

Ep #302: Yoga for Every Body with Dianne Bondy



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Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Jill: Hey, runners. So I have a really powerful guest for you this week, the amazing Dianne Bondy. Dianne is an accessible yoga teacher, which I fucking love. She's a social justice activist, which I love even more. And she is the leader of the Yoga For All Movement. And among many other amazing accomplishments she is also the author of two books, *Yoga Where You Are* and *Yoga For Everyone*. And she is the host of *The Intentional Well-being Podcast*.

And I could go on and on for days of her accomplishments, but we got to start talking. But one thing I do want to say before we dive in is that Dianne is committed to increasing diversity in yoga and she describes herself as not just a yoga teacher, but a disrupter and a change agent. And that is like one of the main reasons I wanted to talk to you today. So welcome, Dianne, thank you so much for being here.

Dianne: Well, thank you so much for having me. I'm going to be honest, I'm slightly fangirling because I do follow you on Instagram and I love what you represent as well. I feel like we come from the same shared history of being either underestimated, or being told that we don't belong, or being told there's something wrong with our bodies, or you don't look like a runner, the same way people say you don't look like a person that does yoga, whatever that's supposed to mean, whatever that is.

So I'm excited that you are also in the running space showing people that this can be for anybody.

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Jill: Yeah. This is so funny, I just spoke to a woman who is a plus size figure skater.

Dianne: Oh, cool.

Jill: And I was like, oh my gosh, there really is, there's a representative of size in every sport. And I feel like we need some sort of, I don't know, like we need a club.

Dianne: A club.

Jill: Yeah, we do. Okay, so let's talk about you. Would you mind sharing a bit about yourself and your mission? Because it's amazing.

Dianne: Thank you. I call myself the accidental activist because I never intended to be an activist, get on the horse and start calling stuff in, out or up. But I just got tired of going into yoga spaces or just any spaces with this face, my Black face, my plus size Black body, my textured hair and getting all kinds of attitudes from folks. Like I don't belong to be in this, I'm not welcome in this space, this isn't for you, questions, touching, just all the things that make you feel othered. And nobody in the world wants to feel othered.

So I just got in my feelings one day and wrote a blog post for Elephant Journal back in, I think it was 2012 I wrote it, and it was yoga isn't just for skinny white girls. And I just wrote about my experience of being the only big bodied Black person in a yoga class and everybody just looking sideways at me. And then when I'm able to do the practice because I've been on my mat for half a century, 50 years, people are like, "What? How is it you can do these things?" I'm like, why are we underestimating people?

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And so that was my first like full-on shaming at a yoga studio, because I had been practicing with my mom. And the way I say I've been practicing for 50 years is that my mom taught me when I was three. So I'm 53 years old, my mother taught me when I was three and I've been doing yoga on and off for most of my life. Maybe not the physical practice always, but the spiritual practice, the emotional practice, the practice of building community, the practice of showing up for people, the practice of creating spaces where people feel like they belong.

And that's all under the guise of the first tenant of yoga called ahimsa, do no harm. And I like to take it one further and disrupt harm. When I see harm happening, how can I use my power, my platform, my knowledge, my education, my networks, my privilege, to disrupt that harm? When can I speak out about it? When can I share other people's information? When does somebody know something a lot better than I do? Where can I step back and platform them?

And that's all what I learned from the philosophy of yoga, showing up, not being attached to things, not being attached to an outcome, doing the best that you can do, being truthful in the things that you speak about. And so that just, I applied all those principles of yoga to my everyday in life and it made me an accidental activist.

Because I started looking around and going, where are the Black people? Where are the fat people? Where are the brown people? Where are the people with disabilities? How come this is all very thin, very affluent, very snobby, very self-focused, the majority of them white women thinking they're doing something spectacular because they can do a handstand? Sorry, but it's going to be a no for me.

And so I just was like, let me figure out how to diversify these spaces. And if I can't diversify these spaces with the spaces I'm in, then I need to just create my own spaces and make them as equitable as possible. Put it out

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there that this is what I'm doing and then the people who need this will find me.

And so it started with a yoga class with my mother when I was three. And it turned into this whole situation that I'm in now. So I don't even know how it got here, but it somehow got here.

Jill: I mean, it's quite a situation though, right? You've spoken around the world about this.

Dianne: Yes.

Jill: Not only do you teach yoga to other people, but you teach people how to become the type of teacher that you are, which, to me, yeah, you can help quite a few people by teaching them yoga. You can help millions of people by helping people teach your methods. And I love what you just said about doing no harm and then disrupting harm, because really that's yoga. People think that yoga is just doing a bunch of poses and feeling flexible.

Dianne: No, no, no. The very first tenant in the Yamas, the very first tenant is a Ahimsa, non-violence, do no harm. So if you're not doing any harm, then you're also disrupting harm, right? When you see harm happening, you're shutting it down.

And when I see people who are already historically excluded from places being attacked, how can I sit back and allow that to happen? How can I call myself a human if I don't care about other humans or I only care about myself and my people, and people who only look like me? This is ridiculous.

As much as we would like not to be, I think, for a lot of people, we're all in this together. And we're going to have to learn to get along and help people

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out or it affects everybody. And the quicker we learn that we have more in common than we don't, and the quicker that we learn our humanity is at stake, the faster that we're going to start behaving like actual well-being human beings instead of selfish assholes.

Honestly, I'm completely over it. Every morning I wake up and I'm like, oh, look, they're trying to take away no fault divorce today because they know that two thirds of women initiate divorce in America, and probably in Canada too, where I am from, and what are we doing? We're trying to make women indentured servants to men. Like how long before they take away our right to vote? How long before that becomes the docket?

