results in lawsuits, embarrassing press and gossip around the yoga studio water cooler—and in celebrity yogi Rodney Yee's case, a new

wife—but they rarely ruin careers.

But the latest national yoga sex scandal could result in career-ending consequences. Aspen, Colo. yoga teacher Steven Jon Roger, 49, is scheduled to stand trial in September for misdemeanor charges of unlawful sexual conduct with two of his students—a judge threw out felony sexual assault charges earlier this year. In the “Graspin’ Aspen” case, so-dubbed by yogadork.com, prosecutors accuse Roger of intentionally touching intimate parts of his clients’ bodies without consent. A guilty verdict will compel Roger to register as a sex offender. Roger pleaded not guilty in June.

Is the Aspen case an isolated incident or indicative of a larger problem in the yoga community? Most likely the latter, according to Judith Hanson Lasater, Ph.D. The San Francisco-based yoga instructor serves as president of the California Yoga Teachers Association and is considered the guru of yoga ethics in the United States. Unlawful touching of female students by male yoga teachers happens all the time, she says, and it won't stop until victims start speaking up.

“It's happened from the highest level gurus in India to multiple generations of yoga teachers in the U.S.” Lasater says. “It's so common as to be beyond a cliché. ... Some of what these teachers are doing, they should be in jail for. Technically, these behaviors are assault.”

Too Close for Comfort

In many styles of yoga, teachers touch students to adjust their pose. But touching an erogenous body part is unacceptable and unethical, Lasater says. (It's also illegal—unwelcomed touching of a sexual nature constitutes misdemeanor sexual battery in California.)

“It's happened in every city,” she says. This includes Santa Cruz County towns, according to yoga practitioners interviewed by Good Times.

“Jennifer” (a pseudonym) says a male yoga teacher in Santa Cruz inappropriately touched her twice.

“I was in ‘full pigeon’ [pose] and he came over to adjust me, I guess, and wrapped his whole body around me,” she says. “Our bodies were completely touching.”

In another class, “I was in ‘warrior two’ and he came up behind me and thrust(ed) into me from behind, into my butt,” Jennifer says. “Then I was in ‘downward dog,’ and he came up behind me and did the same thing. After that, every time he came to adjust me, I just said, ‘No, no, I'm fine’. ... I should have said something when it happened, but it just happened so quickly.”

A yoga instructor herself, Jennifer says she has never encountered such a full-contact style adjusting. “I've been practicing yoga for 15 years, and I have never, ever had an instructor invade my space like that,” she says. “There is absolutely no reason for it. You can adjust someone with one finger.”

“Meagan” (also a pseudonym) says a Santa Cruz yoga instructor lured her back to his house for some private practice. After a few poses, he talked her into a massage and then sexually assaulted her.

“As soon as he started massaging me, I knew it was not completely harmless,” she writes in an email to GT. “I froze up on his floor and my mind was racing, trying to decide if it was safe to get up, if he was going to try to rape me ...” During the massage, she writes, the yoga teacher touched her inappropriately and started to perform oral sex on her. “At that moment I got up, so confused, but trying to stay composed.”

Both women reported the incidents to the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department. Andrew Isaac, a prosecutor in the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office, says that the DA's office is “aware of the allegations,” but he would not comment further. “The DA's office does not discuss ongoing investigations,” he says.

Two other local yoga students describe teacher behavior that, while not illegal, seemed unethical for a yoga professional.

"I was in happy baby pose," says one student. "You're on your back, your legs are up and spread apart with your hands on your ankles. You're wide open in the crotch. He [her yoga teacher] came up through my legs, he comes close to my face and he says in a quiet voice, 'Do you know what [a renowned yogi] calls this pose? She calls it, 'Honey, I'm Home.' I felt creeped out. Why would a yoga instructor say that to me?"

The second student, who is married, says her yoga teacher called her at home, even though she had never spoken with him outside of class and had not given him her phone number.

"He said something like, 'I was thinking of you the other day and I want us to get to know each other better, call me sometime,'" she says. "It was very disturbing."

Stand Up, Speak Up, Walk Out

However, many violated yoga students never contact law enforcement, or they withhold their names from authorities. Cases cannot be prosecuted without victims' disclosing their identities. In an e-mail obtained by GT, Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Deputy Kelli McCoy expresses frustration over anonymous reports she has received from yoga students. "...[U]nfortunately they are no good without them disclosing their identity," she writes.

Victims' silence is steeped in a stew of psychological complexities. Many female students harbor emotional issues that leave them susceptible to their teacher's influence, Lasater says. Adding to that, yoga itself can render students emotionally vulnerable.

