

Yoga Onboard

As elemental and beautiful as a magical dolphin passing to calmer waters

BY JAMIE LYNN MILLER

Out West,

rock climbing and skiing kept me in constant motion. Since relocating to Wilmington, I've shifted platforms a bit: ramping up the yoga, dabbling in stand-up

paddling, and nose-diving, a lot, into surfing. When friend and cherished yoga instructor Laura Golden invited me to check out stand-up paddle yoga — SUPY — I was onboard.

I Google Mapped my way to what Wrightsville SUP owner Jarrod Covington refers to as the “Top Secret Location for SUPY.” Jarrod and crew spend “thousands of hours” on the water searching for sandy, oyster-less “toppling zones” sheltered from excess Intracoastal Waterway traffic.

Around 7 a.m., our class of seven women pushed off for the short paddle to the day's classroom. I was hoping we'd hit the water early enough to beat the coastal winds, but a persistent headwind met my every stroke with a “Where do you think you're going?” push backward. Finally, I gained some forward momentum and pulled ahead to our destination.

Jarrod circled us, one by one, like some sort of helpful, friendly shark, unraveling each board's anchor before tossing it into the sandy-bottomed abyss. *Anchors?* I gave myself a mental high-five. SUPY would be a cinch!

About thirty seconds later, my board starting drifting toward the marsh grass, and teacher Laura's soothing instruction faded in the distance. I squinted into the sunlight and strained to become a visual learner. I tried to ignore the rapidly approaching mass of grass.

Jarrod magically transformed into Anchor Sherpa. He appeared out of nowhere, dragged my anchor cord and paddled us back toward the group, depositing me next to my friend Taylor.

She shot me a look.

“Sorry,” I stage-whispered, bulging my eyes at her.

I'd reappeared just in time for “pigeon” pose: front leg bent across the board, back leg extended straight behind. Laura encouraged us to dip our hands, and I took in the changing sensations: the growing heat of the sun, the cool touch of the water, and we transitioned into “downward facing dog,” the sharp blue ridges



of water disappearing into the stationary green marsh grass.

My board started drifting toward Taylor's. She remained unfazed by my latest disruption, however, striking a mean “warrior two,” her gaze steady along the horizontal axis. Inspired, I regained control of my board and attempted the familiar stance practiced over thousands of hours on my stationary yoga mat.

“Whoaaa.”

My knees wobbled herky-jerky, and my horizontal axis careened vertical as I fell into the water.

“You OK back there, Jamie?” called Laura, laughing over the loud splash.

“Oh, yeah . . .” I dangled my legs a moment, enjoying the change in medium, then pushed back up on the board.

Apparently, my fall created some sort of domino effect. Within the next four poses, two other yogis went overboard, and off to my left: “Fuhhhh . . .” Taylor had sworn off falling into the water in her not-so-waterproof yoga pants, yet she seemed in grave danger of both swearing *and* toppling overboard in “crow.” I staged a repeat performance, somewhere between “tree” and “eagle” — one-legged stances are an extreme sport on a gently swaying yoga mat.

Finally, we reclined into *shavasana*, also known as “corpse pose.” I felt confident I'd nail this one. I stretched out, closed my eyes, and dipped my hands in the water, which was gently lapping against the board.

Suddenly, I felt a surge of energy below me. I opened my eyes, startled by the invisible commotion.

“Dolphins!” cried Laura.

We shot up out of *shavasana* and looked around — sure enough, a softly curved fin surfaced to her left.

Some schools of shamanism say that dolphins are connected with the power of breath and emotional release, and as our hands found “namaste,” palms pressed together at heart's center, our dolphin resurfaced once again, this time, closest to me. We let out a group “Om,” and our new friend slowly made its way toward the greater waterway, pausing every now and then to resurface as if waving goodbye. 🐬

To plan your own SUPY adventure, visit wrightsvillesup.com.

Jamie Lynn Miller is a writer, DJ, and wandering outdoorswoman. In her spare time, she collects coffee card and passport stamps.