Honestly, why do we want to subjugate an entire group of people? For insecurity? Do you not know how to be in relationship with others? Do you not know that we are human beings and human life would cease to exist if we decided we were no longer going to participate? So y'all need to quit. Stop it.

Jill: Yeah, agreed. And I think this whole concept of we're all in here together, like when I think of fat phobia, right? And people are like, "Oh, it only affects fat people."

Dianne: Nope. No it doesn't. Yeah.

Jill: Nope, it affects everybody. Everybody. Patriarchy only affects women. Nope, it's affecting the men too, right?

Dianne: It's way more toxic for men, if they would actually look at it.

Jill: Yes.

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Dianne: It really limits the way that they can behave and the way that they see themselves. I say to my husband, men are seen as the providers. The expectation to go out and earn all this money and support a family and all that stuff, that's hard. That's a lot to ask. Now, if you were in a partnership with somebody and you both can work and you both can divide the chores of your life, isn't that easier? Wouldn't that be better?

I remember when I started my business and my husband was supporting all of us on his salary. And I remembered at the end, when the business flipped and we were making money and then I was making more money than him, I had to turn to him and say, "Okay, you carried us for like five years by yourself. Let it be my turn to take some of the pressure off of you. I am now in a position to actually pay you and carry my responsibilities.

And he started to cry, and I thought this is a partnership, dude. For you to support all of us, that's a lot to ask. But he was very much raised by his family that he provides for his family, right? And I go, but you are. You also need to provide emotional support and comfort, and the boys want to hang out with you. Let me help. I'm now in a position to do this, I can take on more because you carried us. I said, dude, you carried us for five years. Let me do my part.

Because when we got married we were dinks, dual income no kids. And I had an accounting job and we made pretty much this same amount of money, par par. And we were just, you know, we were out there spending money, living our life, going on cruises, doing the thing. Then we decided to have children and I said, listen, I'm going to start my own business while I'm pregnant, which was dumb. And then you have a baby and I literally had to go back to work right away because I had a business.

So here in Canada you get a year off for maternity leave. And so I took eight months of the year and then he took four months. So you can split it with your spouse if you want to. In that eight months, when my baby was

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little, I started building out my business. And then Alan got time to take some time off in the end, and it's paid time off. So only to make Americans feel worse, it's paid time off.

And so I said, okay, let's rethink how we want to see our family life live out. Because we both worked in jobs where we had to work a lot of overtime, and that we were working holidays and weekends because I worked as an accountant in a casino and that's 24/7. So it's not like there's downtime or off time or anything like that. And I didn't have any support for my child. So if I have to work on Christmas Day, who's going to look after my child, right? Like, I can't take my child to work with me.

So I wanted something that had more flexibility for me as a mom. And so that's why I decided to leave my job as an accountant, which I can still see the panic on my husband's face when I said I was quitting my job and I'm going to run my own business. And he's like, no way.

But the beauty of having a yoga studio and running a yoga business is I just would strap my baby to me and continue to teach yoga. Or I run a caregivers and moms class and I just bring my kids. I had my own studio, I was able to either hire a babysitter to come with me, or set my kids up in the lobby with toys and all that or set them up in the corner. I just made it work.

And I just wanted some more flexibility. And I also wanted to do what I loved. And I also noticed there were not any Black people teaching, there were not any plus size people teaching, and I wanted to disrupt that narrative.

But that was a big part of it, I go, this is a partnership, it's not always going to be 50/50. Sometimes you're going to do more and I'm going to do less, sometimes I'm going to do more and you're going to do less. But I'm not

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into this conventional definition of marriage where I expect you to be the only breadwinner. That hasn't been around since the 60s, I don't think.

I grew up with a mother who worked. And Black women and people in lower socioeconomic situations have always worked. I don't know women of color and Black women who haven't always worked. So it was always my intention to work.

And my husband is white and his parents were from an older generation. And the minute I got pregnant, the first thing my father-in-law said to me was, "So are you going to quit your job?" And I was so irritated that I turned around and said to him, "I currently make more money than your son, so maybe he should quit his job."

Jill: How did that go over?

Dianne: Not well, not well. I quickly became known as the bitch. I'm still living down that whole reputation 20 years later, but whatever.

Jill: But I feel like when you become known as the bitch, you're like, obviously, I'm pushing buttons and I'm doing something right.

Dianne: Yeah, and I don't care. I think bitch means being in total control of herself. Thank you, RuPaul.

Jill: There we go.

Dianne: I mean, I don't care. And to quote Tina Fey, bitches get shit done.

Jill: Yeah, exactly. I know, I usually take it as a compliment.

Dianne: Me too.

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Jill: I'm like, "Oh, thank you. Awesome."

Dianne: Yeah, awesome. How did you know? I thought that was a secret.

Jill: I love that so much. So let's kind of talk about as you built this practice, this business, right, this mission, what have been some of the challenges that you've come across? I don't know if it's been people or just general society in general, I guess. What are some of the roadblocks that you've come across as you try to execute this mission?

Dianne: All of the above. Just, Jill, all of the above. People's attitudes toward me at first. Like moving into a predominantly white industry being a person of color and size, being a Black woman, I always butted up against people who would possibly come to my classes thinking that I wasn't qualified, that the type of yoga that I was teaching wasn't authentic. Just anything and everything to deter the public from coming to me.

