

Joyce Virani

BEAUTY ROOTED IN AN ABUNDANT HEART

Joyce Virani is a luminous, shining light. Naturally, gorgeously beautiful, Joyce's journey to the USA began as she reached for the stars in the world of modeling. Her energy and focus took her from a small town in Holland to the fashion world of Milan, Paris, Los Angeles and NYC where she dazzled in Elle, Vogue, Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan, Glamour and In Style. Joyce's years of traveling and being in front of the camera took her all over the world – a global voyage of discovery where she began to discover her true authenticity. While modeling allowed her artistic expression to flourish, it was really in the raw, untamed African bush – with no lights or cameras – that Joyce discovered the essence of Joyce. The wild Kenyan landscape with its uncomplicated, beautiful people and the magnificent animals of Africa – provided the first powerful immersion into something so moving that Joyce said, "I had never felt so alive, so rooted, so vibrant, so raw. Everything about the natural beauty of Africa resonated with me."

A talented, driven woman, Joyce experienced many different roles in life that would ultimately prepare her for the career she now finds so satisfying and necessary to her wellbeing – that of a Female Energy and Wellness Coach. For so long she had been spinning from treadmill to treadmill until nature stopped her in her tracks and she experienced the wake-up call of Graves' disease. It changed her life irreversibly and for the better.

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Joyce with Tommy



Marriage to Saleem and two beautiful children later (they shared our shoot with Mom), Joyce reminds us that real contentment and happiness lie in re-discovering our inner cores – the essences of who we are. This close-to-nature Mom radiates warmth, kindness and gentleness. Her priorities are not stuff: she focuses on her family, and loving deeply. Most importantly, she's learned that in order to give to others abundantly – she has to replenish her resources and her energy. This is what Joyce teaches women in her Energy and Wellness coaching and Qigong classes: that opening one's heart space and discovering one's intimate inner self is exceptionally rewarding and so important to our wellbeing and health.



Q: Your background and upbringing is diverse

JOYCE: I grew up in Holland in a loving, multiracial family enjoying different kinds of cultural traditions and foods. Our Dutch meals were basic, fresh and delicious. The Indonesian dishes were much more elaborate and always front and center of big potluck gatherings with each person sharing their favorite dish. I remember going on a road trip with my parents, Opa and Oma, sisters, uncles, aunts and friends. We all piled into our cars driving 18 hours caravan style to Spain - making many stops alongside the road. Out came the woks, little burners and bags of food to cook. Food is still that for me - a way to gather and connect. I love to cook for my family and friends and I have a passion for finding easy, delicious meals that look like a million bucks while being dense in flavor.

Q: What was young Joyce like?

JOYCE: As a little girl I was always moving, enthusiastic, passionate, creative, spirited and happy. My Mom stayed at home with us and fondly remembers me always chatting

away - it was never boring with me around. If I was not chatting, I was dancing or singing while Dad played the guitar or created art with my Mom. And I loved being outside running around with my sisters and friends in my favorite outfit that remains one of my signatures today: my broken-in jeans, a white shirt paired with my favorite earrings and a little lip gloss. Done!

Q: What did you do with all that drive, energy and focus?

JOYCE: As I grew older I channeled my energy into playing a few instruments and volleyball. I started playing for the local team at age 13 and was, not too long after, picked up by a scout for one of the district teams. I trained every night for a few hours and loved it. My whole family and many of my friends played as well. It was a very loving and fun community to be a part of. Around the age of 16, I was invited to train for the Olympic team. Trainings were hard and long and I knew that if I ever wanted to make it on the national team, this was all I would do every single day for many years to come. I realized within a few weeks that there were so many other things I was passionate about and decided to quit. Exercise always kept an important place throughout my life, though, in many different forms and shapes.

Q: How did your modeling and acting career begin?

JOYCE: I think I was barely 17 when my father showed me a modeling class ad in the newspaper. I had little interest in fashion but liked the idea of exploring a different side of me - learning how to gracefully walk, model in front of

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Kai, Joyce and Nina



a camera, and put a little make up on. I instantly felt a strong connection with Simonne, the founder of the 18-week course and remained close to her for many years. I learned so much from this beautiful, spunky and loving woman and walked many local fashion shows for her - providing a springboard for my model career later. It was at one of these shows I was spotted by a model scout from Amsterdam. I was about to go to College, so I kindly told him I had no interest. After waiting tables several evenings a week to pay for college life, I decided to dig up his card and pay him a visit. I was met by a wonderful, crazy and fun group of people full of excitement to work with me while I continued my studies. It was the start of a wonderful and magical modeling and acting career.