"Yoga is a profound process of opening up," Lasater says. "It's a process of letting go and allowing your instructor to touch you verbally, emotionally and physically. You [students] are encouraged to let your teacher into your being. Then one day your teacher puts his hand on your breast, and it doesn't shock you. You have been groomed to accept everything [he does] as teaching."

Often women blame themselves and are too ashamed to talk about the abuse—"battered woman's syndrome," Lasater calls it. Still others believe that calling out the teacher defies yogic principles.

"There seems to be what Buddhists call 'idiot compassion,' which implies you should just forgive unwanted sexual advances and forget about it because it's the yogic thing to do," Lasater says. "But I think we should all get angry about this sort of behavior."

Even if women do speak up, what will happen? Barring criminal prosecution, usually not much. Most yoga teachers don't have licenses to strip away. The industry remains largely unregulated in most states, including California. And industry organizations that dole out teaching credentials, such as the national Yoga Alliance, lack systems to investigate or reprimand teachers for bad behavior.

Industry organizations do give teachers guidance on ethics. The California Yoga Teachers Association Code of Professional Ethics is among the most comprehensive: "All forms of sexual behavior or harassment with students are unethical, even when a student invites or consents to such behavior involvement," it states. (See full code at yogateachersassoc.org/ethics.html.)

However, ethical codes are non-binding suggestions. "There is very likely no yoga center and certainly no yoga organization which is likely to kick you out and keep you from teaching," Lasater says. "There is almost never any announcement, publicity or discussions about the ethics and professionalism of what happened, just lots of gossip."

Nothing will change, Lasater says, unless violated students speak up. "It's sad, it's frustrating, and it's only going to stop when women say no," she says. "If one day a woman in class would say, 'He just put his hand on my crotch and I'm asking all of you to leave this class now with me in solidarity,' and if people would walk out of class, I guarantee you it would stop."

Good Times is investigating claims of sexual misconduct in Santa Cruz's yoga community. If you have been a victim please contact us at letters@gtweekly.com. Names and email addresses will be kept confidential.

Comments (48)

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for fear of a legal suit

written by [Ann S.](#), August 04, 2010

The reason men get away with such behavior is because perpetrators remain anonymous by using both litigious and personal threats against those who come forward. The GoodTimes' fear of a legal suit has forced them write this article as if there are tons of known male yoga instructors locally who "adjust" students inappropriately, or lure them home to allegedly rape them. Mark Stephens was thrown out of the Vets Hall due to his inappropriate behavior toward some women in his yoga classes, he then opened a

westside yoga studio next to Kelly's bakery. If there are others in the community who have been assaulted or touched inappropriately by Stephens or other teachers please contact lawyer Dana Scruggs, Defensa de Mujeres and or, Rape Prevention at UCSC. Silence is complicity. <http://www2.ucsc.edu/rape-prevention/>

P.S. As a yoga student I can personally vouch for Victor at the Nourish: Yoga, Massage and Nutrition where this sort of behavior would not be tolerated.

Sincerely, Ann Simonton,
Long time activist to end men's violence against women and founder of Media Watch

-2

Mark Stephens owner of Santa Cruz Yoga
written by [Tyler Karlson](#), August 04, 2010

It's common knowledge in the yoga community that Mark Stephens owner of Santa Cruz has dozens of rumors about sexually assaulting women. I guess the DA doesn't care about these cases, thanks Andrew Issac. Were these crimes all committed by the same person. Please tell us more GT, we obviously have a crisis on our hands.

I saw the video of Mark Stephens getting fired from the Vet's Hall. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuqtBWR8pE>

-4

REALLY?

written by [Karina Subijana](#), August 04, 2010

Is this article referring to MARK STEPHENS? What is the point of outing teachers, when the teachers responsible are not even named.

-4

Yoga teachers adjusting?

written by [Melissa](#), August 05, 2010

I am a Yoga instructor and spa owner and this article is the main reason I do not adjust students when teaching a class. I make sure to ask if the class has the pose and if it looks like they do not, then I describe it in more detail to them so they can move into the pose at their own pace.

When these things happen it gives the business a bad name and that is a big problem for those of us that do all we can to not violate others space.

I do hope the Santa Cruz teacher that is accused of doing this is not in practice any longer.

I also hope that all that read this that go to Yoga class or get massages and feel like they are being violated will start to speak about it. Let's keep Santa Cruz weird but safe from this type of practice.

Namaste'

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written by [Former student](#), August 05, 2010

Sounds like Mark Stephens.

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written by [Ash](#), August 05, 2010

I am a 20 yr practicing female yogi and currently reside in Santa Cruz, Ca. I am shocked by the journalistic approach to this subject and poor representation of both student and instructor. How can you honestly report on a story like this without credible, documented, and trustworthy sources? Since when did the Good Times report like the Enquire? Fueling lies, hate and gossip in a small community. To the women in this story, editor and reporter, shame on you! You know your resources are bad, have stories with holes in them (and evidence to support these lies) and not a single police department representative to back up any of these women's claims!