And initially, when I started teaching I was using a lot of stock images of people who didn't look like me because I had to get people in the door. And I think there was this hesitation from a lot of folks to take yoga from a Black person, which I find just really interesting. And then I've always said Black teachers are out here, we've always been out here.

And if you want to just kind of diversify your perspective, try going to a class with an instructor that doesn't look like you and see how different, like have a different experience. And so that was one of the things that I ran across, is other people in the industry or other people in yoga studios who felt threatened by my presence or what I was offering were quick to be talking trash about me.

And what was really interesting is they don't know that this stuff gets back to me. I have one of those faces where people feel the need to tell me

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everything, whether I want to know or not. My friend told me it's called a storytelling face in psychology. If you have a storytelling face, people just feel really comfortable telling you stuff. And I guess I feel non-threatening and comforting, because people just unload on me a lot.

And so all of this would get back to me and I wouldn't pay it any attention. I can't say it didn't hurt, because it did because these people don't know me and they're making these judgments about me. But I always turn that into staying focused on what it is that you're doing. If they're talking smack about you and they're paying so much attention to you, then they're threatened.

People who dislike you will watch you more than people who like you, and I find that so fascinating. And so I just kept pushing. And I just would remember people would come into the studio and see me and go, "Oh my God, you're the owner? Oh my God, are you the teacher?" And occasionally I still get that. And I'll be like, "Yeah."

Jill: What the fuck?

Dianne: Yeah, I know, seriously. Seriously I would get that all the time. And I'd be like, "Yeah, this is my business. And yeah, I'm the teacher." And then again, I would kind of get in my ego a little bit and then make the class so hard that these people just couldn't keep up and be like, "Well, I thought you said you practiced yoga." Just because they were so rude to me.

I've got a really good story, I'm going to digress a little bit. I went to a yoga conference in Toronto years and years and years ago. And we were in a Dharma Mittra workshop and he was running us through whatever his practice was. And for those of you who aren't familiar with Dharma Mittra, you may have seen pictures of him doing a hand-less headstand on a manhole cover. I don't know what you call them.

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Jill: So he just bounces his entire body on the top of his head on a sewer cover?

Dianne: Yeah, no hands. Yeah, on a sewer cover. Yes. Back in the day, sorry, I'm not trying to gender things but back in the day they were called manhole covers. So yeah, on a sewer cover. So if you go and google Dharma Mittra, you will find him. Now, he's a teacher, I think, from Argentina. And he's been grouped together with some yoga masters like Mr. Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois and some of the older pioneers. I believe he's in his 80s and I believe he's still doing that hands-free headstand. So I really believe he's been doing that for a while.

So we went and took a course with him because he's like a sage and a guru and everybody wanted to be in his presence. So I sit there on the mat and this woman sitting next to me looks over at me, and she's like, "Oh, are you taking this class? Because it's going to be really hard." Implying that just because I show up in this body, I'm not going to be able to do it.

And I'm like, "Yeah." "Well, he does a handstand and he does a headstand in his class. And if you're not prepared to be able to do that, then I don't know." And she's going on like this. And this is before I owned my studio, I was teaching at a community center at this point. And she's like, "Oh, and I have a studio here in Toronto, and blah, blah, and ray, ray."

And she was saying all this stuff and I was just like, okay, there's a need for her to tell me all this stuff. And I'm just going to go with it. He comes into the room, a lot of drama, his teaching assistants come in, they're all burning incense, it's a whole production.

He walks through a cloud of incense, he sits down at the desk, he starts his Dharma talk about how we are insignificant because we are meat eaters or whatever it is he said to us. And I was just like, "Wow, I paid for this right?" Not only to have this experience with the woman next to me, but to be

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shamed for my food choices, right? And I'm just like, whatever, this is the yoga community. I'm taking it all in, what can I do better? What am I not going to do when I ever get to a position to teach like this, blah, blah, right?

So we're going through this flow and it is challenging. Like he's giving you options to pop up into a headstand or a handstand as part of your sun salutation. And the woman next to me is living her best life doing all the things. So we get to the end of the class and everybody goes into a headstand. And just for reference, this is a tiny room with like 60 people in it and we are mat to mat to mat.

So I've been practicing my headstand forever and I could do it. I didn't make any mention to her about anything. I could do the handstand portion, all of it. And so I get into a headstand and she cannot. So she is struggling to get into a headstand. So Dharma Mittra walks across the room because she's the only one having a hard time. And he is trying to help her up and she is panicking and flailing.

So he keeps stepping closer and closer to me. And I'm like, he's going to knock me out of the headstand and then I'm going to take down everybody around me because we are mat to mat. But he keeps stepping back because she's flailing and she's kicking her legs. And then eventually she can't get up so he gives up and lets her go down. And she's like defeated.

And in my pettiness because when she looked over at me earlier and had said, "Well, it's going to be hard for you, but just do what you can do." And then when she was struggling, he finally gave up and brought everybody down to child's pose, and then we were sitting in meditation. And then at the end, I looked over at her and I went, "You did what you could do." And I said, "Good for you." And I walked away.

And I know it was petty, but sometimes I'm a human being and I'm petty. I'm just going to be honest with you. She was making me feel bad and I

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thought, oh, okay, I could have taken the high road, but I didn't. I love telling that story.

Jill: But, I mean, that happens all the time. I mean, it happens in the running world. Like you'll go up to pick up your packet for a race and there'll be like a 5k and a half marathon and a marathon. And they'll be like, "Oh, honey, the 5k line is over there." And you're like –

Dianne: I'm here for the marathon.