Q: What were the highlights of this phase of your life?

JOYCE: What I love most from my days in front of the camera is the opportunity to have traveled and lived all over the world - connecting with many different people - their beliefs, cultures, food, rituals, desires, passions and their stories. Out of all the photo shoots I have done, I will forever cherish the one created for your beautiful magazine. When I look at these pictures – after looking at so many in my long career - it is not about the clothes or the make up or any other message than just me being me. I feel emotional with gratitude for my family and for feeling so at peace.

Q: Education has always been important to you?

JOYCE: Ever since I was a little girl, I loved school. I loved everything about it. I loved studying, researching and connecting with other students and teachers. I still do. It is the reason I never gave up on my dream of getting my college degree while modeling and traveling the world. Doing both at the same time was actually the best thing I ever did. It gave me great balance and always a home to come back to with a loving and supportive group of college friends I am still very close with today. After graduating in 1996 I wanted to continue to integrate my master’s degree in Art History and Art Management with my modeling career and decided to move to Milan. For 6 glorious months I worked as a model while visiting museums - finally seeing all the art I studied in college. I was elated and felt invigorated. I loved being in Italy and loved the Italian people with their sense of style, their drama, humor, amazing food, art, and lots of passion. My sister Wendy, also a model, living in Los Angeles at the time, traveled to Milan to model and visit with me. Together we set the town on fire!

Q: Shortly thereafter, Los Angeles happened

JOYCE: It was love that brought me from Milan to Los Angeles. I remember my first weeks driving around - being scared out of my mind. I had my driver’s license in Holland but did not own a car. Like many students I would bike, walk, and take the train or the bus. When someone handed me the Thomas Guide, I thought they were joking. To calm myself down, I played a jazz CD in my car. When I listen to this CD today, it brings me straight back. Thank goodness I had my sister Wendy around to guide me and support me. It was great to be close to her again and I loved living in LA: the weather, the beach, the mountains and healthy free-spirited people all spoke to me. Soon I was zipping around town for castings. I modeled, acted and of course studied - taking classes in Real Estate and Interior Design.

After 5 beautiful years with love found and lost, I longed to be back in Holland again. So I rented a cozy little studio in Amsterdam while modeling and spending time with my loving parents, family and dear friends. I had missed them so.



Q: But America still called

JOYCE: I had a dream of living in Manhattan. Even though I had approached the ripe age of 32, considered old at the time in the modeling world, I felt a strong desire to go and do it anyway. I was fortunate to model for several years longer but it certainly was not easy. I am so glad times have changed since then, and older women are now celebrated, wearing their age proudly, shining beautifully on the runway as well as in commercials, ads and magazines.

Q: Was Manhattan everything you dreamed it would be?

JOYCE: It was. I loved being able to walk everywhere any time of the day and night. I felt energized, inspired, creative and vibrant in this city and all it had to offer. I would sit in Central Park for hours listening to live music while reading books, sitting on a park bench. I soaked up all the art, the colors, theater, food, the people. It was in Manhattan I fell madly in love with my husband.

After satisfying my NYC modeling dream, I started working as a Marketing Director at a Dutch Floral Design studio. I enjoyed being surrounded by wonderfully creative people, learning about beautiful flowers and event design. Following that job I was warmly welcomed at a boutique recruiting firm. I enjoyed bringing in new clients for them, but was most passionate about finding the right person for the job - coaching, training and prepping them for their interview, helping them realize their dream.

Meanwhile, Saleem and I got married, moved to an apartment in Brooklyn and were expecting a baby girl all at the same time. Late 2007 we became proud parents of our girl Nina. Almost two years later our son Kai was born. I loved being a Mom and stopped working to be home with them. Our family was complete and we could not have been any happier.

