

Jade Guidry: Okay, before I start, I just want to make sure that I have your permission to record this interview.

Christine Fiorentino: Okay.

Jade Guidry: Okay, wonderful. Um, so let's just jump into it, then.

Christine Fiorentino: sure,

Jade Guidry: um, well you just explain to me what your job is and, and what you do real quick.

Christine Fiorentino: The quick version would be...

Jade Guidry: or not real quick, either way.

Christine Fiorentino: It's not as easy as all that. But I, I do a few things I, um, facilitate women's groups. And I also work with people in private sessions and the work I do is something like therapy, but I'm not a therapist. I'm not a licensed therapist. I Do a combination of us kind of psychological and the underpinnings of, of a spiritual life. So the two things come together as if they are just the same thing really, Psychology and Spirituality. Um, nd so I do private session work that way. And then I also teach yoga.

Jade Guidry: Cool, Wonderful. I think will mostly be focusing on the yoga today because I was not informed that you do all the other cool stuff. Um, but when talking about yoga, what, uh, what Covid regulations have you had to conform to while, while teaching yoga.

Christine Fiorentino: Oh, during Covid, well, at first, all the classes were not happening. So I went directly to offering, within like two weeks of the whole shut down the lockdown, um, and so I started to offer zoom classes and, which was actually quite lovely in a certain way, novel in the beginning, because I was able to... From the email list that I had collected over at my, my, uh, 13 years being here on the coast, uh, collected quite a large email list. And so when I wrote to all those people on my email list, people who I hadn't seen in years returned to my class, some people who had moved out of the area. So it was lovely to have just, you know, all kinds of people show up on the computer.

Jade Guidry: Cool.

Christine Fiorentino: Now I have added in, uh, Health sport has brought back one class that I teach. Now, once a week for one hour. So it's quite short. I used to teach our 20 minute classes there. But the one hour class for once a week is happening and there's a limit to how many people, they are allowing inside. So there's just eight people in the large studio, so everyone can maintain a good distance apart. It's changed things for me as far as just my style of teaching obviously because either teaching on zoom or teaching in a room where I have to stay in my one little square box is different for me. So I've had to make

adjustments to, you know, just to how it feels, you know, being in the room with people or not being in a room with people.

Jade Guidry: Uh huh.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah.

Jade Guidry: So would you say that's the hardest thing about your job or what would be the hardest thing about your job since Covid started.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, I mean I think that is the hardest thing. Because the class didn't start until August. So for the first few months the hardest thing was just all of a sudden, I'm just not with people in a room. There was, you know, i-it was Also different because I couldn't really make contact with the people on zoom. Because when I switched to the zoom uh, format it felt like I sh-, I needed to be doing the yoga so that people could see what was happening. And they had something to refer to, because I couldn't really see them in all their tiny little boxes and teach them that way. Although, I know now I've heard some teachers are doing it that way. But it seems to make more sense to me somehow to just do the yoga, but it is about, you know, there's way less contact that way and personal-ness. And I think that that's, that's hard. You know, because I'm very much, I'm much, I'm really about interacting even during the yoga class. So, I like to have to see people's bodies to see their responsiveness to see their faces you know if they look lost or whatever, like I can really make contact and that's, that's definitely different. And it is even different now that the in person class has begun. I can't weave through in and out of the of the of the rows and cruise around and make the actual physical contact that I would do if, if I needed to help someone find, you know, a more precise alignment for themselves or, you know, show them how to connect with some other part of their body that seems to be left out or whatever. So it's, um, you know, just the contact fullness, the personal newness and the interaction you know it, which obviously you know we're all looking at that in our society in general.

Jade Guidry: Yeah.

Christine Fiorentino: So it's exaggerated by Covid.

Jade Guidry: What is the most important thing you think everybody should know about what you're doing during Covid?

Christine Fiorentino: Huh... I'm not sure about that question as far, if that really, tt's not resonating as far as like, what's the most important thing that I think everyone should know about what I'm doing.

Jade Guidry: Let me rephrase then.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah.

Jade Guidry: What do you think is the most important aspect about doing yoga during covid? Do you think there's a reason why you should?