Jill: Yes, right? So it's like there are people that want to, they just take a look at you and they make some judgments, and then they've got to be condescending, right?

Dianne: Yes.

Jill: Yeah. And then you spoke about the woman who had the knee replacement and her shoulder was locked up and people would look at her and be like, "Oh, yes, the marathon is here, or the handstands, the headstands are over here.

Dianne: And she's here for the 5k, yeah.

Jill: Yes, it's so frustrating.

Dianne: It hurts, actually. It's very hurtful and unnecessary.

Jill: It is. It is. And I think that like, I mean, I get why people think that way. I don't get why they feel the need to let it out of their mouths, but I do understand, like we're all programmed to think that fitness bodies look a certain way, right? And it's just everything is like there's a picture of what

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that person looks like, and if you don't fit in, then yeah, I get it. Like when I tell people I'm a fat running coach, I have to watch them process.

Dianne: Yeah, the wheel is turning. Yeah.

Jill: They're like, "Okay, she said the F word and I don't think I'm allowed to say that because I'm not fat." Right? And it's like it breaks their brain a little bit.

Dianne: Yeah.

Jill: But you can see all of the societal programming just like going across their face before they –

Dianne: Open their mouth. Or sometimes they just open their mouths before they let the programming go.

Jill: See, and that's the thing, those are the people that always say the stupidest shit. It's the ones that you can see them filtering, you're like, "Okay, thank you. Thank you for that."

Dianne: Yeah. There's going to be a moment here, they're going to try and say something insightful. The person who just blurts it out like a gumball machine, in head out mouth, like no.

Jill: It's not okay.

Dianne: It's unnecessary.

Jill: Right. You've had a lot of challenges as you've kind of built your business, as you've built your mission. I feel like there must have been times when you're like, "Fuck this, I'm done."

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Dianne: Yeah.

Jill: And so how do you keep going? Because obviously, you've not only kept going, you are thriving. I don't know if there's a bigger word than thriving, but whatever it is, that's what you're doing.

Dianne: Thank you, thank you. Some days I wonder. I would want to give up often. But then I would think to myself, who wins when I give up? Who wins? And what would giving up entail to the industry for me? It means that they were right, that because I'm Black or fat, or what have you, that I don't deserve to be in this space. That I let these people dictate what a yoga body looks like, who gets to practice, what is authentic, what isn't authentic.

I just think to myself, I can't. I love humanity too much and I love fat folks too much. And I love Black folks too much not to show up. Because I think we're worth it. I just think we're worth it. And I think we're worth all of that. And what ends up usually happening is when I'm feeling super defeated, is when I'll get this out of the blue Instagram message or out of the blue email that says to me, "You changed my life."

And I always say back to them. "No, you changed your life." I provided you some tools that help you see the potential of who you really are when you take away the societal programming that is absolutely based in patriarchy, misogyny, and racism, all of those things, right? Capitalism, all those things that keep us very limited and small because we've been programmed that this is the only way you can be in the world. Which is part and parcel to white supremacy.

So when I get those messages from people, then I'm like even if I just touch one person, then the work I do is good. And I often will have people say to me, you don't know who you're influencing, or you don't know what a change you made in my community or the world or whatever. And that's

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what keeps me pushing forward because honestly, I think, you know, I'm an accountant.

I've kept up all my accounting certifications, let me just go back to crunching numbers for a big corporation in a cubicle where I have two breaks and a half an hour lunch hour and just get a paycheck every two weeks. Let me just do that. You know what I mean? Some days, but I can't. I can't. There's enough people who do that, that they don't need me also doing that.

Jill: Yeah. Well, I think when you feel called to change an aspect of the world around you, you can't run away from the call. It's like what is it, the hero's journey when you're writing a novel or whatever? Like the hero always has the moment of questioning, is this the right thing?

Dianne: Yeah, that reckoning. That reckoning and in yoga speak we would call that self-study, right? We would sit in it and we'd be like, "What am I actually doing? Am I really making an impact? And what is the purpose of this? Is it my ego? Am I really trying to change the world? Or do I not know what I want?" And the self-study part sucks because it's forever, always. You spent a lot of time in your head asking yourself, "What the hell am I doing? Why me? Why not somebody else? When do I get to retire? You know, whatever it is, right?"

Jill: Yeah.

Dianne: Yeah, that's part of the whole experience, to be honest.

Jill: I could not agree with you more.

Dianne: I got into that with running. I can just imagine, like when I see people in larger bodies, fat runners and I'm just like, "Look at you out there

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representing.” And I can just imagine, you know, I remember Mirna Valerio talking about an ultra marathon and having a troll tell her she's not a runner. Chances are that troll has never run past anything and is sitting in their basement on their computer behind an avatar with a fake account just being a dick.

Jill: Yeah.

Dianne: And I think being a dick is genderless, you're just an asshole.

Jill: Oh, no, I agree. Being a dick is definitely genderless. Being a dick and having a dick, two different things.

Dianne: Two different things entirely.

Jill: Yeah. So I have a question for you about, I mean, this is like coming through the lens of fat phobia, but just also like racism, misogyny, and so forth. Have you ever found your own brain buying into some of the bullshit ideas that you're trying to change? Because I know I do.

Dianne: Yep, all the time. All the time, because we're conditioned right? You and I are conditioned from little kids. And that's like 20, 30, 40 years of programming. And sometimes, you know, my mother is still stuck in that old paradigm and that older mindset, so she'll say stuff. And then for a minute, it'll register in my brain because I've heard it from her before. And then it'll be like, no, no, no, we're not doing that. We're not doing that. We're not doing that.