Q: But then 6 months later you faced a major challenge

JOYCE: Yes. I was faced with a big lesson and opportunity for growth when I was diagnosed with Graves' disease, an autoimmune disease brought on by stress that affects the thyroid. It turned my life and that of my family upside down and has led me to become the person I am today. My body was telling me to slow down and take care of myself, but given our frenetic environment, that was close to impossible. Our apartment complex was under construction. Workers were jackhammering our façade standing in front of our windows all day while I was breastfeeding Nina and Kai. Napping was nearly impossible. It was also an exceptionally cold winter. There was nowhere to go. All this stress triggered my thyroid to become overactive in a very bad way. My heart rate was 100 at rest and my appetite went through the roof while I was losing weight at the same time. It felt like a person was standing behind me - clapping hands all day - telling me loudly to hurry up. I tried several different holistic treatments and herbal supplements, but without being able to remove myself from the stressful environment and with the severity of the symptoms,

I was urged to start taking some medication. Meanwhile my Mom came to stay with us for several months followed by my Dad to offer relief, love and support. Many nights a week my husband took the train to New Jersey to find us a more peaceful home. Thanks to him we were able to move to a lovely home in New Jersey about a half a year later. Here we could all finally breathe again. Within weeks I was able to halve my medication and get off the heart medication. I could not have done this without the love and support of my family and friends.

Q: You began to look for holistic ways to help you heal?

JOYCE: Now, away from the constant noise, I was able to look again for holistic ways to de-stress, slow down and take care of my body. I started working with a wonderful herbalist who helped me heal from leaky gut and adrenal fatigue. After some research I found a Qigong class and fell in love with the easy to learn, dance-like movements, breathing exercises and visualization. This ancient system of Chinese exercises provides numerous health benefits, such as reducing stress and anxiety, enhancing immunity, building stamina, improving sleep, focus and performance, regulating blood pressure and relieving pain, and has since then become a part of my everyday life. I am very grateful to have found a wonderful teacher and am honored to practice with her every week.

Doctors strongly urged me to remove my Thyroid telling me I would never recover. I am glad I listened to my body and strongly believe my Qigong practice has played a huge part in my self-healing and full remission.

Q: Your illness was the catalyst that directed you to this new path of Qigong and taking much greater care of yourself?

JOYCE: Using movement paired with breath and intention opened up my body as never before, sending a huge amount of energy into my belly, hips and pelvis - leaving me connected and empowered from my core rather than feeling the need to puff up my shoulders to be strong. This awakening to being both soft and strong, vulnerable and courageous has become central to my healing on many levels and my passion to teach and share. Once I connected to my feminine essence, I felt safe to express all of who I was, and to let go of my tough cookie exterior, replacing it with a newfound powerful vulnerability that opened my heart. I learned to look inward to my emotional and energetic body to guide me. Attuned to my intuition, I feel less need to always be on the go, in control of my environment or struggle to achieve my goals. I now try to make decisions based on how I want to feel and less on what I think is rational or what everyone else thinks I should do.

Q: Do you think that this is a vast problem - particularly with women - that they haven't learned to take care of themselves first?

JOYCE: Definitely. I had to learn that taking care of my self is not an act of selfishness but essential to connect and respond to my deepest needs and desires. And to not only take care of my physical body, but also to listen to my body's clues

and wisdom. I had to learn how to eliminate self-criticism, not overschedule, let go of the need to be perfect, say no, refuse to do things out of guilt, and give myself much-needed rest and downtime to re-energize and tune in. I also had to learn how to ask for help. All of this has not come easily to me.

Going at it alone was a point of pride in how I grew up. Faced with challenges, I would come up with a plan, put on my armor, grab my sword and figure a way out. It took me a while to realize that I did not have to do it all alone. I had to open up and become vulnerable, trust, be curious and ask for help. We are meant to experience the feeling of connection and lean on and teach each other, not just when things get tough, but every single day.

Q: What role does healthy nutrition play in your overall health?

JOYCE: I grew up eating healthy home-cooked meals and have continued to do so. But I have taken it to a whole other level after graduating from the Institute of Integrative Nutrition. Through this year-long, intensive life-changing program I have been trained in more than 100 dietary theories and learned about not only the power of food but moreover the importance of discovering and creating real nourishment in all areas of life. Inspired by their concept of bio-individuality, I started to experiment with different ways of eating for myself and my family - honoring the fact that what works for one person may not resonate at all with another. My son and I eat vegetarian but I occasionally still cook meat for my husband and daughter. I also started juicing and we all love our daily delicious smoothies, which are a great way to get some extra veggies in.