Christine Fiorentino: Oh my goodness. Yes. So it's not so much about me. Right. It's about yeah showing up to do yoga. Yeah, absolutely. The most important thing is, well, I start most of my classes with a short meditation. So, the meditation part is the settling grounding, help with anxiety, you know, the, it's the regulating part. And I think we all really need help with that regulating right now. Like, and it isn't shameful, because we all need it. We all need it from the day we're born until the day we die. Sometimes we can become a little bit more independent in that regulating but when things get to be this intense in the world. We need to tap into the supports that help regulate us too, and the yoga is such a self care, um, practice. It's a self connecting practice, it's a self healing practice, but it also, you know, as... As, when I show up I step into it, uhm, with a conscious understanding that it's important for me to hold space and the realness for people to be just their humaneness, and to bring it all. You know, to not think like, oh, when I go to yoga, I should spiritually be in a great place and be all peaceful and stuff. It's like, no, no, no. That's why yoga exists is because we can't show up in that peacefulness place. Right? We, we come so that we can we can learn how we can return to that place over and over again, but it is an amazing tool, to help us, you know. So, we have all kinds of ideas, we bring the ideas to so we can actually see the ideas but yoga is way more than just stretching and getting strong, it's really, it's really about showing up in in every way that you feel every way that you, you identify yourself. You bring your whole life experience with you. And you settle and you land and you just relax into it, but I think that that is what's important in this time is that we can. We have a place where we feel like we can bring our anxiety or depression, our feelings of isolation and loneliness. All of that stuff. And to be held, and to be seen and comforted, actually. So yeah, and then the physical practice helps the energies that we might be contracting around loosen up and move. So, and the breath comes back and we feel healthy, we feel present. Again, we feel more balance and yeah you couldn't ask for something more important right to do times of Covid. So I think it's, it's true, you know.

Jade Guidry: Do you think that more students are, I know like with the... The regulations that in place, you're not allowed to have so many people in your class but you think that people are starting to reach out to yoga as a way to do that. Do you think people are in tune with that.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, people are. And I think there's, been there's been different waves from what I can tell, like when Covid first started the novelty of it, the weirdness of it, like, oh, and I can go to the computer and get yoga on the computer. So there was a big wave of a lot of interest. A lot of participation and then that dropped and I talked to a few people who said, "yeah, I was really into it at the beginning and then I lost it. And I just didn't want to. I didn't want to do yoga on the computer anymore. I didn't want to, you know, I couldn't organize"... Like all structures were just sort of all of a sudden, people are just floating around like where am I, you know, in space. And I think now people are starting to feel more comfortable with either coming back in person. So the classes that I'm teaching in person are very gradually, uh, it's filling up. I mean, I haven't had eight people yet, but I did have seven people last week, and for the first few, I think it was

actually for the first month, I had one or two people show up. Because a lot of people just still we're not certain that they really wanted to show up. But now, people I think are just like, no, I gotta do this, I gotta get, It's not... Some people are very clear the zoom yoga is not working for them. And some people had to find that out after testing it for a little while, that they just really didn't want to do that. So I think there is now a resurgence. And now that fall is here and maybe there's, you know, scheduling and all of that, that people are kind of feeling like okay now I need to like re-implement my self care. So yes, I do. I do see that another wave of, of, uh, interest and need.

Jade Guidry: Uhm, with your on person, or, in person and online classes, how do those generally work? Like, how and how did it differ, would you say?

Christine Fiorentino: The, uh. So, wait. So the first part of that question again.

Jade Guidry: Uhm with with your online and you're in person classes. How do they generally work?

Christine Fiorentino: Work. Okay. And then how do they differ? Well, I mean, in the in person class, since it's just one hour it, I just keep it very simple and the people come in and they go to their designated taped spots in the room and they know they put their maty down in that piece of tape and they stay right there. There are no props available at the gym, so they have to bring all their own stuff and, um, basically, they don't have to touch anything they can carry their own stuff in, put it on the floor do their yoga pick up their stuff and leave. They don't have to open the door. The door stays open. Windows can be open or closed, we can have fans on or not, depending on you know when we also had the smoke. It was hard to have the windows open because that wasn't good air. So we chose to close the windows have the fans on keep the door open to the studio. Uhm, and the classes just, you know, a multi-level class for anybody to join because it's not about being advanced or, you know, beginning it's just everybody comes and we do what we can do. In the zoom yoga everybody's in their own spaces and everybody has variety of spaces so I... You know, that's probably a lot more simple people feel a lot more comfortable. They're in their home space and they can just follow me and do what they can do. I'm the kind of teacher who gives a lot of different options like you can do this pose and stop here, you can make it harder by going a little further, and doing this and you can go to, like, you know, like I usually have like two or three stages of poses that people can... You know, stop here because if you're you know stiffer or not sure of your strength or balance to stay in this position, add this if you want to go further, that kind of thing. You know.