All the time. I will fall into diet culture nonsense a lot of the time and I have to catch myself all the time. I'm like, oh, wait a minute, this is diet culture speaking to my insecurity in order to make a buck off of me. This doesn't actually work.

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Because I had done a talk for, I think, a platform around eating disorders and disordered eating and I had talked about the failure of diets, right? That we know diets have a 95 to 98% failure rate, yet we blame the individual and not the diet. And how many diets are there? How do we keep reinventing these bullshit diets?

And then I had a troll, of course a troll with an avatar and no real face in my comments saying stuff. Because I limit my comments on my Instagram to people who follow me and to people I follow, which is a security feature that anybody can use on Instagram. And it is recommended, so don't come at me with your bullshit.

They are in my DMs giving me shit about something. "Figures, you damn Libs, you never let us tell you the truth on your page." And I always respond back or not, it depends if I'm feeling petty, feisty, or if I have energy. If I have time, I'll get back to you. But if I don't, I just delete and block. It really depends.

Sometimes I like to have fun with these folks because a lot of the time they're not that smart, so it's really easy. I hate to say that, but it's true. So he was in there, "You know why you're so fat you fail at dieting? It's because you're lazy." And I just was like, okay, you're funny.

Jill: Oh, that's a new one. I've never heard that before. Wow.

Dianne: Yeah, I always do that. I go, "Is that really the best that you can do? Is that what your minuscule intellect can bring to the table?" I said, "First of all, I didn't want you commenting on my page, but here you are in my DMs, so that tells me you're stupid. Second of all, I said calling me a Lib is not an insult."

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If you look at what liberal mindsets and ideologies have done to change the world and give women the right to vote, so many things are liberal ideologies that are considered your freedoms, but you want to, whatever.” I'm thinking to myself, I don't owe this person anything, but I just let them have it.

And I said, okay, so have your mom bring your dinner to the basement and you have a great day. And then block, and then I always say be blocked and be blessed. I am a human being and I will sometimes turn the other cheek or look the other way. But sometimes I just like to entertain myself because I can tell that if I go toe to toe with you, you're going to lose because I don't know why you thought you could approach me. I don't know what it was about my personality that thought you could engage me but let me shut that down. Tell me why. But it was so funny.

So I went to the gym and I worked out with a trainer two times a week and I said, “Oh, look at this comment.” And he thought it was hilarious. He's like, “Dianne, you have the highest rep max in the gym and you're running all over the place and you teach all these classes, and your body still shakes out like this.” This is just my body, okay? You don't owe anybody a workout, you don't owe anybody health, you owe yourself peace. Do what fucking works for you and mind your business.

Jill: Yeah.

Dianne: I'll mind my body, you mind your body. I am stating statistics that are peer reviewed and posted by legitimate sources. So if you think I'm just making this shit up, good for you. Once again, have your mother bring your dinner to the basement for you.

Jill: I don't understand it either. It fascinates me because they're like, show me the study where it says that. And you'll be like, well, here are five references.

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Dianne: Yeah.

Jill: And then they're like, then they block you. And you're like, oh, I'm so sorry you don't like the truth. Okay.

Dianne: I won't even give them five references. I say, you clearly can read and type, because you're in my messages. Go to Google and look it up. Why do I have to give you five references? Why do I fucking care what you think?

I think that's one of the main, main, main euphoric moments about getting older, is you really stop giving a shit about what other people think. Like once I was over the hump of 40 I was like, okay, I see where people are going with this. Now that I'm over 50 I'm like, yeah, you know what? If I feel like it, yeah. But if not, fuck you. That's just where I'm at.

Jill: Yeah, it's like the trolls show up and you're like, oh, okay, well, here's some entertainment I can opt into for the day.

Dianne: Oh yeah. Yeah, if I have time and I feel up to it, I will go toe to toe with you.

Jill: Yeah, it's like I made it all the way through Love Is Blind season four, I need something new.

Dianne: I need something new. Okay, well, they said this. I'm going to come back with this. And sometimes it's entertaining, most of the time I just delete and block. But sometimes I'm like, oh, you're not very smart. I could go toe to toe with you for a few minutes and see who blocks who first.

Jill: Right? There you go. It's a race, the race is on. I love it.

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Dianne: Yeah, let's see. Oh, you blocked me, okay. Well you started it and I finished it.

Jill: So one of my favorites is I post a lot about how you can be fat and be a runner. And people are just like, "Oh my gosh, look at you. You're going to die before you're 50." And I'm like, "I'm 55."

Dianne: Oh, shut up. Yeah, stop. Yeah, exactly, stop it.

Jill: And then they get so mad.

Dianne: Your knees, your knees. Yeah, no, stop it.

Jill: You're knees.

Dianne: Stop it. Your knee. Your knees.

Jill: Right? I know. I'm like, oh, let's just talk about your knees.

Dianne: Yeah.

Jill: Anyway, let's talk about somebody who's like in a yoga class. Because, first of all, I tell my yoga, not my yoga students, my running students all the time how good running is for their bodies. And they're like, "Yeah, I get it. But my body doesn't do that." Right? Like they think that yoga is something that they physically can't do. Or even if they're like, "Yeah, I know, I can make modifications. I don't want to go to a class because nobody looks like me, I don't want to be the fattest person in the class."

Dianne: I get that.

