Yoga came to me by accident - literally. Never could I have imagined the influence it would have on my life 38 years later. Although I grew up in California in the 60’s, I was a long way from the culture of those times. I was not inclined to think of anything beyond family and athletics. By 19, I had numerous sport-related injuries. With little relief from Western medicine, I began searching for alternatives. During my 2nd year at university, I happened to pass by a recreational centre room full of woman doing something strange, and for a reason not entirely clear to me, walked in and signed up.

My first experience was not pleasant, but it hooked me. I attended classes regularly but more as a ‘workout junkie’, jumping around to different teachers. After moving to New Zealand in the 80’s to play rugby, I met Zhander Remete, whom I would study with for the next 20 years. He was a former martial artist and soldier - a very masculine man, and I found this refreshing. All of my previous teachers had been bendy young women.

Slowly my life transformed and many of the causes of imbalance in me, physically and psychologically, dropped away. This process also affected me spiritually - I began to see life with a different set of lenses. I became a different person. And once I began teaching this transformation increased.

And then the unexpected day came when my teacher sent me off - his exact words were “It’s time to get off the breast!” Not an easy thing to hear, but a necessary one I think, for any serious student to come to - a place of self-responsibility, creativity, and self-reflection. I have deep gratitude for the role my teacher played in my life and the gift when he said goodbye!

For more information about Peter’s classes worldwide, visit petersterios.com. Peter’s DVDs are available from yogamatters.com.

Photos by: Mikki Willis ©2013
Vajrasana
Thunderbolt
(PHONE VARIATION)
HOW TO PERFORM
Kneel down with knees and feet together. Tuck your toes forward and sit upright on the heels. Bring your hands together, interlock the fingers, and extend the arms straight over the head, palms facing up.

Inhale slowly, following the sensation of your breath through the back body into the pelvic floor. On the exhale, soften the diaphragm and draw the navel in, rounding the spine, and simultaneously drop your head forward, lowering the arms, until the hands reach the floor. Pin the heel of your thumbs into your mat, and slowly press the arms straighter, shoving the hips further back, pressing the forehead down towards your knees (not the floor), spine rounding further. Think of it like a 'humble' Cat pose!

With each inhale, feel the fullness of your breath spreading the skin across your back. With each exhale, re-release the diaphragm, pull the navel in stronger, release your collarbones, armpits drop a little and spread your shoulder blades. Stay in the pose for 3 cycles of breath. To exit, inhale slowly and curl the spine up, one vertebrae at a time, until you’re fully upright, head and arms last.

VARIATION
Slowly inhale through the nose (3-4 seconds), then slowly exhale, mouth open, tongue out until empty. Holding the breath out, suck the navel to the spine and hold 3-4 seconds (Uddiyana Bandha). Then release and repeat 2 more times.

BENEFITS
Strengthens core abdominal muscles, tones abdominal organs, creates heat in the body, and aids digestion.
Strengthens the heart, lungs, shoulders and feet.
Increases flexibility in the spine, increases circulation in the brain.

MODIFICATIONS
Use a belt around the arms to relieve chronic tension in the shoulders and neck.
Use a round bolster under the ankles to relieve pressure on the toes and arches of the feet.

CONTRAINDICATIONS
Avoid if suffering from migraines, detached retinas, or glaucoma.
Pre-existing shoulder and neck injuries require more acute attention and slower movements to avoid overuse and/or re-injury.
Parivrtta Surya Yantrasana
(One Leg To Head Pose)
HOW TO PERFORM
Sit upright with straight legs. Bend the left knee, and pull the foot against your right buttock. Then bend your right knee, lift the leg and support the heel and ankle with both hands. Take the leg over the right shoulder like a backpack, resting the back of the knee on the head of the shoulder. Take one cycle of breath here, feeling the sensation of your inhale into the right hip and buttock, and with an exhale, soften the right groin and hip, feel the femur drop slightly creating a little more space in the hip joint. Then grab the top of the foot with your left hand, holding the leg on top of the shoulder, and place the right hand on the floor beside you.

Slowly turn your torso left a little, pressing the right hand flat, arm straight, and extend the leg up slowly, flexing the heel. With each exhale, gradually work the right leg straighter, as the left arm gently moves behind the head. Keep your breathing slow and soft, avoiding excessive muscular force in the leg.

Stay in the pose for 4-6 cycles of breath. To come out, bend the straight leg, letting it slide off the shoulder to the floor. Straighten both legs and repeat on the other side.

BENEFITS
Strengthens core abdominal muscles and spine.
Tones abdominal organs.
Creates heat in the body.
Increases flexibility in the shoulders, hips, sacrum, and legs.

