

# Layers and Layer Masks

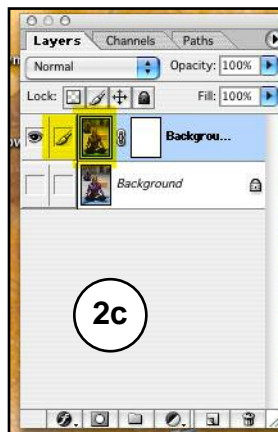
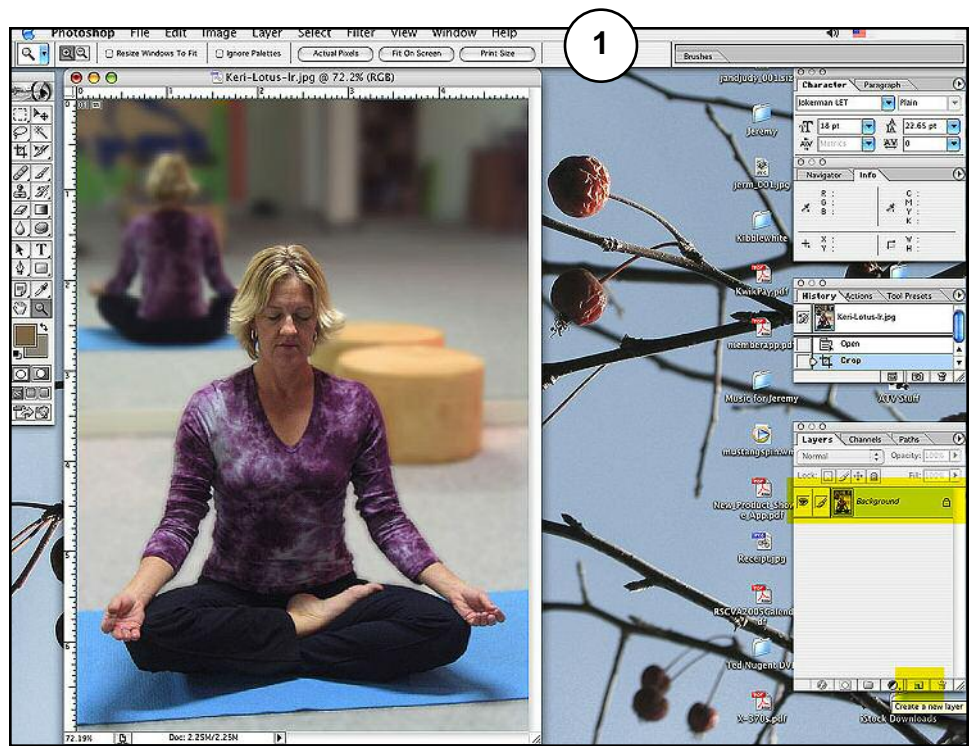
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This is a very basic introduction to using layers and layer masks.

I'll go into some more detailed layer mask techniques in other tutorial pdf files.

The first thing I always do, when I know I'm going to be manipulating a photo using layer masks, is open the image and make a copy of the Background (your image defaults as the Background when it opens). Do this by clicking and dragging the Background Layer to the New Layer icon in your Layers Palette (if your Layers Palette is not visible, go to the Windows menu in PS and put a check by the Layers palette in that menu).



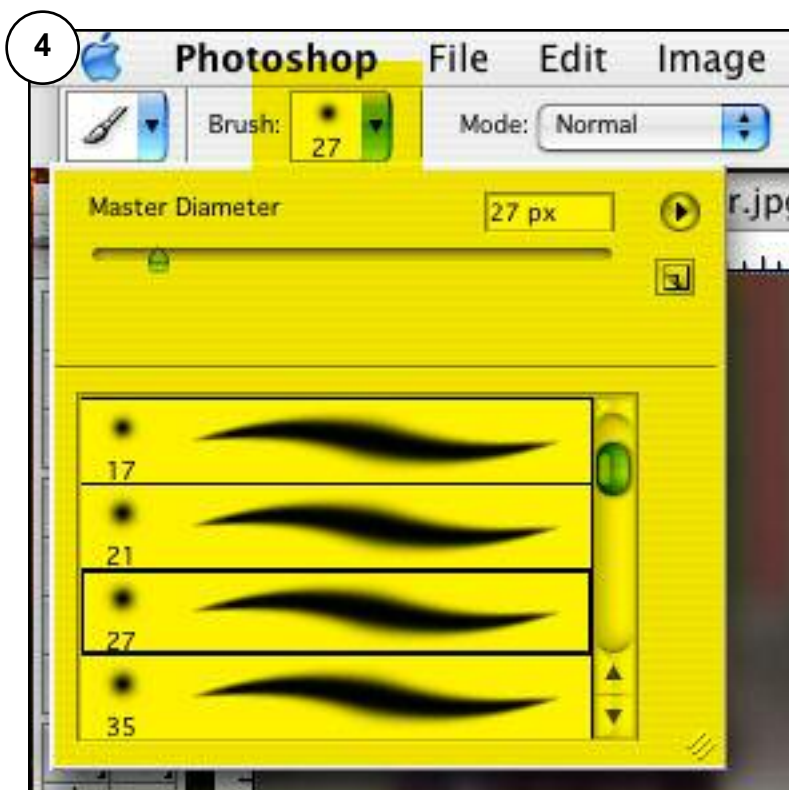
You then see you'll have two layers: a Background and a Background Copy. If you click the little eye icon off on the bottom layer, it "hides" it, and you will only see and be working with the layer copy. That way if you do screw anything up, you still have your original layer to play with (fig. 2a).