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Jill: And I mean, I have been to plenty of yoga classes where the instructor didn't understand how to suggest modifications for larger bodies. And so there I am, I just spend the entire fucking class in child's pose because I'm like, "Well, I can't do that. I don't know what else to do. So I'm just gonna lay here."

So, first of all, how can you help somebody go to a class? And I think, first of all, the reason that you have all of the amazing online options is specifically for that reason. But if somebody did want to go to an in-person class, how can they advocate for themselves? What are some mindset things that they can work on before they go?

Dianne: So if you're in a larger size body, a plus sized body, a fat body, however you identify, I would highly recommend looking for an introduction to yoga class that's not in a yoga studio that might be at your community center. And the reason I say a community center or a public space, it takes some of the anxiety and it takes some of that trepidation from stepping into a yoga studio space, right? Because it's a community space and people are going to be doing everything there, right?

There are going to be people playing basketball. There are going to be art lessons. And it's going to be really affordable for your first try in case you really decide it's not something that's for you. And a lot of community centers will have an intro to yoga session. Or if you feel comfortable and you want to have that studio experience, go to the studio and find out who's teaching intro to yoga. Find out what we're going to be teaching. Is everybody going to be a beginner in the class? What are some of the poses?

Because when I teach intro to yoga, I do a printout and a syllabus for everyone. And I say week one, week two, week three, week four, week five, this is what we're going to be doing. And then when I owned my own yoga studio, I would have a meeting with my beginning yoga teachers. So

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there would be like a basics class and I would be saying, we have 30 people in the intro to yoga program, and they are going to be coming to your intro classes or your basics classes. This is what they've been working on so far.

So when they're tailoring in their classes, they're tailoring it to what the students can find. Maybe start off with your online stuff, your intro stuff. And then when you've got a basic understanding of the yoga practice, then you can go into a studio space and say, "Listen, I've been practicing, I've learned some of these modifications for myself. What would be the classes that you would recommend for me?"

Or check out first a community space. So there's lots of yoga at the park in the summertime. Community Center yoga. Yoga at the YMCA. Places like that, I find it's a lot less intimidating and that you're going to get a more, I find, realistic view of what yoga looks like.

I think sometimes when you're working with certain studios, you can go on their website and take a look at the teachers in the studio and every teacher is doing some complicated balance or some complicated pose in their studio bio pic. And then you can figure out who's what and what's what.

And when I'm teaching my 200 hour and 300 hour yoga students who are going to go out in the world and be teachers, I say to them, in your bio, tell people who you are. Listen, I work with elite athletes, when you come to my class, you're going to sweat within an inch of your life. I work primarily with intermediate and advanced students. Because that will weed out anybody who's not in that. And if you want to teach that, there's no problem with that.

If you're looking to be a more accessible teacher, in your bio, you know, I love teaching beginners and I love teaching people who might struggle in a

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traditional yoga class, right? I really work on making postures adaptable. And if they put that in their bio, then those are the folks you want to go to. If you see a yoga for all poster or a yoga for everybody poster and the person is in a headstand, know that that's not going to be a class for you because they haven't really thought it out.

If you're going to do a class, like if you're going to teach a class like that, have somebody doing something in a chair or have somebody doing something really basic. Doing a headstand and calling it an intro to yoga is very problematic, right? If you want to say introduction to inversions and put a picture of yourself in a headstand, that makes a lot of sense.

But you're going to have to screen your teachers. Read their bios, look for their personalities. Maybe go take one class at the studio and see what the studio vibe is like. See how the front desk reacts to you. See when you step into class, what happens. And that way, you haven't made a full investment in going there and you can switch out.

So shop around. I always say you can throw a quarter into a Whole Foods and hit about 50 yoga teachers. So there has to be one for you, right? There has to be somebody out there for you.

Jill: Oh, I love that. It's so true, too.

So what if you're in a class, so you've found the class that you're like, "I think this is the one." And you go to the class and the instructor is trying to encourage you to go deeper into a pose and it doesn't feel good or you're just like, "Listen, I get that I'm supposed to be stretching myself, but this hurts." How can you speak up for yourself? Especially if you're feeling intimidated and you're like, "No, I have to do what the instructor says."

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Dianne: Yeah. And always know that you do not have to do what the instructor says. And hopefully the instructors are saying to folks, “Okay, welcome to whatever class this is. I really want you to take the time to pay attention to how you're feeling and to move your body in that way.”

So if you have an instructor who's like pushing, pushing, pushing and coming up to you, vocalize it immediately. Especially if they are a Yoga Alliance trained professional, they've been taught already that they're not supposed to be coming at people and forcing people into poses. That's part of their primary teacher training, is to be able to adapt poses for different kinds of folks.

But if you are being pushed by a teacher, remember you are your own best yoga teacher. You have been living in your body for X amount of years. You know how it bends and how it doesn't bend. I would flat out tell them, if I push myself in the way that you are encouraging me to do so, I'm not going to be able to walk when I leave the class or I'm going to injure myself. Because they will run away from you faster than you can imagine because they don't want to push you into a point of an injury where they could be held liable for you injuring yourself.

And so I would say to yourself, you have to advocate for yourself in these roles because people truly don't know what your body can do. Just tell them, “I'm good here. Thank you.”

Jill: Yeah.

Dianne: I'm hoping at that point people, where we are in the yoga industry, I hope we're now realizing that people know how their bodies move. And let's give them freedom to explore that.