I have personally practiced with the local yoga instructor your story mentions and must say without a doubt that he has the utmost of respect and love from his students, male and female. All of whom have practiced 1-15 yrs with him, and never been accosted the way your story claims. We should all be so blessed to have his grace in our community.

+8

wide sweeping generalizations belong on FOX NEWS.

written by [Friend](#), August 05, 2010

"Put a man at the front of a room packed with adoring females and trouble lurks nearby." really? rethink this statement, Laurel.

+15

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written by Franny, August 06, 2010

To Ash-- you'll notice that the article doesn't name "your teacher" at all. Interesting that based off of those women's stories you assumed (or just knew?) it was him and came running to his defense.

If goodtimes couldn't say who is harming these women (legal reasons?? ongoing investigation??) maybe they were banking on the community to reveal who. And it worked--everyone obviously already knew who is doing this. Let's hope this means he won't be able to get away with manipulating and groping women anymore?

-7

Sources

written by Laurel, August 06, 2010

Ash--My sources are credible, documented and trustworthy. Names were not revealed in order to protect their privacy, as is customary with sex abuse victims. Stories with "holes" in them did not make it into this article. As for police backing up claims, I refer you to Asst. DA Andrew Isaac's quote.

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written by Mother Teresa, August 06, 2010

This article is about yoga instructor Mark Stephens who has touched many women inappropriately and forced numerous woman to have sex with him. He preys on young beautiful women, that are afraid to complain and press charges because he threatens to hurt them or their families. His name is not mentioned in this article because he threatened Good Times with a law suit. He is a master manipulator and a dangerous man in our community. If you or any one you know has been hurt by this man please call Women's Crises and Support or lawyer Dana Scruggs. Lets get this man out of our community.

-5

Obscures the real issue

written by John Glore, August 06, 2010

The term "yogi" is applied to one who is immersed in a yogic lifestyle, and implies purity in thought, word, and action. The teachers referenced in this article--one of whom is Mark Stephen--are not "yogis" or yoga teachers by any stretch of imagination, but are fitness teachers with poor or nonexistent moral and ethical standards.

This is not a story about yoga at all, but rather a story of sexual misconduct toward women. Framing this story in any other fashion demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of yoga, and a lack of respect for the real issue: sexual harrasment and abuse.

+2

Smear Piece, Not Journalism

written by paula in capitola, August 06, 2010

Laurel Chesky and the GT are fully aware that Kevin Halpern, Michael McEvoy, Phil Lynch and others have carried out a slanderous smear campaign against Mark Stephens, but she chose to ignore this side of the story. Why? Repeat a lie enough times and it starts to sound like the truth. Meanwhile, Chesky knows there are hundreds of women across SC who praise Mark as a teacher, bringing their daughters and sisters to his classes, and they have written to the Good Times to convey their experience with him as an honorable yoga teacher. But apparently the Good Times was intent on this as a hit piece, not a piece of journalism, and has ignored that vast majority of women's voices that have spoken out in support of Stephens. If you doubt this, just go to one of classes, packed full of women fully aware of these smears going back a year or so. Shame on the Good Times for publishing such a hit piece, and shame on Chesky for allowing herself to be so used by editor Limbach.

+5

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written by Erika A, August 06, 2010

As a student of both yoga, and Mark Stephens, I have nothing but good things to say about him as a teacher. In my experience, many male yoga teachers have questionable boundary issues, and I have, over the years, been at the receiving end of unwanted advances (though nothing that I would characterize as sexual battery). Mark's classes are a safe haven for many men and women, and his gentle, kind demeanor is free of any hint of sexual aggression. I wish those who are touting this as a women's cause (I understand this is Santa Cruz, and we must all have a cause to make us feel good about ourselves) would take the time to talk to women who have constant contact with this highly qualified teacher. If you choose to look up for yourself, you will see that the sky is, in fact, not falling. Stop ruining a good man's reputation! Your actions and words have consequences.

To Paula and other followers

written by J.F., August 06, 2010

Paula, you are accusing good times of accusing a person who was not at all mentioned in the article. And, as a fellow woman, I must ask you...

WHY not talk about the most important issue here: the victims. So the teacher still has a big following-- what does that prove? Isn't one victim one too many? The idea that a popular and powerful man can't be responsible or capable of this kind of behavior solely because he is popular is not only ridiculous, it is also (sadly) the attitude that has kept so many victims silenced in the past and enabled this behavior to continue. Just because a successful coach, teacher, manager, etc doesn't harm *all* of his students, doesn't mean he shouldn't be exposed for and held responsible for those he did. Maybe his followers who remain devoted should take a step back and consider who deserves defending here.

