

## **Transcript for The Who's Dat Phat Girl Podcast - With Brooke Hoover** **EPISODE #30- Rescue Dogs and Down Dogs**

Hey y'all, I'm Brooke Hoover. A Louisiana native, actor, writer and comedian. I've lost 100 pounds through diet and exercise or shall I say "lifestyle changes". My twenty year and counting health journey has taught me that just like taking a diet pill for weight loss, body positivity doesn't magically happen overnight. I'm working on re-gaining my self esteem and re-kindling my love affair with Cajun and Southern comfort food in a healthier way all the while juggling eating as clean as I can, re-establishing myself in the entertainment industry which, as we know, is historically fat phobic all the while showing my inner phat girl some love - that's phat with a PH - pretty hot and tempting. Let me tell y'all a tale or two...

When the yoga teacher told me, "Stand up. I've got to fix your yoga mat. It's driving me crazy", I told myself it was finally time to throw the towel in (even if it was complimentary and smelled like lemongrass essential oil). My diagonally placed yoga mat was messing up my sense of calm too but I was trying to focus on my Ujjayi breathing instead. Isn't that what a good yogi is supposed to do?!?!?! This yoga teacher's commentary defeated the reason why I was pursuing a yoga practice over the past twenty years: to get out of my own perfectionistic ways, Zen out and hopefully tone up. Since middle school, I sought out yoga much like a hopeless romantic seeks out a relationship with someone they want so badly but will never have - the married man, the workaholic or the bad boy who won't change his ways (or move out of his parents' basement). I wanted something from yoga that it promised in theory: toned arms, a matchy-matchy Lululemon wardrobe and genuine love for wheatgrass juice

I began my journey as a yogi when I was in middle school. It was offered as an elective to gym class and I wanted nothing more than to avoid running the track outdoors in the Louisiana humidity. An added bonus was getting to change in a private bathroom instead of the dreaded locker room. That alone was the jackpot for this chubby girl whose gym teacher loved coming in to "just check and see how y'all girls were doing" from time to time. I loved listening to the voice of the Spanish teacher turned yoga instructor and the hum of the central air-conditioning as I lay back in reclined butterfly, simultaneously looking at the bulletin board so I could learn how to conjugate verbs in Spanish. However, I soon realized I did not like the competitive vibe that was created by my arch nemesis, this super athletic mean girl who spent several months making fun of the way I walked. She was shaped like a stick and could do a headstand as easily as a bendable straw in a daiquiri that you can get at those drive-thru daiquiri places (if you don't know what I'm talking about, you haven't spent much time in Louisiana). My body which was representing puberty in full effect could barely do plough pose without farting much less get me into a headstand. My teenage foray into the world of Om was joke fodder among this arch nemesis for months. But, I didn't want to give up or hate yoga. I just blamed myself, moved on and signed up for Tinikling as my new elective instead. (Because rhythmically jumping between two large sticks was a much better choice for a flat

footed fat kid.)

I actively pursued yoga again at the YMCA when I moved to Park Slope, Brooklyn after college. I thought it would be a great way to build a sense of community in a new neighborhood. I imagined making friends with the locals, sipping almond milk lattes after class in yoga pants, attending dinner parties, munching on crudité in the living rooms of brownstones that had been in the family for years, talking about their family vacations to Lake George or making jokes about how Ithaca really was Gorges. What I got instead were yogis who got grouchy when we had the Hatha yoga teacher substitute for the Vinyasa yoga teacher (perish the thought!), yogis who would push you down on the staircase, rushing to get to the showers first and one yogi who stopped class to single me out to tell me that my Ujjayi breathing was all wrong. The self-conscious middle schooler in me said, "Let's get a swimming cap and head to the pool in the basement instead."