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And I just got back from Pilates training. I took Pilates training 22 years ago and I was like, I'm not a fan of it. It can only be done this way, and Joseph Pilates said this, and blah, blah, blah. Like this really elitist thing. So I taught Pilates my way for a long time and I went back to this training now because I'm curious about it. And it has changed significantly into empowering your students.

One of the first things our trainers said is, we're not here for an aesthetic, we want people to feel stronger. We want people to feel better. We're not shaming people into doing certain things. And here are all the ways you can do the same thing that gives people an opportunity to explore it for themselves. I'm like, oh my God, this was definitely not happening 20 years ago. I'm pretty sure it wasn't happening 10 years ago.

I taught Pilates, but I just taught it in the way that I teach everything. If this isn't working for you, A, B, or C. If this isn't working for you, D, E, F, right? I've always taught it that way. But to see it vocalized from head and corporate trainers was really interesting to me.

The paradigm is finally shifting, that pushing people does not make them come back, does not make them feel empowered, does not give them autonomy over their body and just chases people away from movement for the joy of moving. Not because we are changing our body to suit an impossible aesthetic that doesn't actually exist, but that we're increasing our capacity to have mental wellbeing. That we're making an investment in our future selves so that we're able to live independently for longer, so that you can carry your groceries into the house.

For me, it's lifting my 40 pound carry on into the overhead bin because I don't like to check a bag. You know what I mean? These are all these things that being physical is an investment in yourself. And I noticed this is the first like big training I've taken in a long time and I'm like, fucking finally. Fucking finally that we're not like, "Well, we want the Pilates body," or

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whatever that bullshit was that we were doing 20 years ago. I'm so grateful that this is changing.

But speak up. Don't be afraid to speak up is the advice I would give.

Jill: And I just want to point out, the reason that it's changing is because people like you are out there being a voice and saying this isn't right, here's another way to do it. And I think the more we have qualified instructors, like yourself, saying it, and the more we have people sharing this is what my body looks like doing yoga, this is what my body looks like doing Pilates, the more the message will change.

Because I think nobody's going to change how they're doing it if everybody's buying into it, right?

Dianne: Exactly.

Jill: And so I think, yeah, I do feel like the past – I mean, I'm like you, I've been doing this since about 2013. And I feel like 10 years ago the fitness industry was a lot different than it is today because enough people are like, “Fuck this. I'm going to do it my way.”

Dianne: 100%. I first taught my first fitness class in 1987. Yeah, when I was 17. I was 17 in 1987. And I have watched this fitness industry change. And for me when I started teaching for me, like not giving a shit about well, this and that and this and that. Keeping my students safe, making sure they were having fun, filling up my classes every week because the attitude was we are here to feel good in our bodies.

I'm not here to shame you into anything. If you can't do this, do this, this, this, or that. Like giving people lots of options to explore movement. And I just, I'm over the shaming people into stuff or forcing people into stuff. Who

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wants that? I don't want my class to be like, "Oh God, I have to go to class." Right? I want to be like, "Oh, goodness, I get to move my body." And the benefits that blossom from that.

We need to move away from movement as punishment for, A, something that you ate or, B, for your body not conforming to an impossible standard. An impossible standard.

Whenever I see J. Lo out there going, "Look at me." We're the same age, "Look at me, I'm 53 blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Yeah, but you're also a billionaire. I would look like that if I had a billion dollars, right?

Jill: Right.

Dianne: If somebody else was doing my laundry, somebody else was cooking my meals, cleaning my house, picking my kids up from school, what would it look like if all of that were happening? Access to the best doctors in the world. Access to the best plastic surgeons in the world. I don't believe you haven't had any plastic surgery. I don't believe you. You know what I mean? Nobody ages like that without some kind of intervention. So please don't lie to me.

Jill: Or like hitting the genetic lottery, right? Like there's so much of it.

Dianne: Yeah, 100%.

Jill: I think you can have billions of dollars and still if you don't have those genetics, so she really has. I mean, she looks amazing, but I think defining that amazing for a 53 year old woman is an hourglass shape, a perfect ass, right?

Dianne: Right.

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Jill: I fucking love J. Lo.

Dianne: Of course, yeah.

Jill: I love her music, it's amazing.

Dianne: I'm just saying stop lying though, right?

Jill: Yeah, like holding her out. Yeah, like this isn't an example of what all women should be aspiring to at that age.

Dianne: It's not possible.

Jill: She's one example of being 53 and their other amazing examples of being 53 that are just as valid. But, yeah, the attention that we give to her just kind of feeds into every other insecurity that we've been taught as women. And then we're like, oh, well now – Have you seen, this one gets me every time and it does make me laugh, but it gets me every time. It's when they're like, okay, these are the Golden Girls in their early to mid-50s. And then they show J. Lo there.

And I'm like, so I'm supposed to think that I'm doing it wrong because I don't look like J. Lo.

Dianne: Right.

Jill: And then I'm also supposed to be like, well, at least I don't look like the Golden Girls. I'm like it was the 80s, everybody had that fucking haircut. 20 year old women had that haircut.

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Dianne: Exactly. Exactly. And I often watch The Golden Girls from the 80s and 90s and thought to myself that's cute. And I would have been, what, a teenager? Like honestly, why do we disparage people for getting older?

Yeah, I've seen that one where Rue McClanahan is 51 and J. Lo is 51 and we put them side by side. Society has changed, technology has changed. I would like to see her regular, without any filters on, without any lighting on her, a day when she just rolled out of bed and her hair is sticking out.

