

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Lilias Folan, An Extraordinary Yogi

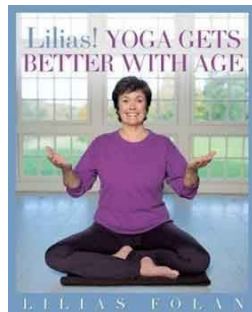
Lilias Folan, a former resident of Indian Hill, was an American yoga celebrity. She practiced, taught, and wrote about yoga for decades and became a major force in promoting its spiritual and physical benefits. Her story is worth telling.

Born in 1936, Lilias Moon was raised in New England and graduated from Bennington College with an art major. She married Bob Folan in 1959; together they had two sons, Michael and Matthew. The young family resided in Stamford Connecticut, and her life was somewhat stressful. After consulting with her doctor, who recommended exercise, Lilias attended a yoga class at the local YMCA. Trying to improve her physical and mental health, she stopped smoking, trimmed her weight, slept better, and gained energy. She felt better. This led her to study yoga more intensely. She took lessons from a Turkish teacher in New York City and became a devotee. The exercises led to an improved body, brighter outlook, calmer mind, and increased self-realization.

In 1967, Lilias, Bob, and their sons moved to Ohio. They resided at 8000 North Clippinger Drive and enrolled their boys in the Indian Hill School District. Lilias brought her yoga to Cincinnati. She began by teaching an adult education class in Mariemont, then expanded to Thomas More and Edgecliff College. In an effort to become more proficient, she traveled the world to study different approaches to yoga, and she was instrumental in bringing experts to the Midwest. With others, she organized retreats in the Cincinnati area. She learned asanas and techniques from several swamis and developed a passion for the practice. Her classes emphasized postures and breathing, and Lilias' charm, warmth, and positivity enchanted her students. The wife of a local PBS television show producer attended her classes and persuaded her husband to introduce a TV show about yoga featuring Lilias.

Thus in 1970, WCET (Channel 48) pioneered the program "Lilias, Yoga, and You". At first it was local, but within 2 years, the show was broadcast by PBS to 40 cities throughout the U.S. The series lasted until 1999 (almost 30 years!) and brought yoga to the homes of millions of Americans. Lilias had a huge impact with her long brunette hair, attractive figure, gentle voice, and ability to seem as if she was relating to each student individually, like a friend or confidante. She inspired many people to embrace the practice. Some believe that Lilias laid the foundation for the yoga boom that later followed. Over 500 episodes of her routines were aired, some of which can still be viewed on DVDs or YouTube.

Besides teaching in person and on television, Lilias authored 4 books: Lilias, Yoga and You (1972), Lilias, Yoga and Your Life (1981), Lilias! Yoga Gets Better with Age (2005) and Lilias! Your Guide to Enhancing Body, Mind, and Spirit in Midlife and Beyond (2011). These volumes contain illustrations of poses with concise directions, comments, practical tips, encouraging remarks, possible schedule routines, and some autobiographical notes. They also emphasize the importance of mindfulness, self-care, and spiritual well-being, reflecting the beliefs of Lilias herself. Swami Chidananda praised one book as a "guide to self-unfoldment, poise, peace, and inner illumination."



After 32 years of living in Indian Hill, Lilias and Bob Folan downsized and sold their home. Their sons were now married with children of their own. Lilias and Bob were proud of their seven grandchildren. She continued teaching, with a lighter schedule, and led weekly classes in the parish hall at St. Thomas Church in Terrace Park in 2015. When she developed breast cancer, underwent surgery and chemotherapy, Lilias slowed down more while still maintaining her positivity and "joy in the journey".

Lilias Folan had a significant role in popularizing and advancing yoga in the United States. She has been called a "yoga icon" and acquired the nicknames "Julia Child of Yoga" and "First Lady of Yoga". Her trailblazing accomplishments brought many people better physical, mental, and spiritual health. She certainly deserves the Indian gesture of respect: *Namaste*.