Q: In your work as a Female Energy and Wellness Coach what is your aim and focus?

JOYCE: It is my desire and intention to share my wisdom and experience to guide women into rediscovering their inner spark and heart's desires - feeling alive, empowered, vibrant, energized, beautiful, sensual and passionate from the inside out. I want to see their eyes sparkle and their hearts glitter. Together we focus on cultivating skills and practices to create and manifest a life of health and happiness - recognizing women's ageless beauty, inner radiance and undeniable belief and trust in themselves. Once they do that, everything else will fall in place. When choices are made from a feeling of illumination, it all makes sense.

Through a custom-tailored coaching program, we develop a deeper understanding of the food and lifestyle choices that work best for each individual woman, and begin to implement lasting changes that will improve their energy, balance and health.

In my Female Qigong teachings I am passionate about helping women connect with their feminine essence, their emotional and spiritual self, and spark their inner healing power. We shake, bounce, dance, breathe, meditate, massage and use sound to move stagnant energy layers in the body where stress, tension, disease and emotions are stored.

Q: You also donate your time teaching Mindfulness and Qigong to children at school?

JOYCE: Two years ago I was asked by founder and director of The New School of Monmouth County- the school where Nina and Kai go- if I wanted to teach Mindfulness and Qigong. This project-based school, housed in a big old home with a kitchen and a tree-lined back yard with vegetable garden, has been around for over 46 years and teaches about 50 children ranging in age from 5 till 15. Their hands-on holistic approach to education allows children to explore and learn with open minds and to care for those around them with open hearts - fostering a lifetime love of learning and allowing them to follow their own path towards knowledge. Without any testing or homework there is room for play and downtime so vitally important not only for us adults but even more so for children. Nina and Kai are thriving in this environment academically but more importantly - socially. It has been so inspirational to teach children Mindfulness and Qigong. It is beautiful to see their body, heart and mind opening up, ready, willing and excited to move, breathe and visualize. It warms my heart to see them connect with their inner voice and power, being grateful for and appreciating how their bodies work and how beautiful they are. It helps them to learn and love; to pause, listen, and come home to themselves. I am excited to donate my time and teach children in other schools as well.

Q: Your sister, Wendy Both, was on our July 2016 cover. You share a special relationship with her

JOYCE: Wendy and I have such a beautiful relationship and are able to share our deepest desires and feelings with each other. Above all, we can laugh together with tears streaming down our faces. We did not always get along this well. There were times when we felt we did not completely understand each other or were living very different lives, but we never gave up trying to connect and as a result have only grown closer over the years. I love and admire her deeply and am very grateful for all the support and guidance she has given me on my path to grow into the person I am today. She has inspired me in so many ways to become an Energy and Wellness coach. We would love to collaborate one day. We are not sure what that would look like yet, but we are excited about the possibilities of working together as healers.

Q: How does your family celebrate the Holiday season?

JOYCE: I LOVE the holiday season. Our holiday season is about spending time as a family. The day after Thanksgiving, Nina and Kai pick out our Christmas tree. We will blast some holiday tunes and start decorating the whole house together. After a few days, you may find some newly-made Lego ornaments here and there and several notes to Santa. Christmas is also a time when we recognize that there are those less fortunate than us. We sit down as a family and create a list of acts of kindness we like to carry out. It can be as simple as opening a door for someone, sending a card, giving somebody a compliment or adopting a dog - which is what we did last year. We feel so lucky to have found this beautiful, gentle soul. Tommy brings us such happiness, calmness, playfulness and unconditional love. He is a true healer, always there to give kisses where needed.



We celebrate New Year's Eve on Dutch time (which is ahead of us). We have a special New Year Memory Jar in which through the year we place little notes with important events – whether it's losing a tooth, learning how to bike or visiting a special place. We open the jar on New Year's Eve and each of us reads out a note. It's a beautiful moment to be grateful and reflect on all that has happened. Then we blow out candles for a year passed and welcome in the New Year with some delicious home-made cupcakes.

Q: What does your home mean to you?