I was still determined to find my Zen and continue fighting the battle with yoga when I moved to Jersey City several years later. I joined a super bougie gym that I could only go to during "off-peak" hours because that was the only membership I could afford. They had multiple yoga classes a day. I thought to myself, "this is it. If this doesn't make me stick to yoga I don't know what else will." I belonged to that gym for a full year before I mustered up the courage from doing cardio machines and swimming laps solo to actually set foot into an open level Vinyasa class. I had already accepted the fact that I wasn't going to find a bestie while in extended side angle pose. The yogis who rushed in to class, some of their heads buried in their smartphones, others actively avoiding making eye contact didn't phase me. This was my time for inner peace, Dagnabbit....instead, I let the yoga teacher who got bothered by crooked mats defeat me and translate into "Brooke, your crooked yoga mat means you're a failure." So, I stopped going to that yoga class. Then, I stopped going to more yoga classes taught by other teachers. Then, eventually I stopped going to the gym completely.

In the most Zen-like way, it was only when I stopped fighting so hard that I began to feel at home with yoga. My beloved senior Pomeranian Precious passed away and I crept into a horrible funk. It was the first "big" death of someone so close to me in a long while. I usually pride myself on being a strike me down but I get back up again type of person. Not this time. I replayed Precious, the Pomeranian's last morning over and over in my head, wondering if the veterinarian and my mom and my decision to put her to sleep was really the right choice. Precious had been betrayed in her distant past by former owners and I felt like I was doing the same thing even though logically I knew we were doing what was best for her. After I hugged her lifeless little body good-bye, I allowed this difficult decision to consume me. I had no zest for life. These negative feelings trickled out elsewhere and I started feeling stuck in my acting career as well. I wanted to make a change but I didn't know quite what it was. I did not know how to even make the first step. The controlling person in me wanted to just snap my fingers and make it all one hundred and ten percent better again, right then and there.

Instead of allowing myself to grieve for Precious AKA Presh, I beat myself up for not being able to flip the switch and go back to my usual joie de vivre. I was furious at myself for resorting to being a blubbering idiot most days when I could have chosen to focus on the wonderful years we gave a Pomeranian who came from an abusive home. I thought of her on the cold, silver veterinarian table instead of the trips we took her on including visiting the popular South Jersey attraction Lucy the Elephant, the web series we created that starred Precious and my other senior rescue Pom Kibbles PAGEANT POM MOM and the way she hopped when it was time for a treat and we called her Jimmy Hoppa.

My funk-like state went from my mind to my body and soon I had this cold that lasted for a month...in the summer. Crazy. As an actor, I am accustomed to listening to my body instead of my over-calculating mind. So, I gave in one day when my body screamed at me, "I feel like garbage. I know you're sad and sick with your head cold, you poor baby, but you need to get up and move, girl!" It was like an inner spark had crawled up my butt. Or, maybe it was a certain Pomeranian. Ugh, not that I meant Precious crawled up my butt but...I think y'all know what I mean. I was on a mission but without any goal in particular other than listening and accepting. A mission to listen and accept. I can do that.

I pulled out my purple lotus print sticky mat, laid it on the living room floor and pulled up the YouTube app on my iPad. I was joined by Kibbles as I typed "yoga videos" into the search bar. YouTube pulled up a plethora of videos and showed the top ranking ones from the same source, "Yoga with Adriene". These videos aggregated by YouTube would soon become the best friend with whom I'd wanted to share matcha lattes, stories of childhood vacations in the mountains and my deepest darkest secrets such as stealing a few towels and several single use toothbrushes from my former bougie gym.

After I completed my first yoga video, which was under twenty-one minutes called "Yoga Tone", I felt so accomplished. This was something new for me. I usually never applauded myself for baby steps, in yoga or in life. I am still a go big or go home type of person but I'm realizing you usually can't go big without making a baby step. And, then another baby step. And, then a toddler step. And, then a teenage step. Which sometimes means making a step backward. And, so on.