-6

mark stephens is paula in the above comment

written by mark stephens is 'paula', August 06, 2010

now mark stephens is a crossdresser named paula too?

'paula' is obviously mark stephens. only he would know the detail 'paula' mentions

run mark stephens out of town, just like they did in LA

-8

Mayor of Santa Cruz

written by Mike Rotkin, August 06, 2010

I, for one, am sick of people slandering Mark Stephens. There is a concerted effort on the part of a group of men, led by one man who was dismissed by Mark from his Yoga class, ironically, following a complaint by a female student of sexual harassment and stalking by this other individual, who is now, in a retaliation vendetta spreading false rumors about Mark in every forum he can find. (Now I will not doubt be added to the "conspiracy" along with Neal Coonerty, Third District Supervisor, and D.A. Bob Lee, who apparently have some reason to tremble in their boots in some alleged fear of Mark Stephens.) Law enforcement investigated the claims against Mark and found them not only baseless but possibly slanderous and dropped their investigation. All I ask is that nobody pass these outrageous charges on without actually knowing a real person (not second hand) who is willing to come forward and claim that Mark has abused her. How does one disprove sexual harassment when nobody is actually willing to make a claim and put his or her name to it. If Mark actually did some of these things, the claimant would be protected against slander charges, since the truth is always a defense against slander. I'm glad that at least the Good Times had the good sense and journalistic integrity to not name someone in an article when they, apparently, had no credible witnesses of the supposed offense(s). Unfortunately, the article did provide an opportunity for several individuals, other than the alleged victims, to repeat the slander anyway.

mike

+13

Mark Stephens

written by Diana Dure-Biondi, August 06, 2010

Mark Stephens is a compassionate, kind and skillful yoga teacher. I have been his student for almost 4 years. I am so grateful to have him here in our community.

+8

oh ya - Mark is sooooo scary - oh please!!!!

written by Roc, August 06, 2010

We were wondering who this (badly written and not even good enough for National Enquirer) article was talking about - so we looked it up online. Mark Stephens is who you were subtly writing about? What a joke.

Its obvious by watching the video on youtube - that this was a setup. Why else would someone be there to film it and call him a sexual predator? Mark did not even know why he was being fired - but obviously that man with the camera did.

Laurel - you are irresponsible - why not tell the whole story? Because that would not support your getting a byline for the story.

Mark is an excellent teacher and is supported by many students, teachers and authors in the industry. He knows his stuff well. If its true that other male yogis are the one smearing his name - and you are only telling part of the story, Laurel - you have a lot of explaining to do!

+10

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written by Mojo, August 07, 2010

I checked out his website. The quote he uses on several pages is just plain creepy after reading this article!!!

-7

Rapist yoga

written by Peter Williams, August 07, 2010

I was a longtime student of Mark Stephens. After watching him sexually abuse women in classes, I refused to go back. I hope that the District Attorney Bob Lee decides to prosecute him. I think Stephens is a sick individual.

-6

Hahaha

written by George Frijlick, August 07, 2010

Why doesn't the good times just come out and say that this is Mark Stephens? Everyone knows it. Its so taboo. Mark Stephens is a disgrace. There are dozens of women who he assaults. its public knowledge. i wonder how many political campaign contributions he has made.

-5

Mark Stephens man of the hour

written by William Cooper, August 07, 2010

People who think that Stephens is so great are fools. How is it possible that someone so popular can be such a conman and criminal? Look at politicians people. You vote for criminals, and you pay money to have him usher you around in yoga poses as he assaults women. Shows the real backbone for people in general. All of his students are fools. Santa Cruz is a piece of crap city. People are naive. Go to a real city and a sicko like Stephens would be brought down very quickly.

-6

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written by Bike, August 07, 2010

This is to Paula from Capitola, shame on you, you call yourself a women? Just because it didn't happen to you or anyone you know doesn't mean that the allegations are not true! If it did happen to you would you want the support of other women? Just because this didn't happen to you doesn't mean he's innocent of the charges, we think we know someone when in fact we don't really know them at all, history has proven this. Just because you participate in his classes doesn't mean you know what he's like behind closed doors.

-3

'paula; is mark stephens

written by 'paula' is mark stephens, August 07, 2010

'paula' is mark stephens

-4

Sex Offender

written by Terry Jackoviac, August 07, 2010

Mark Stephens should be a registered sex offender and should be banned by the Yoga Alliance from teaching yoga. He is a disgrace. I hope the Good Times publishes an article that names him specifically.