Now, with your copy layer highlighted, click on the layer mask icon at the bottom of your palette (fig. 2b). You will see that it opens up another box on the layer you're working on.

One thing you will always need to be aware of when you're doing these alterations, is that you are working in your layer mask and not your actual layer. You can switch between the two by clicking on their respective boxes on the layer. If you click on the layer mask (the right-hand box on your layer), you'll see that the icon to the right of the "eye" is a box with a circle in it (2b). If you were to want to edit your actual layer, you would click on the image portion of the layer (the left-hand box on your layer), and you'll notice that the icon switches to a paintbrush (2c). For this particular exercise, we'll be working mostly in the layer mask, so click back into the layer mask box.

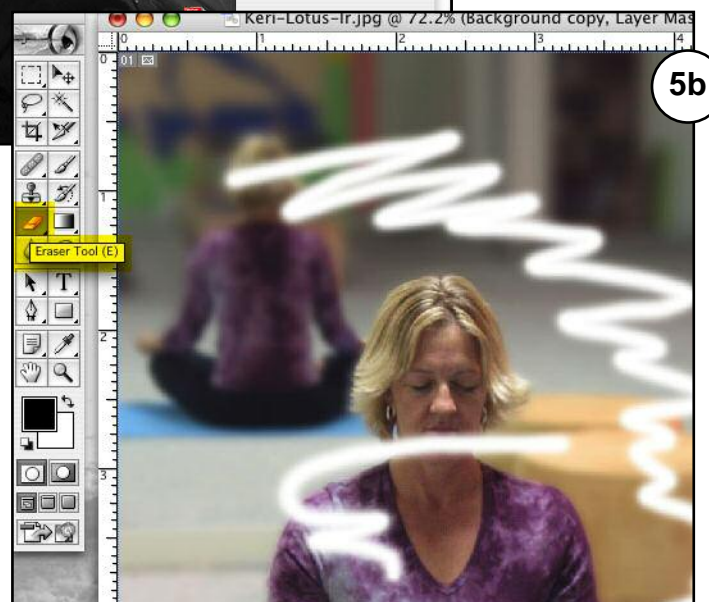
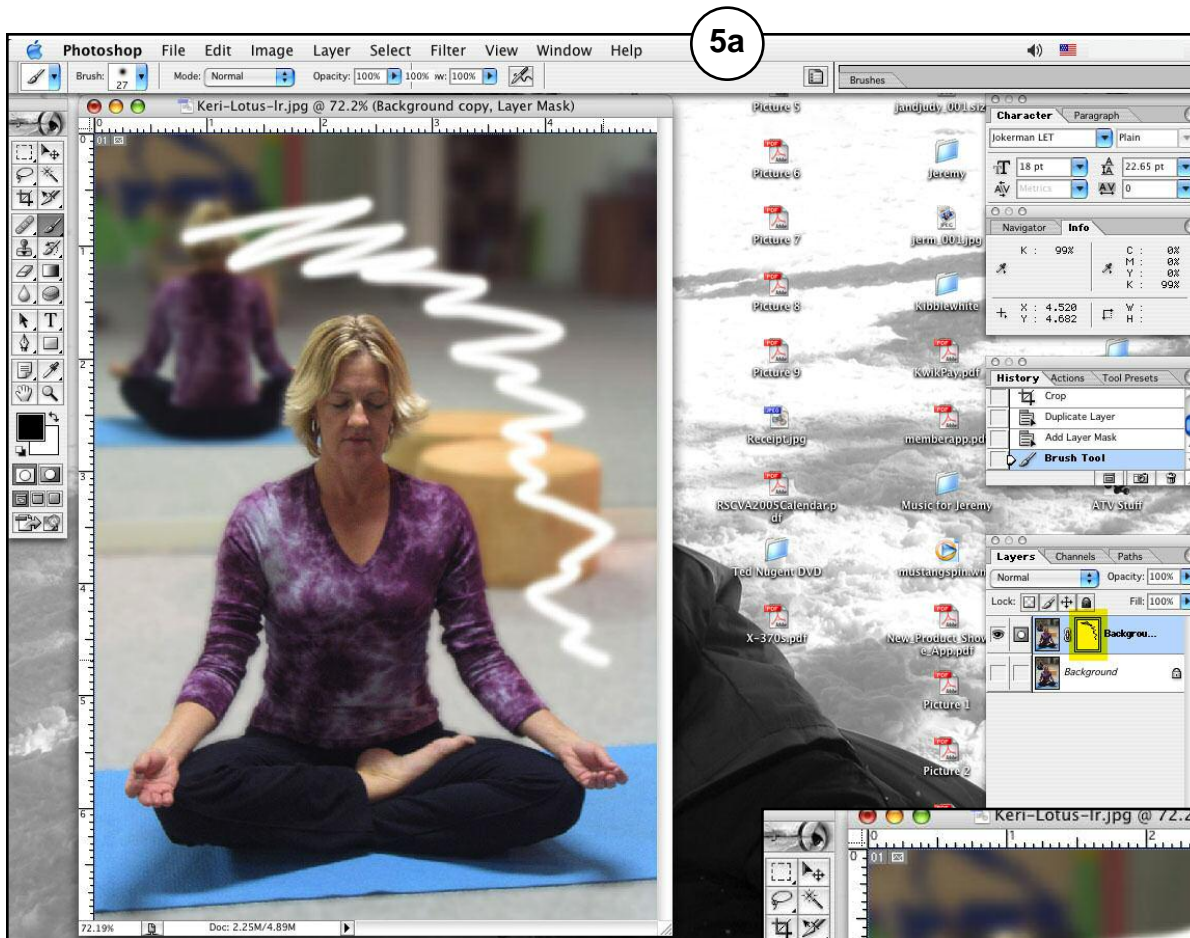