I want to see that because all of our images are carefully curated to look a certain way and lit a certain way. Because with car lighting, I'm going to tell you a secret, Jill, car lighting. Car lighting forgives every shadow, mistake, blemish, you have. I don't know what it is about the light coming through the dashboard, it just looks fabulous on everyone. Car lighting.

Jill: So it must be like a UV filter in the glass or something.

Dianne: Something is happening with car lighting. I'll come in there and I'll do a video, I go, "You know I'm a sucker for car lighting." because car lighting is great. Lighting has a lot to do with how you look on film. The way you pose your face has a lot to do with how you look on film. And creating these images and expecting everybody else to live up to them is absolutely ridiculous.

All of those photos have been curated. And people need to know that social media stuff is just not real. It's not real. And filters are getting better and better and better now when they're not glitching out. So there's a lot of filters that are going on things that you don't even know it's a filter.

Jill: And see, I think it's fun in a way like, oh, this is what I would look like if I was 20 years younger. But then we internalize it like this is what I should

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look like and there's something wrong with me if I'm not, if I don't. And so that's where I think it goes way too far.

And I feel bad for like, I mean, we grew up before there were cell phones, filters, all of that, before social media, thank God, right?

Dianne: Thank God.

Jill: Yeah, the young people of today, all genders, are growing up believing that that is the ideal. And that's right, that's just as damaging. It's damaging to everybody. It sucks.

Dianne: It is. And that's the thing that we think is damaging to one person. It's damaging to humanity in total. Like racism isn't only damaging to Black people and other racialized folks. It's also damaging to white folks. It's like a narcissistic systemic abuse that is hurting all of us. And the minute we realize that, the sooner everyday people will start to unpack the way they see the world.

Jill: Yeah, could not agree more. Could not agree more. Yeah, white supremacy is like, it hurts all of us.

Dianne: Everybody, it hurts everybody. And I just wish people could see that that's happening and make some changes in the way they look at the world. Get some education, make some friends who don't look like you and have the same lived experience as you. Branch out, branch out.

Jill: I love this. So we're almost up to time, but I love your mission, I love everything you stand for. And I'm looking, I had all these questions I was going to ask and we just kind of had so much fun talking, we may need to do a part two of this episode. But before we do that, I want to make sure that we tell everybody where they can find you. And please, your Instagram

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is so good. It is one of my favorite parts of every day because it's educational, it's interesting, it's entertaining, right?

Dianne: I try.

Jill: It's like it's got everything.

Dianne: I try really hard. My husband gives me a hard time. He's like, "What is the brand of your Instagram, Dianne? It just seems like a hodgepodge of random thoughts." I go, that's my brand, a hodgepodge of random thoughts. Today, I feel this way about misogyny. Tomorrow, I feel this was about racism. Look at me with a stupid filter on my face. Oh my god, there's a flower in my garden. Let's do some yoga. Oh my god, I have Pilates today.

My husband says it's just all over the place. And I go, "And I like it that way." You know what I mean? I really want my page to be about community. And that if I find creators who are really doing a great job of sharing information, I want to platform them. I have a lot of people who follow me and a lot of people who are influenced by me and I want to show them there's all these other great creators out there as well.

So I try to share as much content as I can from other creators who are doing great work. And I try to just answer, if any questions come into my DMs I try to make a video about them. This was the question of the day, how do I do a forward fold in a larger size body, or if my chest gets in the way, or whatever? I try to be that person.

So yeah, so find me on Instagram, Dianne Bondy Yoga Official. I might have a mild to medium obsession with Instagram, so I'm on there quite a bit. That's probably the fastest way to track me down.

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Jill: And it's Dianne with two N's, right?

Dianne: Yes, because I'm extra like that.

Jill: I love this.

Dianne: Also, Dianne, D-I-A-N-N-E, bondyyoga.com to see where I am and when I'll be in a town near you. But yeah, you can find me there. The fastest way to track me down probably is Instagram because I do like to look at that several times a day.

Jill: I love this. I do too, it is my most used app. That and the New York Times crossword, it's embarrassing.

Dianne: Good for you. No, good for you. See, you're building your vocabulary, so good for you.

Jill: I'm just like, I don't want dementia so I'm going to do these crosswords every day.

Dianne: Yeah, I think that's wise.

Jill: Okay, so we will have links to all of that on the show notes. The other question that I wanted to ask you is what is Yoga For All TV? I saw this on your website.

Jill: Yes, it is my online studio where you can get access to over 300 videos of me, over the years and currently, doing all kinds of different kinds of practices. It's me and I have invited a few of my favorite teachers and we create content on the yogaforall.tv app. It's an app in the Android and in the iStore. So you can get it as an app, you can go online and do it. But this is

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my class, I have an introduction to yoga for larger bodies, an introduction to beginner yoga, how to do this, that and the other thing.

So it really breaks everything down for you so that if you eventually want to step into a studio space, you have all the tools at YogaForEveryone.tv to get you there. So it's nice, and if you just want to practice at home, it's like it's right there. It's always there.

Jill: I love this. All right, everybody immediately go there.

Dianne: The first two weeks are free.

Jill: Follow her on Instagram, check out YogaForAll.tv. This is so good. Thank you so, so much for spending your time with me this afternoon.

Dianne: Of course, Jill. It was absolutely my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me. This was so much fun. And I want to have you on my podcast. So I'm going to book you for *The Intentional Well-Being Podcast* and we'll continue the conversation.

Jill: I love it. Fabulous. All right, thank you so much.

Dianne: Thank you. Bye everyone.

Real quick, before you go, if you enjoyed this episode, you have to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to runyourbestlife.com to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.