Unlike my former experiences with yoga, doing yoga at home with Kibbles sometimes sniffing my mat or my face and with Adriene's voice guiding me, I didn't feel judged or constrained (by others or my own negative mental playback). I also surprisingly did not berate myself for only doing a shorter time frame of fifteen to forty minutes of yoga in a day instead of doing at least an hour long class. I didn't say to myself, "Oh you're not really doing yoga because you're doing it in the comfort of home and not at a studio." What surprised me most was that I stopped judging and criticizing myself without actively trying to do anything other than just pressing that iconic red YouTube play button.

When it comes to an exercise regime, experts always say find what works for you and you won't quit. I had been doing it all wrong for the past twenty something years. I was trying to fit into this cookie cutter idea of what I thought a yogi should be instead of doing yoga for its true purpose. In the past yoga attempts, I was no different from the smartphone obsessed yogis, the Hatha yoga haters or the OCD yoga teacher. But, now, Yoga was becoming second nature to me and it was the one time of day I didn't beat myself up. Adriene's vibe and approach to yoga really helped me get on that mat daily even though she was miles away in Austin, Texas and she had no clue she was my new bestie. Adriene was so real, more so than any other teacher whose class I'd taken in person. She was relatable with her funny Wu Tang Clan references, jokes about her creaky old wood floor and asking us to make Texas T with our arms to stretch our torso. Unlike previous instructors, Adriene encouraged me and thousands of other viewers to "find what feels good". She respected the practice of yoga but didn't take herself too seriously, which was exactly what I needed in yoga (and in life). I wasn't surrounded by the flop sweat of fellow class attendees who I labeled as "pretentious yoga snobs". I was just around myself, Kibbles when he decided to join me for a quick down dog with Precious's memorial including her ashes and her portrait painted by one of my best guhl Arlie staring right at me saying, "YOU CAN DO IT GUHL."

However, after a few weeks not everything was Namaste and lotus blossoms. Old habits of judgment and negativity crept in quickly. My right foot and its severely fallen arch made any right-legged posture incredibly tough and frustrating. I could barely hold a proper right leg high lunge let alone balance on my right leg for tree pose. I told myself if I wasn't fat, if I had sucked it up and done cross country instead of musical theatre in high school, if I had been born to parents who had beautiful high arches that I'd be better at this. My controlling thoughts and negative playback came out in full force but I wouldn't let them make me stop doing yoga yet again. I had finally found something that was working and I wasn't going to walk away from it on my flat feet.

Adriene assured me (well, "me" by way of a YouTube video that oodles of other homebody yogis also watched) that it was totally cool if I wasn't where I expected to be. While in a class at a studio or a gym with actual people I would have judged myself and used my unhealthy competitive spirit to force my left leg into my crotch and stand on my right leg even if it sacrificed all of the pose's integrity. While safe at home, I stood there focusing on lifting through my right arch, my left toes on the ground in order to find balance and staring at Precious's memorial wall, the picture of her staring at me saying, "YOU'RE A TREE, GUHL. AND YES YOU MAY BE PARTIALLY CRAZY TO HEAR YOUR DECEASED DOG'S VOICE IN YOUR HEAD."

I started focusing on the things I could do well and the progress I was making. I could hold a plank for nearly two minutes. That same plank led me to try crow pose, where you basically use all your upper body strength to balance on your arms. While I could not successfully execute crow in its entirety, I noticed a strength in my upper body that said, "one day this will be possible. Don't stop. It is a

practice.” Y’all know what? After eight years I still can’t do crow properly and I stopped trying after I fell flat on my face and almost broke my nose and that’s fine by me because it is NOT my most favorite pose. So, I’ll let that one go. That’s what a yogi does right?

But a Yogi also notices baby steps, like my tree even on the bad right flat foot has gotten more grounded. I used to HATE tree on the bad right flat foot. And I mentally feel more grounded even when I wobble. And, THAT is the real accomplishment. The practice became a healthy addiction because I wanted to show to myself that not only could I do it once, but I could show up for my yoga practice and myself every day, even if I couldn’t do a pose “perfectly”. Even after that detour of negativity, I stopped my negative playback of all my failed yoga attempts in the past RIGHT IN ITS TRACKS and focused on being in the present moment.

