



## BACKGROUNDER

***A personal and spiritual exploration of how Claire's life experiences shaped into an opportunity to lead and inspire others to heal through creative expression.***

Claire left Yorkshire England in 2002, worked and lived in Singapore for four years and travelled around Asia and Australasia. In 2006, pregnant with her first daughter, she arrived in the U.S., moved to Greenwich and later North Stamford, Connecticut. In 2008, Claire had her second daughter and moved to Glen Rock, New Jersey. It was during Claire's mid 30's that she suffered a difficult time and was overcome by depression, feelings of loneliness and

isolation, constantly sobbing and not eating well. Claire reached a point in her life knowing that something had to change and began to ask God some big questions... "What do you want me to do with my life?" and "Where do you want me to go?"

Claire saw a flyer advertising a 200 hour yoga teacher training on the door of her local Bhakti yoga studio, Naturally Yoga. This was the beginning of her spiritual journey. At this time, Claire was freelancing in Public Relations and finally got a break in New York working in an agency but that didn't really work out for her and her family. Whilst taking a few weeks to decide whether to register for the training, she was touched by the hands of God in so many ways. Claire found an OM sign appear on the side of her soup bowl and had flyers for yoga being dropped on her doorstep. Claire attended a weekend retreat called "Ride The Waves of Grace," a title that resonated with her for obvious reasons, perhaps yet another clue before deciding to embark on the training, and she's never looked back since.

Claire's love for yoga began in 1999 and enabled a sense of healing after the tragic loss of her mother. Teacher training helped her to delve deeper into the practice and Yoga became her therapy, saving her and her family. Just to take a step back... since being a child, Claire has always known deep down that she could sing. Friends and family were always commenting on her voice. She joined choirs and continued to play piano from age 8. Although she's always loved the creative arts, Claire has continued to battle with negative interior voices, as most of us do, but Claire felt that this held her back in many ways for most of her musical creative life.

***"As a child, I used to sing a lot on my own. My grandma used to organize gigs for her church group where I would play piano and sing. The problem was, I suffered from performance anxiety. I was always the onlooker, watching others perform but deep down, I knew that I could do it. I loved to sing, dance and play piano but my heart was always too closed. I was too fearful, always felt that I was never good enough, suffered from a lack of self-worth and self-esteem. This has held me back in so many ways," said Whittleston.***

During Claire's teacher training finals, she had to teach a community class and she chose to sing/chant at the beginning and end of her class. She was the only one out of 12 who decided to chant.

***"Looking back, I'm amazed that I even chose to do this with my history of performance anxiety. But, I think about it now in yogic terms. This is not a performance, I'm just sharing my gifts. And Kirtan is really a collective effort after all."***

After sharing her voice Claire was taken aback by the reaction from people. Comments were on the lines of..."Great class but that voice!," "Where did you learn to sing like that?," "And who knew?" And the comments continued as she began to teach more and more classes. One of her friends said to her.. "How many people need to tell you about your voice before you are going to do something about it?"

During Claire's teacher training, she fell in love with the harmonium. Her teacher Sheryl Edsall, Owner of Naturally Yoga, played during and after classes and having had a piano background, she was intrigued by what she thought was a mini piano. After teacher training, Claire had a few harmonium lessons, began to write cover chants, posted YouTube clips of her singing and again, was asked to think about doing something more with her voice. Claire slowly began to love herself again and began to follow her curiosity.

After teacher training, Claire's family moved to Detroit Michigan where she continues to enjoy teaching yoga. When she began teaching and singing, the comments started to come again. "What a beautiful voice you have." "Do you sing anywhere else?" "You have a gift." ***"One student said to me, "Have you ever thought about recording?" I said, "no." She said quite firmly, "But you must!" I had no choice but to sit up and listen. I strongly believe that God was trying to tell me something and I was becoming eager to do something about it. Problem was, I didn't know how to go about recording or getting my voice heard on a wider scale," said Claire Whittleston.***

Claire received an email advertising Mike Cohen's Kirtan Leader Institute. Finally picking up the phone, she had an interview and was accepted onto the leadership coaching program.

Claire started to write more and more tunes and started to add English lyrics to sacred mantras. It was then that Claire wanted to tell her story through her writing. A story of self healing and self discovery through surrendering, following dreams and finding truth. She hopes that her music could perhaps inspire others to follow their dreams too. Claire's influences stem from her love of soul and r&b music. C.C. White, Donna De Lory and Dave Stringer from the Kirtan world, together with mainstream artists such as Amy Winehouse and Joss Stone, to name a few.

In June 2015, Claire went from singing and playing piano in her grandmother's church hall to the main Bhakti Fest Midwest stage, opening for Krishna Das with Mike and his band, to recording her very first EP album with Grammy award nominated producer, Ben Leinbach in California. ***"Such opportunities don't just happen. My whole journey seems so surreal to me," said Claire Whittleston. "I believe that God took me out of myself to allow me to engage in creating music and this has helped me to find the courage and confidence to follow my dreams and share my talents with the world. I made an intention to be more receptive to ideas, opportunities and experiences that were happening in my life and that created miracles," added Whittleston.***

**Contact:** Claire Whittleston  
201-675-5602  
claire.whittleston@gmail.com  
www.clairewhittleston.com