Jade Guidry: Okay, um, has there any has there been anything particularly hard that you've noticed, while teaching, since Covid started?

Christine Fiorentino: Hmm. I think just me adapting to doing yoga while I'm speaking about what I'm doing and then being filmed or wearing a mask because yes in the live classes, everybody's wearing a mask, including me. I don't usually teach that way. So adapting and changing my teaching

style. Yeah, I mean, now that I'm even talking about it I, I, I don't like it as much. But I'm doing more yoga because of this. So, I guess that's good. But it's kind of hard. You know, I would rather go back to the original style that I was teaching. But you know, it's also interesting because sometimes when things are challenging. We're learning something about our capacities and resilience and adaptability. So, I've got all those things. I'm fine with these adaptations, but I think we all would like the world to go back to what it was before. With so much more appreciation for it. Right. You know, so, yeah.

Jade Guidry: Do you think that the pandemic has altered your view yourself as a yoga teacher at all.

Christine Fiorentino: Well, I think it's made me see how valuable it is to be a yoga teacher and to be a support for people like that. So, it's, it's pleasing in that way there's there maybe even, you know, what comes forward is yoga teachers are always... It's funny because I've always done something really nice for a living, like I used to do massage therapy. It's like hard to ever have a really nasty, you know, unhappy client or, you know, people will come in that way, but they always leave with a smile and feeling better and... You know, but I think that truly in this very extra stressful time what I do and what I offer and holding space for people in, in, holding space for people to be where they are exactly where they are in their anxiety, like it's not wrong to feel anxiety. It's not easy, but it's not wrong, you know. And to, to remind people of those things. It's like the value of what I do is really sort of coming forward in this time of Covid and other stressors, you know, in our world so, it's very important. And, and so I, it's pleasant. It's pleasing to feel that the that what I have been studying and crafting for all these years is actually a forefront of importance as a support for people.

Jade Guidry: That's good. Do you think... have you... Do you think that people are less likely to do the yoga in person, because they have to wear a mask.

Christine Fiorentino: Well... Yeah, I mean I, it's not like we're selling out those classes like I haven't gotten all eight spots filled yet. And I think that there's a lot of people, especially because I have, you know, I would say, the median age of a lot, you know, of my health sport students is on the older side, you know. Perhaps more around 60 or we're older. That's not to say that I don't get young people, but I think because there have been, there was so many silver sneakers people and, you know, people who are retired that have more time to come to classes. So, yeah, so I think that the older people are still not really showing up with masks and feeling happy about, you know, coming. You know, they don't want to take the risk.

Jade Guidry: Yeah. Is there any... has there been any resistance from any of the participants against the guidelines that you have to do for in person classes?

Christine Fiorentino: No.

Jade Guidry: Lucky you.

Christine Fiorentino Yeah, I Know. Everyone shows pp, wears the mask, does the hand sanitizer, if they want it, you know, like, and... Yeah, nobody has said, "Why is it this way," or "I'm not coming back" or, you know, everyone keeps coming so,

Jade Guidry: That's good. Uhm... Do you have any particular advice or like yoga moves that people could do to combat the stress that comes along with Covid?

Christine Fiorentino: Well the biggest thing that I can tell people to do without getting too technical, is to really check in with your breath. Because breathing, you know, we stop breathing when we feel anxious. We stop breathing when we feel depressed. We stop breathing when we feel anything that feels like it's going to take over and we have to start to be able to trust that we actually are okay in what we feel. Like I said before, you know, anxiety isn't a bad thing, it's not wrong. It's just not fun. And sometimes it does lead us to, you know, like a panic attack or something like that. But breathing, yeah, is going to help. And if I could even say something more simple, slowing down the exhale would be, i-it helps to bring the whole anxiety and that kind of more energy of like alarm and, and, um, tension, just everything gets calm. So I've been to simplify just: are you breathing? And then when you notice that you're not, see where you can relax and if it's possible to lengthen your exhale, which just means exhale out all the way. And you could, you know, very simply, when you exhale out at the end you can just make a little squeeze to kind of press the breath out a little bit like [example] and then breathe a big full breath in, and then see if you can... So I would, the way I teach with breath is never to force or manipulate your breath. So when I'm saying, lengthen your exhale If your body isn't, you know, on board with that and you try too much lengthening, you could actually, i-it might not work. It might work against you. So you got to first just breathe and then you got to feel, you know, can I relax and and hold even hold your belly with your hands so that you can bring down deep into your body. And then perhaps, from there, work a little bit on just allowing your exhale to be very complete. And then from there, perhaps, lengthen it a little bit. So it's very gradual very gentle. You know, it's not like you're going to flip a switch from Anxiety, near panic attack to being able to completely breathe, right? It's, it's, you know, you need to be really patient and kind with transitioning. I would say that, that's, that's the huge part of yoga is to really, really come back, focus on your breath, sense your breath. You're still breathing. So you're actually okay and sometimes the belief around anxiety or depression or loneliness is that I'm not okay. And it feels not okay until you find your breath. And you go, well, I'm not okay. It doesn't feel great, but I'm here. And that's, that's a comfort.