MODIFICATIONS
Keep the upper leg bent and the back of the knee resting on the shoulder. With both hands supporting the heel and ankle, pull the foot gently towards the chest.

CONTRAINDICATIONS
Avoid if the sacrum is unstable or spinal disks are injured or weak. Pre-existing shoulder, hip, or hamstring injuries require more acute attention and slower movements to avoid overuse and/or re-injury.
Vrschikasana
(SCORPION)
HOW TO PERFORM
Come onto your hands and knees with the hands shoulder-width apart, fingers turned out 45 degrees. Bend your arms, pulling the elbows in enough to support the side ribs, and slowly lower your chin to the floor.

Tuck your toes forward, lift the knees off the floor, straightening your legs. Slowly walk the feet forward, lifting the hips higher. Then raise one leg, pointing the toes, and swing the leg up. Simultaneously, press down into your hands and feel the momentum of the swinging leg draw the other leg up to meet - feet together, legs vertical. This may take several tries to develop more precision with your swinging leg to lift up and balance.

With your legs vertical, weight equal on the hands and chin, slowly bend your legs, feet dropping towards the head, and let the ribs drop a little between the arms. Notice as the feet drop, more weight is on the chin, as the ribs drop there is more weight on the hands, so move slowly keeping weight evenly balanced between the hands and chin. Breathe slowly and release any unnecessary tension in the shoulders, chest and throat.

Stay in the pose 4-6 cycles of breath, and when complete, slowly lower one leg to the floor and come down. Finish in Child’s Pose, knees and feet together, releasing the arms beside you, elbows bent.

BENEFITS
Strengthens core abdominal muscles.
Tones abdominal organs.
Creates heat in the body.
Strengthens the heart, lungs, shoulders and feet.
Increases flexibility and strength in the spine.
Increases circulation in the head and neck.

CONTRAINDICATIONS
Avoid if suffering from cervical disk injury or arthritis of the neck.
Avoid if suffering from lumbar disk injuries.
Chronic imbalances in the pelvis, or moderate to severe scoliosis require more acute attention and slower movements to avoid overuse and/or acute injury.
Pre-existing shoulder and neck injuries require more acute attention and slower movements to avoid overuse and/or re-injury.
Within this simple ‘Neck Toner’ Sequence are seeds for creative neck safety and control in the more dynamic, neck-strengthening Standing Poses, like Parsvakonasana (Lateral Angle), and in the more passive, neck-bending Inversions like Sarvangasana (Shoulder Stand). The sequence is effective, easy to remember, and beneficial for those with or without cervical limitations. Using breath and gravity as guides, each pose can be approached slowly, and modified to suit the individual with props. With regular practice, the sequence builds confidence for anyone wanting a stronger, more flexible neck!

Sit upright in a cross-legged position. Place your hands firmly on the side-waist, above the hipbones (ileums). Slowly drop the head forward, without leaning forward. Release the full weight of your head (a coconut rolling off your shoulders into your lap). Release the collarbones (clavicles), shoulders drop a little, and squeeze the side-waist with your hands, slowly pressing the elbows forward.

Breathe into the back of the heart, feel the skin spread across the shoulder blades (scapulas). On the exhale, consciously soften the top of the lungs, feel the weight of your heart drop a little, head drops a little further. Stay in the pose 3-4 cycles of breath, and then inhale the head upright...
Pressing the right hand in strongly, and with an exhale, lean to the right. Let your head fall to the side. With each inhale, breathe into the left lung, left shoulder, and left side of the neck. On each exhale, soften the right ribs and let gravity take you deeper. If your elbow is supported (use a foam block if needed), keep releasing the head, right ear dropping towards the head of the shoulder. After 3-4 cycles of breath, pull the forehead back an inch.

Release the left hand and straighten the arm, extend the fingers strongly towards the ground... Then pull the forehead back another inch... Slowly extend the chin forward...

Slowly turn the head, look up... Slowly pull the chin in towards the throat, extending the back of the skull...

Then, sweep the left arm over the head, arm straight and extend through the fingers strongly...

Bending the arm, touch the back of the heart, and pull the left elbow back behind you...
5 With the hand, cup the back of the skull, and pull the head up, chin sinking towards the throat...

6 Release the hand, clenching the fist strongly, pump the bicep, and extend the elbow over the crown of the head, looking up (think first wake up morning stretch)...

Then slowly turn the head, look down, over the right shoulder, and extend the elbow further...

7 To complete this side, dropping the left arm behind the back, clasp or reach for the right wrist... As you look down at the ground, slowly turn the heart up, and lean back a little.... With an inhale, sit up. Re-adjust your hands on the waist, shoulders down, elbows forward, head upright, and repeat on the other side.