JOYCE: In 2013 we decided to move a few minutes away from the beach – my absolute happy place. Near the ocean my whole body relaxes. I always come away with a feeling of serenity. Our home has lots of light and is peacefully situated on a tree-lined cul-de-sac with loving families for neighbors. We have a large yard with a big fire pit and vegetable garden. Deer roam around the neighboring property while birds sing in our many trees where a great horned owl may settle in for the night. I feel like we found a little slice of Africa here. I love to snuggle up by the fire, throw balls with Tommy and run around with the kids, climbing the tree house Saleem lovingly built. Everything has slowed down for me here. I feel at peace and at ease and so grateful to live in a wonderful community with loving friends and such a beautiful place with my family.

Q: Favorite indulgence?

JOYCE: Chocolate-covered peanuts. I will go out of my way to buy the best I can find - made with the most beautiful delicious chocolate and fresh peanuts. I will sit and slowly savor every single one of them. They were my favorite indulgence when I was little and they still are.

Q: Most favorite food dish or delicacy?

JOYCE: My father's apple pie, my husband's blueberry pancakes, a smoothie made by Nina and Kai, a beautiful salad made by a dear friend, a piece of bread I received from a poor man in the slums of India. Any food made with love and shared with me is my absolute favorite.

Q: A much beloved part of the world - one that holds great memories for you?

JOYCE: Out of all my worldwide travels, it was a commercial modeling trip to Kenya and Tanzania that I will forever cherish. I shall never forget seeing my first elephant – tears streaming down my face. I felt so alive, so rooted, so vibrant and raw in these countries with their breathtaking landscape, amazing wildlife and beautiful people. I promised myself I would be back. And I did. Years later my husband and I went on an African Safari. We walked, rode horses, drove a jeep and took a breath-taking balloon ride through this stunning part of the world. It was where Saleem proposed to me with a beautifully beaded ring made by local Maasai women. Pure magic!

It is our dream to bring Nina and Kai back to the place where we got engaged. For now I travel back to Africa in my mind, sitting by our outdoor fire pit snuggled up with a Shuka, reading one of my many African novels. And I am always looking for ways to give back to this place I love.

Q: Favorite charity?

JOYCE: I am very passionate about KIVA - a non-profit organization providing micro loans to people in developing countries - empowering them to take control of their future while creating hope and opportunity for themselves, their families and their communities. What I love most is that my gift keeps on giving. I am currently lending money to two mothers in Kenya to help them grow their farming business so that with their profits, they can send their children to school. After they pay me back I will re-invest that money to support other Moms helping them make their dream come true.

I bought one of my favorite, beautifully crafted Kenyan bags from a company named FEED. Through the sale of their artisan-made products they donate meals in the countries in which they were produced. Every product they sell has a number stamped on it, signifying the number of meals provided with its purchase. I am passionate about finding products with a purpose and also get really excited searching for finds on Etsy, supporting fellow Moms.



Q: Best 'Mom' memory?

JOYCE: There are so many! But, I will never forget and forever hold dear the sweet memory of tandem feeding my children. Nina was almost 2 and Kai was just born. I remember feeling such joy and love looking at my children holding hands over my belly while feeding from my breasts. I believe the strong bond they share today has grown from those tender moments they shared.

Q: Favorite book?

JOYCE: *Global Girlfriend* by Stacey Edgar. An empowering, inspirational and heartfelt account of how one Mom makes it her business to help poverty-stricken women worldwide, changing not only their lives, but the lives of their families and communities as well.

Q: A documentary that has had the most profound impact on you?

JOYCE: *HAPPY!* I love this uplifting, yet practical and down-to-earth documentary on the nature of happiness. Director Roko Belic travels for 6 years shooting over 400 hours of footage all over the world to explore what really makes people happy. Current research shows that 50% of happiness is genetic, 10% is circumstantial and 40% is chosen. To know that happiness is within our control is so inspiring to me. My favorite take-away from the movie is how important feeling and expressing gratitude is, as is being compassionate, helping others and having a sense of community - practices I try to instill in Nina and Kai and infuse into our everyday life. When you find what makes you happy now instead of focusing on what you think may make you happy tomorrow, you can connect more closely to who you truly are.

Q: Favorite Quote?

JOYCE: "Ask yourself how you want to feel, and then have the wisdom and courage to build your life around the answer."

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Saleem, Kai, Joyce and Nina