Jade Guidry: Awesome!.

Christine Fiorentino: Mhmm.

Jade Guidry: Um, uh. Some people think that some activities like yoga will never be the same after Covid. Do you agree?

Christine Fiorentino: Well, that's a possibility. Now, I don't, you know, who knows? I mean maybe people will have to continue to wear masks, or maybe will feel comfortable, after Covid settles, to just be in a same room but maintain more distance. So maybe classes will have to be smaller. And I never really thought about that. I mean, and maybe people will want to continue with the zoom yoga. Maybe there's, you know, once a week or something like that, where they have that option. I mean, I thought about that in the beginning, and then when things tapered down I wasn't sure. Like, is the zoom yoga really important for, for people, but it really is for some people who are very high risk. And are- that's really their only way of getting exercise or that they feel comfortable accessing. So it is important. And.. For some. And in public I guess we're going to just have to keep our distance, you know, for a while.

Jade Guidry: We'll see how it all turns out

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Jade Guidry: You said that you run women's groups, you said?

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah.

Jade Guidry: Do you want to tell me a little bit about that.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, so right when, when Covid hit, we went, instead of meeting in person, so there were 12 I had two groups of 12 people in each group. And we were meeting in person. So, but when Covid hit, we all went to zoom. And at first, that was a, you know, like some, some of the members did not want to make that transition. They said, nope, not going to work for me. I'm out. Right. So I did lose people, which was unfortunate. But the people who did stick around, um, discovered, discovered, excuse me, discovered that Zoom was okay like it, "Okay, well we can you know if we can't be together in person. This is actually pretty good." And, um, and now the, the women's groups that I was... that I started, I the format was a year long commitment. So we actually finished the year in August. And now there's a good enough number from both of the groups of people who want to continue. So I'm going to be starting another group, soon, and with all new participants and I will be curious to see, as I start that new experience, will people want to meet in person or will they rather meet on zoom. Would they rather do something online? And.. And that'll be interesting because if I do it online, only I could have people from out of the area join, right? But that's all different. But yeah, I mean, basically what happened with the women's groups, was it, you know we did have to switch to zoom I did lose members. I, you know, I couldn't talk them into adapting to zoom. So I had to let them go and, uh... And, um, and so we finished out the year commitment with, with zoom meetings. Which was great. And it was really a big support, you know, to have a group where we can... You know, and this was like, you know, taking what I've been saying a little bit deeper and further of like what I hold space for in the yoga is for you to show up as a human being and be in your body and to be with what you feel. And then the women's groups and the private session works as groups is the private session work is to, now, explore what you feel so you can understand it better and open it up and realize how okay you really are,

the capacities of this, on the spiritual side of us have like our courage and our strength and our, you know, our ability to stay with something or, you know, these wi-will aspect or the joy of being curious and wondering like, "Well, where is this from" or "why do I believe this about myself," "Where did that belief come from," you know. So we get to explore those things in the private sessions and in women's groups, more specifically.

Jade Guidry: Yeah.

Christine Fiorentino: It's cool.

Jade Guidry: That sounds fun, actually, uhm.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah. But it's sometimes hard because, you know, to even admit sometimes that what you feel, could be: "I've never shared this with anybody," and then you share it in a room of women and everybody goes, wow you know it's, it's okay. It gets held and then it's okay. It feels like it's okay, you know.

Jade Guidry: Do you think having it be a group session helps with Covid? Like people aren't... They're feeling particularly lonely right now. So, do you think that it makes it easier to do it with the group at this particular time, compared to other times?