-4

sick pervert

written by Christina Fortuna, August 07, 2010

Ash, since this article does not name anyone, how can you be sure to defend anyone? Are you that clueless? Did you even read the article Ash, or did Mark Stephens just tell you to write a comment praising his holiness? Give me a break! This is exactly how sick Mark really is, and how naive and dumbed down the whole community is. Wake up fools!

-5

Get beyond the rumors.....

written by Maggie Z., August 07, 2010

My concern is not for rumors or the person who may, or may not, be doing this. My concern is for the victims. Clearly there are people who feel their boundaries have been compromised in a trusting and healing environment. Enough so to report it to the authorities.

Perhaps we should instead be discussing how to help the victims and rebuild the trust of this community. Santa Cruz has a beautiful and solid yoga network - we owe it to the residents and our practice to cause no harm, to be honest and support those who feel abused to come forward. Let them know that we're committed to rebuilding the community.

If there are in fact teachers who are crossing boundaries, then yes, they do need to face the

consequences once the facts are investigated by legal authorities - regardless of how many people can vouch for their credibility.

+4

Implications

written by concerned citizen, August 08, 2010

Why was the Vet's Hall closed after Mark Stephens and his many professional-career type students were removed. What is the relationship--if any? What is the current status--reopening--and have all of the relevant stakeholders been apprised of the process/change/etc? What might the former manager--Tim Bratton--have to say about the Mark Stephens incident [he should know], the closing of the Vets Hall, and any potential changes? These are community wide issues [3200 hundred people per week used the Vets Hall]--and we seem to lack the transparency needed to address these important issues. Manym people earned their livihoods at the hall--they deserve to be consulted.

+7

wow

written by concerned yogi, August 09, 2010

Speaking of former manager at the Vets hall (where Mark got "fired") Tim Bratton...he now teaches classes at Marks new studio....enough said?

Please find me these "people" that ran Mark out of LA. I am sure (you) would find quite the opposite if (you) spoke to any of his students/mentors/fellow teachers from LA.

Regarding him not being a "yogi"who teaches fitness classes-have you ever met the man? have you ever taken his classes?

This is VERY manipulated journalism.

Since when does journalism make allegations about someone with information they got from an EMAIL (credible?)! Who knows how true or to what extent these stories are?The whole story of "oh he invited me back and suddenly (idk how?)I had my pants off and didn't know how to say NO sounds sketchy". What **Loading...**al assailant gives massages and oral sex? NO ONE would believe a story like this if it was on CSI. why are you now? Sounds either like regret or a way to wreck his name. Since the police DO know this story and HAVE spoken to "victims" then why are no charges made? Bad evidence, if any? I think GOODTIMES was just looking for something to spark interest in readers....

+5

Bad Judgement Santa Cruz City Council?

written by Santa Cruz Citizen, August 09, 2010

Why did the Mayor of Santa Cruz declare June 5th Mark Stephens Day while while Stephens is being investigated for sexual assault???

ADDENDUM TO CITY COUNCIL AGENDA – JUNE 22, 2010

MAYOR'S PROCLAMATIONS

1.Proclaiming Saturday, June 5, 2010 as "Mark Stephens and Santa Cruz Yoga Day" and urging all residents of our fair City to join in celebrating the many contributions of Mark Stephens and the opening of Santa Cruz Yoga.

+0

Scary Yoga Attacks

written by Inca Friend, August 09, 2010

This stuff is really nasty. It appears to be a battle between Fox News and and Colbert. And I'm not sure which side is who? Can our City Council who wholeheartedly supports all efforts of the Domestic Violence Commission be that far off? My Daddy once said that "If you bad mouth something, all you're left with is bad breath."

+9

Mark Stephens - An Honorable Teacher

written by Anne, August 10, 2010

I have had the privilege to be a long time yoga student of Mark Stephens both in LA and in Santa Cruz. He has a long and distinguished history as a master teacher who always demonstrates the utmost respect for his students.

Fact: There's a group of conspirators who are bent through jealousy, anger, and malicious thinking to try to destroy this wonderful person.

Fact: It is common knowledge in the yoga community that there are people who have anonymously spread slanderous rumors about Mark for over a year.

Fact: It is common knowledge in the yoga community that some of these "anonymous" people have criminal backgrounds and are adept at harming others.

Fact: Mark has not and does not abuse his students in any way.

Fact: Mark Stephens is an honest, kind, and compassionate person.
Peace with you, peace be with you all.

+3

Real Issues

written by Holland Simonns, August 10, 2010

The Real issue is pointing out the truth that there are numerous women in the Santa Cruz area who have been the victim of sexual assault in yoga classes by a yoga teacher. Whatever your opinions are, the fact of the matter remains.

