

lifestyle

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Learning to sway to the music

By **RAGANI BUEGEL**
as told to Jan Uebelherr

Last Updated: Oct. 26, 2002

My first name is actually Julia. The name Ragani came from the teacher who taught me yoga, and as a part of that also taught me Kirtan music.

His name was Swami Rama. And Ragani was the name that he started calling me, before I went to India the first time in 1991, because of the music.

I really loved Kirtan - and I have been doing this for 20 years now - and it just was a real big part of my life. "Raga" means "to give color to," but it's loosely defined as kind of a melody; the way that Indians play music is a raga. Ragani is the female form of a raga.

I was about 15 when I went out to what's called the Himalayan Institute now. It's a yoga center. I went there every summer for 11 years, to study the yoga and the music. I had heard Kirtan once before . . . Some people were studying yoga, and I used to baby-sit their daughter. I went over to the house, and that was the first time I heard it. I would ask her, "What is this music?" And she said, "It's from India."

Kirtan is really like keeping company with your spirit almost. It's a call-response . . . and it keeps building. It keeps getting passed back and forth, and it's almost like this echoing back and forth, like a mother and son calling. A leader starts the chant and then it keeps going. It creates this kind of sway. It's very soothing.

How I followed it here - I hadn't been doing Kirtan for three years. We had been living here in Milwaukee and I had sort of started it at a Buddhist center. Three or four people would come. Sometimes nobody.

There were a couple of people who I had done some Kirtan with, and I said to the man who was running it at the center, "I imagine it with 100 people. I just feel it." He said, "Well, I don't think they'll fit here" - kind of joking, because it's a very small center.

A woman called me about 10 weeks after that. She said, "I hear you do Kirtan, and I'd really like to have it at this church where they rent space and where they teach yoga classes." So I went over and looked at it, and three months later we started what is now ongoing monthly Kirtan. That was last September.

We now get somewhere between 70 to 100.

My husband has been the biggest inspiration. He's the one who said, "If you're going to do it, do it right. Get the microphones." We got all the stuff to do a live performance.

He then went out and got a computer with a program for recording music. I said to Dale, "I don't think I can I

How I Did It



Ragani Buegel leads East Side Kirtan, which meets the first Friday of the month at Kenwood United Methodist Church, 2319 E. Kenwood Blvd. The next Kirtan will be held at 8 p.m. Nov. 1 at Centennial Hall, led by guest artist Dave Stringer. A \$15 donation is suggested for this Kirtan. Other Kirtan events are free.

do it. It's so frightening for me to look at a computer program, and all I want to do is just do music."

As it turns out, you really want to do the techno stuff too because then you can fine-tune things. So I started doing it, after he kind of fiddled with it and showed me a few things. Then I was hooked.

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