Christine Fiorentino: Well, I, yeah, there's something to that question. I think it's a good question, Jade, because I think that everything was so heightened, right? People's anxiety, people's depression, people's loneliness. There was even one member who may have had Covid and but didn't get any positive test post, post the symptomatic phase. But she was having all the post Covid stuff that everybody has been talking about. So, she was very, very anxious and, you know, not getting the answers that she wanted. And, you know, she would bring all of that to the group and for all of, you know, for... To have a place where you could speak those, those concerns and your fears and your anxieties and all of that and be held instead of, "well, here's some advice for you." You know, it wasn't like that. It's not, we don't give advice in the in the group, we just, we just have compassion, and we have empathy, and we have, we're learning. You know those capacities, uh, can open in us as a, as a circle or a field of a group that has trust, you know? And so, I think that that is, it has been really important because of all that heightened you know anxiety around, not knowing what's happening, you know?

Jade Guidry: Um, you mentioned earlier that there was a possibility of maybe opening up the group to other areas. Do you think that that wouldn't have happened if Covid didn't occur?

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, I mean, I don't think so. I mean, my whole zoom, my whole world of zoom wouldn't have happened you know if unless Covid happened. And so, discovering zoom yoga and discovering you know how to even work zoom and have, um... You know, for instance, in the, in the women's groups we meet, I will present a teaching of, you know, that we're going to explore this particular view of this part of our

humaneness. And, and then we do breakout groups and, you know, so the breakout groups are amazing and you know, so people are just sitting on their computer and all of a sudden, they're like, with just two other people on their computer and they get to talk and interact and then they get, they get sent back into the main room. I mean, all that's so amazing, this technology. And yeah, I think that it brought in new possibilities for me, as a teacher, and what I do, with women's groups and private, private work with people. It will, I think ultimately expand my community right to... All over the world, if it, if it wants to go that far. And so many possibilities for formatting, you know, women's groups and, you know, this way you can be anywhere and be part of a group, which I think is amazing and important.

Jade Guidry: Together, but still apart.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, right.

Jade Guidry: Wonderful. Well, I think that's actually all the questions that I had for you. Is there anything important that you feel like I missed that we should probably talk about?

Christine Fiorentino: Um, I wonder about you know where this video will be, because it's recorded, where this will be seen or by who it will be seen, or?

Jade Guidry: Yeah! Um so basically the video is mainly just for me so I can write the transcripts later. Um, but I do believe that I have to send it to one of my professors and then they will pick and choose kind of the best bits of information to put into, hopefully, fingers crossed, a permanent display in one of the local museums. Basically just explaining how the humble community has been doing and how we dealt with all of this. So, yeah.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, yeah. Well, so yeah, I don't think that there's really anything based on that, what you just said, that I need to say except for, you know, just... Self-care is important right now and find a way that resonates with you and know that there's so many options on your computer, which aren't, you know, maybe optimal but they're good, and they work. And so to, to, to find what resonates and what and what helps support you through this hard time because staying isolated or thinking that you should be able to just cope on your own is, is really not quite it. I mean, nobody can do that by themselves. We're not islands. We're humans and we need we need relationship we need self-contact as well as contact with others we trust. And, um, we need to do, if we need to do that distanced through a computer then that's the way we got to do it. So maybe that's just a message I have, you know, like...

Jade Guidry: That's good advice.

Christine Fiorentino: Good. Yeah, do it. All right. Well, that's lovely. Jade, thank you so much for well...

Jade Guidry: Yeah! Thanks, you so much! Thank you for meeting with me today.

Christine Fiorentino: Yeah, maybe one day we'll see each other in real, real life.

Jade Guidry: Without mask so I can recognize you.

Christine Fiorentino: Right. Do you live in Arcada?

Jade Guidry: I live in Eureka, but I am up there for school all the time.

Christine Fiorentino: Well, I live in Eureka as well. So maybe I'll see you at the co-op or...

Jade Guidry: Yeah.

Christine Fiorentino: ...or if you're somewhere.

Jade Guidry: Yeah. I work at the mall. So, I'll be there most of the time.

Christine Fiorentino: Where do you work?

Jade Guidry: I work at Schatzi's Hidden Treasure.

Christine Fiorentino: Okay, well, I know where that is. So maybe I'll come in and wave across the across the clothing racks and the crystals. All right. Enjoy your...

Jade Guidry: Well, it was nice meeting you.

Christine Fiorentino: Nice to meet you to enjoy the weekend

Jade Guidry: You too.

Christine Fiorentino: Bye

Jade Guidry: Bye.