-2

Where's the real story???

written by Beth, August 10, 2010

This story is full of holes. Let's get the real story here and answer the questions on everyone's mind...

Question: why was there someone waiting outside the Vet's Hall with a video camera the day Mark got banned? It seems to me that who ever took this video had knowledge of what was going to happen that day. Who is this person and why is he after Mark? Is it payback, jealousy or some yoga teachers in Santa Cruz who want Mark out of town for their own benefit? Another question: Why would the woman who went to Mark's house for a private lesson be naked with Mark if there wasn't mutual consent? The other questionable claim was from the yoga teacher who took Mark's class and stated that she thought his style of giving adjustments was too invasive. Fine, if she was so offended, then why would she continue to take his class? Let's get the real story here, who are these people going after Mark and why?

+6

slander

written by MaryM, August 10, 2010

As a devoted student of his for the past two years, I speak for myself and all his students when I say he is a master teacher and a generous, respectful, and caring individual. I hope this slander passes soon because Mark is the backbone of the Santa Cruz yoga community, and he is the last person that deserves this bad press.

+7

Satya

written by Mark R., August 12, 2010

taken from the website: expressionsofspirit.com

2. Satya – Commitment to Truthfulness

Satya means "to speak the truth," yet it is not always desirable to speak the truth on all occasions, for it could harm someone unnecessarily. We have to consider what we say, how we say it, and in what way it could affect others. If speaking the truth has negative consequences for another, then it is better to say nothing. Satya should never come into conflict with our efforts to behave with ahimsa. This precept is based on the understanding that honest communication and action form the bedrock of any healthy relationship, community, or government, and that deliberate deception, exaggerations, and mistruths harm others. ii

+3

Mark Stephens Lied about being Fired from the Vets Hall

written by [Dave S](#), August 13, 2010

As a former student of Mark Stephens, I was told by him that he left the Vets Hall because he wanted to open his own studio. After seeing this video below, it is obvious that he is a liar. Since seeing this video, I have connected the dots on other lies he has told. It is obvious that this article is the tip of the iceberg. Everyone must watch this video, how does Mark off the top of his head know so much about sexual assault law and process. I must admit I was fooled by him, but it feels good that I am no longer under his spell. Seeing him behave this way throughout the video, he looks like a mobster, not a yoga teacher leading 500 hour teacher trainings.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uuqtBWR8pE>

-3

Community Support for anyone harmed

written by Teacher of Yoga & Ethics, August 13, 2010

As a longtime student and teacher of yoga and other spiritual disciplines, I state this on behalf of our community.

Any women that has ever been violated by Mark Stephens or any other yoga teacher, you have the support of leaders in your community. Please contact any lady yoga teacher and share your story, they

will help you. Take comfort in knowing that you have done nothing to deserve this and recognize that your incident it now appears was not an isolated one. If these allegation are true (which after months of rumors that many of us did not want to face, they appear to be), it is essential that these women do come forward to law enforcement, no matter how painful or frustrating the process is. Very few of us in our entire lives will have the privilege to take such powerful actions and stand up for ourselves and hold anyone accountable that has ever harmed us.

Mark, It is amazing that you have had multiple women press criminal charges against you, yet you still lead 500 hour teacher trainings. Obviously yoga alliance has no process to take away your ability to certify teachers. Your only option to silence these rumors is to go back to your source of teachings, you must contact Chuck Miller and Maty Ezraty, who you have told countless people and identified on your website that you are a student of to seek their support to continue teaching. Please have Chuck and Maty come up to Santa Cruz and teach at your new studio and ask them to show support for you. If your relationship with Chuck and Maty is as genuine as you describe and your supporters declare in the comment section, they will happily teach at your studio or record a video on your behalf declaring their pride for you.

Without the blessing of your lineage, it is obvious that your teachings are not authentic. Given the world renowned profile that you declare, getting support from Chuck and Maty will help end this situation for you and your community. Any student of Mark is encouraged to ask Mark of this also. In eastern traditions, lineage is the only blessing that allows us to continue on our journey of sharing these sacred mystical teachings.

+1

Crimes Against Communities

written by Love those who harm others, August 13, 2010

We like to believe in redemption and the belief that people change. Unfortunately the countless stories, first hand of sexual assault committed by Mark Stephens are beyond appalling. His behavior is pathological and he can not help it or control himself. The lack of compassion for those he has criminally violated has forced an entire community to take a stand against him. Mark, spare hundreds of people, your victims, students and our community and turn yourself into law enforcement. Your victims will have mercy on you as it is obvious from a clinical perspective that you are mentally unstable and a complete sociopath. Mark is riding of the shoulders of every teacher before him that built this reputation to be respected globally, a yoga teacher. Even more repulsive is the bombardment of abusive, shameless exploitation and terrorist tactics that Mark uses against women that speak out against him or try to break free of him. Mark shamelessly exploits his students for his own gratification without any compassion for how he affects others. Mark, we recognize how injured and wounded you are from your past. Your wikipedia profile use to state that you were a ward of the state of California in your youth. If you share your past with people, our community will have compassion at your inevitable sentencing.