Those same lessons began to translate into my every day life. I realized that in my acting career instead of feeling stuck and focusing on all the things I had not yet done, I patted myself on the back (and did so easily thanks to the newfound upper body limberness) for what I’d accomplished thus far. I started celebrating Precious’s life instead of focusing on her last moments and questioning if we failed her somehow. I felt that I was now emotionally ready to adopt another rescue dog and Kibbles was more than ready for a companion because my down dog wasn’t the same as a fluffy four legged friend.

We adopted Annie, a (circa) seven-year old Pomeranian who had been used as a puppy producer, caged in a puppy mill her whole life. Thankfully, Pawsitively Poms Rescue rescued her and through them she got the first taste of human kindness. But, she still had a long way to go on her road to rehabilitation, confidence and trust. Life, you funny guy, isn’t that a metaphor for my own journey? Annie feels most comfortable sitting on the couch in the living room watching me say curse words while I practice inverted twists. My least favorite twist was (and still is) where I have to put more of my weight into my dreaded weak right foot, my left foot back in a twisted lunge. If I had avoided that pose, if I had given up, I would’ve never seen Annie give me that infamous Pomeranian smile for the first time. It was as if she was saying “I’m scarred. I’m scared. But, I am happy right here where I am right now.” And, I thought, “I am too, Annie. I am too.” Annie and I have developed a bond over her simply being with me while I do my daily yoga practice. I don’t know if it’s because the shapes I make sometimes remind her of her furry friends or if she knows it’s because we’re both on a journey. That journey won’t ever end. It will be constant. And, I’m okay with that. Adriene says that’s why we call it “yoga PRACTICE.” We adopted Annie SIX years ago to the day that this podcast launches. And, we are both still learning, still improving, still fighting fear but still moving FURward and being easier on ourselves along the way. Yes, during that time Kibbles passed away as well. But, when I do yoga inside now I can either face Kibbles’s portrait and memorial wall or Precious’s and regardless, I feel like they have my back. Sometimes, right when I’m getting a little too mushugenah, our other rescue dog Archer joins us and humps my leg and it gives us all a good laugh.

You hear people say that yoga changed their lives in so many aspects. That is what I wanted from the get-go. I expected a life changing ground-breaking mind blowing GONG SOUND every time I hit the mat. I wanted a new body, a Lululemon clad "squad" and perfect Zen. But, it wasn't until I let-go of this idyllic yoga lifestyle that I started to benefit from my practice. This acceptance of letting life just be was what I was missing in all my other yoga attempts over the past two decades. I have added other YouTube yoga teachers to my repertoire including but not limited to Yoga with Marina, Yoga with Travis Eliot and Boho Beautiful. As my body got stronger, I wanted to challenge myself and I wanted to challenge my energy to branch out but always come back to my beloved Yoga with Adriene and her dog Benji.

By giving up control of having to have this flawless flexible body in a perfect yoga practice, by giving up this notion that I need to wear \$200 designer yoga athletic wear and I can instead wear my ratty shorts, t-shirt and no bra, I can laugh when I fall, fart and make a fool of myself and realize true Zen is being thankful each day that I am lucky enough to practice in a home surrounded by the love...and a lot of dog hair.

Thanks so much for listening, y'all. It is my hope to inspire, uplift and entertain you with this Who's Dat Phat Girl podcast. So, if you're HUNGRY for more, you can book me to speak or perform my solo show that inspired this podcast Phat Girl Costumes written by yours truly and directed by my best bud Brian Lady at your virtual or in person event. Please visit [BrookeHoover.com/fluffybuttproductions](http://BrookeHoover.com/fluffybuttproductions) or email me at [contactbrookehoover@gmail.com](mailto:contactbrookehoover@gmail.com) for more information. And, let's follow each other on instagram - I'm @Br00keH00ver and those O's are not the letter O but they're ZEROS. Not because I want to be a size 0 but because I guess I'm just so clever with my late 90s Yahoo! self

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