-3

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written by Concerned, August 16, 2010

I'm concerned with the increasing volatile nature of these attacks on an individual. The last two post has showed me that we're getting to a tipping point. I ask that Good Times take down this comment section before things get beyond angry postings.

-1

David Koresh Clone

written by David Koresh Clone, August 17, 2010

Mark Stephens real teacher that he studied with is David Koresh. Mark's desire is to be a cult leader based upon his endless desire for other's to praise him. Why does Mark spend so much time hoping others care and approve of him??

+1

Puzzling Polarities

written by Wallace, August 17, 2010

I heard about this deal roughly a year ago from various yoga friends, but I am not very informed. I have taken a couple of classes with Mark and have a good many friends who really appreciate his classes. What surprises me is that there is such a wide spectrum of sensibilities about this man. The article, which was startlingly ambiguous for a piece of journalism, might have approached this in a broader, more objective way by examining the people involved in the crusade against Mark. I watched the video from utube and found it uncomfortable for a variety of reasons. The man in control of the camera did not come across as all that compelling with his baiting remarks, and the character in the car was sort of cartoonish. Who are these people? If Mark has acted inappropriately in countless situations, where are these people and why haven't they succeeded in taking legal action? I'm not asking this rhetorically, I am honestly asking why they have not come forward. On the other hand, I do intuit something awkward in Mark's responses, something that would make these accusations not seem entirely preposterous, and, in my direct experiences with Mark, his energy is a little different, but again, that's just speculation and everyone

looks guilty under the microscope.

I am not a big yoga person, but I am a longtime resident of Santa Cruz. And given the community buzz that this issue has engendered, I wish the approach to this article could have been less about the phenomenon of yoga instructors using their power unethically, and more about the specific situation. Was there a lawsuit threatened to GT? That would be interesting to know... How did this guy with the camera know that this was Mark's last day? What was the Vet's Hall's process in barring Mark from their midst? There are countless questions that I would find engaging and interesting.

It could be that the author wanted to write about these things but was told not to because of possible litigation, but it sure seems like there is/was an opportunity to do some serious investigating about something that the vast majority of people in the yoga community in Santa Cruz has heard about (and that's a pretty big community).

As I read these posts, what strikes me is the absolute polarization of sensibilities. People are either fully indignant or fully supportive of Stephens. In a case where there seems to be so few concrete facts out there, that really confounds me.

Bottom line: I don't have enough information to know if this is a gross injustice to Mark Stephens or a tragedy of one man abusing his position and power, or, if such a thing is possible given the gravity of the accusations, somewhere in between . . . Thus, I am reserving judgment.

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They're everywhere

written by A concerned citizen, August 18, 2010

There are bad and good male yoga instructors everywhere. Here in Edmonton, there are a couple who are quite well known for just getting into the yoga instructing side of things because of the access it gives them to women and usually women of affluence.

Most of these guys were bartenders or massage therapists before becoming yoga instructors. I don't know why more studios don't have stricter policies around the behavior of their instructors. Also, if you have an instructor who offers "privates", I'd watch out.

-3

Response to Concerned post from on August 17th

written by Concerned for women harmed, August 19, 2010

How would you respond if someone raped, intimidated, harassed and scared the life out of your sister, so much so that they had to leave the town they lived in. You then find out that the person that committed this crime has done it to others, many others. This is what happened to us.

+4

Many Sides

written by Various perspectives, August 21, 2010

I can understand the desire to not see or believe the darker side of this man.

Many people have benefitted from his presence and his work. It's clear that he has been a positive force in many people's life. But this doesn't necessary prove that he's incapable of actions that harm people.

I haven't been as fortunate as some who've only seen his positive sides, and I've seen and heard so much about his dark sides that it's hard to ignore. I think it's naive for people to think that these women and men who are speaking against him have some stupid grudge against Mark Stephens and that's all it is. I'm sure that most people have not met or spoken with victims nor have heard first hand accounts, and to make blanket statements about the situation is ludicrous. Come on people put some more energy in to investigate something before you say he's innocent. That sort of sloppy logic is what makes women afraid to come forward, because the women know that he's built such a reputation and people just blindly buy in to it. They feel as though nobody will believe them.

I've spoken directly to a Mark Stphe's rape survivor, a victim of sexual assault and have spoken directly to numerous female yoga instructors who have informed me of his misconduct either as a direct recipient or has had their students confide in them of his abuses. The number of violations that this man has committed is unfathomable. Even in his delusions he may think he has done no harm or he may claim that it was "consensual" the women obviously do not agree. And this is NOT an isolated case.

I've read an email from a prominent LA yoga center who was Mark Stephen's instructor who said that they had to run him out for sleeping with students and married women. What happened to brahmacharya?--sexual purity or respect? It seems to be a consensus amongst sources from LA that he was run out of LA for rampant sexual misconduct. An acquaintance was attending a teacher training of a prominent yoga instructor from LA and brought the subject of his misconduct up to her and she was quoted as saying "He's doing it again?" what upsets me is that nobody warned any of us up here in Santa

Cruz of this. As a result the number of women who have been harmed are countless.

Do you want know why he was run out of the Vets hall? Because people reported sexual misconduct to the board. And for fear of liability the board decide to keep their mouth shut. There were numerous reports of his misconduct made to Tim Bratton th manager of the program monhs before his termination and nothing was done until some brave souls confronted the board directly.

When news of his termination became public a storm of women started contacting the board about his abuses. Again because most of these women were too afraid or embarassed to come forward the situation remained silent for the most part .

Another friend of mine has counseled and provided support to anoher woman who was a victim of acquaintance rape victim of Mark Stephens. She was verbally assaulted and physically threatened and to this day refuses to go to the police. Two women have gone to the police and the Sheriffs and DA have done nothing about it thus far. I understand many women are severely traumatized and afraid but I do think that women need to come forward and people need to support each other. The silence simply breeds silence and confusion. It becomes a larger issue than just you. The safety of other women depends on the courage of those who have been harmed to come forward. It's like being hit by a landmine and surviving and not telling others that there are landmines. You are partially responsible for the harm that comes over future victims.

It's a serious issue and sadly because of legalities, fear and threats the truth is largely unavailable to most. Satya?? To not speak the truth and to allow someone to continue to harm people and to thus harm themselves is not Ahimsa or Satya. Go ask your teachers about it. This misinformed and superficial understanding of spiritual concepts is the very thing that contributes to the haze of denial and delusion.

I hope that more clarity comes to this issue for the safety of women and their friends and lovers, for the trauma of sexual abuse always reverberates in to the community. I hope for the integrity of yoga that this sort of behavior is not tolerated in the future and that communities stand up to protect each other from this sort of abuse.

Sometimes truth is not comfortable but I think there is a responsibility to share what we know to protect each other and the offender from future offense. Mark Stephens if you don't like this, stop forcing yourself on women, sleeping with married women and ignoring the harm you are causing in countless lives.

+4

Mark Stephens Prey's on Married Women with Children

written by Mark Stephens Prey's on Married Women with Children, August 23, 2010

I can not comment on the allegations in this article, but I know the names of two married women with Children that Mark Stephens had a consensual affair with. One of the couple's is now divorced because of Mark Stephens. It's very disturbing to me that a yoga teacher, especially one that trains other's to be yoga teachers, has affairs with married women with children. It was confusing to me why Mark Stephens would do this, then a friend explained to me, "who could keep a better secret than a married women". My friend took it a step further, "who could keep a better secret than a married women, a married women with children, Mark know's they aren't going to leave their husbands if they have kids." What a perfect target for a spiritual gigolo. I would like to propose a debate to Mark's community, is it OK for Mark Stephens to have affair's with married women? Any response would be great.

+1

Wake Up

written by concernedyogi, August 23, 2010

Mark has two sides. As a former student of Mark's I do agree that he is extremely knowledgeable about yoga and really knows how to teach a wonderful class. He is charming and oftentimes imbues the spirit of yoga. It would be great if the facts stopped there, however they don't. When people make statements that several women come to his class and bring their daughters, sisters, etc., yes, this is also true. The problem with that statement is that these women aren't victims of his abuse. He knows which women are easy prey and doesn't touch the ones who aren't. He would never go over the line with someone of power, money, fame or influence. It is the vulnerable women who he preys upon. I pray, that these women, and Mark, get the help they need and that an end is put to this once and for all.

+3

Why was Tim Bratten Fired from the Vet's Hall

written by Why was Tim Bratten Fired from the Vet's Hall, August 26, 2010

Why was Tim Bratten Fired From the Vet's Hall. Tim it's time you tell the yoga community your story about Mark Stephens and why after so many years are you not involved with the Vets Hall anymore. It's amazing that you are teaching at Mark Stephen's studio, despite the fact that Mark Stephens spent so many years intimidating and yelling at you. Countless people are aware of his behavior against you.

+1

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