My goal for this photo is to drop out the background and the mat beneath Keri, and just keep her actual body. To do this, you can either use one of your selection tools (the magic wand tool {fig. 3a} or the lasso tool {fig. 3b}) or you can just paint/draw and erase directly on the layer mask (fig. 3c).



For the purpose of illustrating the theory behind layer masks, I chose the brush tool (fig. 3c). You'll then want to choose a brush size that feels comfy for you (fig. 4). Your brushes are located right underneath you PS menus. Ok, next page starts the fun stuff ... ready?

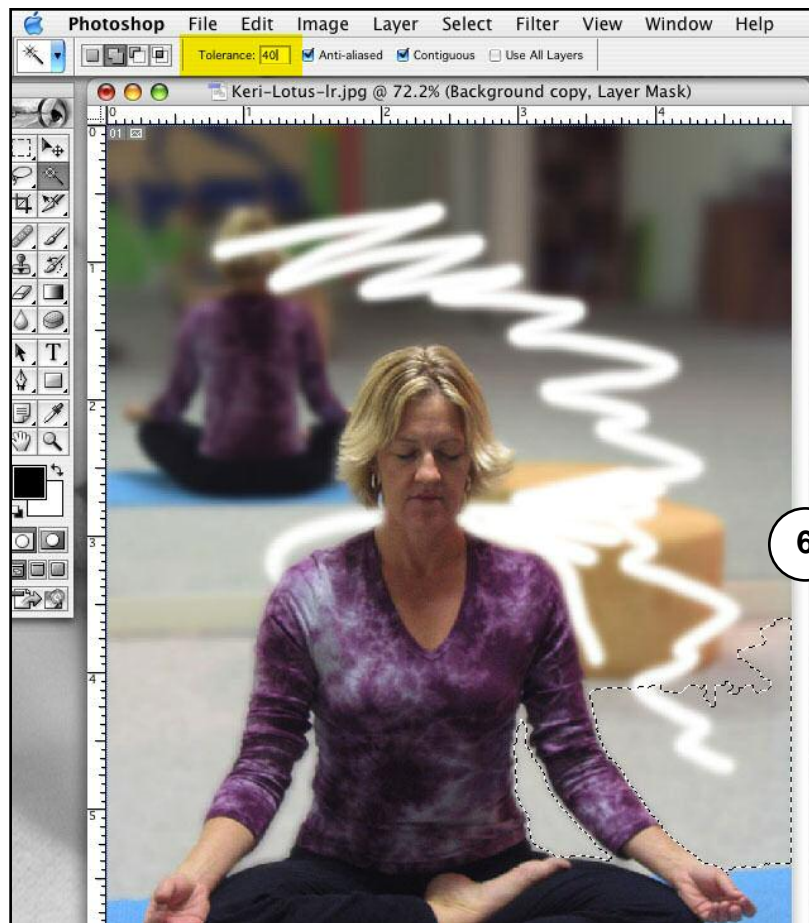




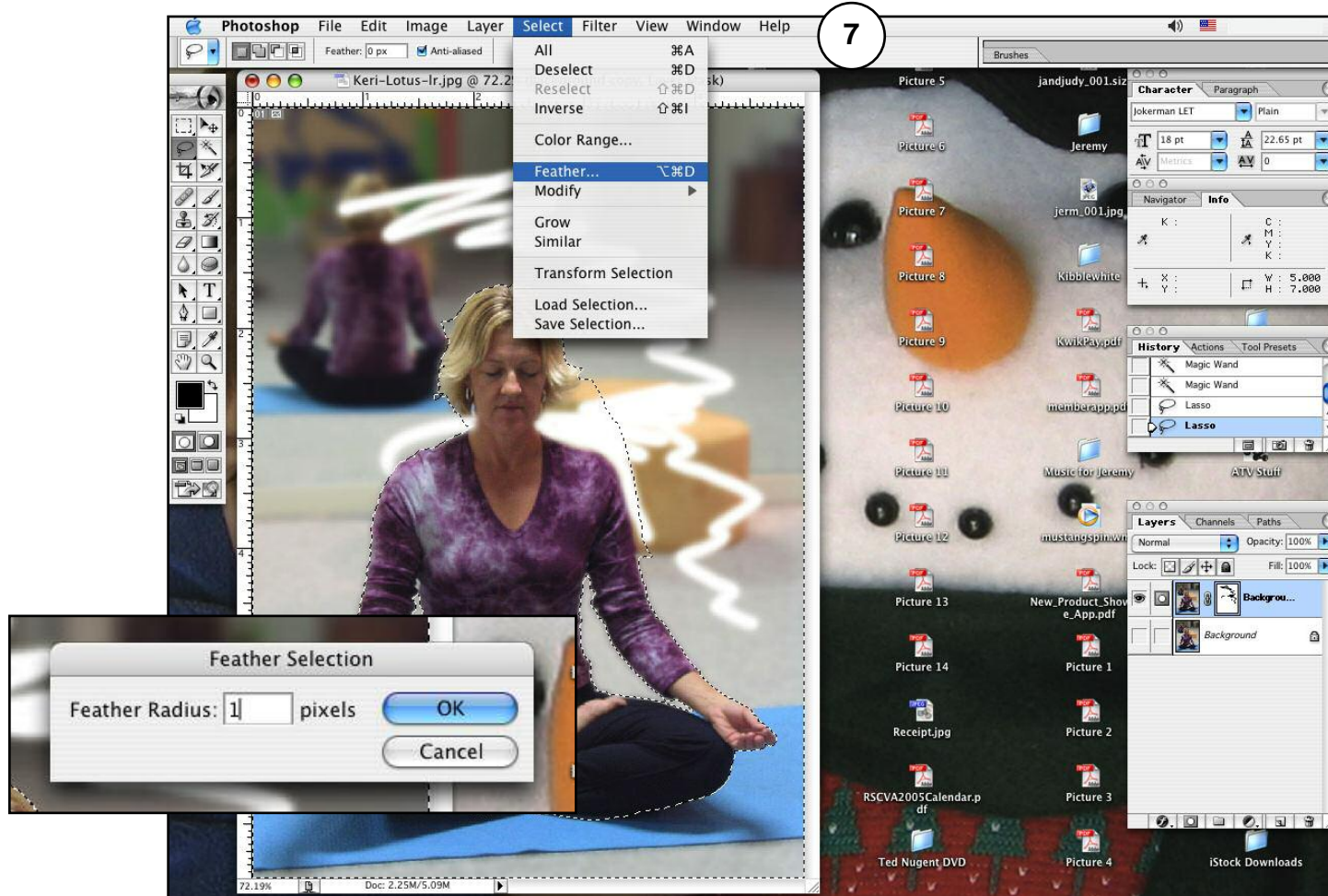
When you're thinking of layer masks, you need to kind of reverse your normal way of thinking regarding drawing and erasing. When you draw into a layer mask, you are in essence "erasing" from the primary image. Conversely, when you erase from a layer mask, you are "drawing back in" the main image. A mask is really just a sort of "block" on the image. Wherever there is data in the layer mask, it "blocks" that part of the image. So, if you just use your paintbrush tool and start scribbling into the layer mask (fig. 5a), you'll see that it *looks* like you're actually erasing image. Take a peek over at your layers palette and you'll see that everything that is white in your image is black in your layer mask. But uh-oh .. what happens when you get all wild and crazy with that paintbrush and actually run it right through her head?? (fig. 5b) No problem! Remember .. this is a layer mask ... you can always go back and rework something you did even a hundred steps ago. It's just drawing and erasing. So go and grab your eraser and erase the part that went across her body (fig. 5c).



Now, drawing and erasing the entire layer mask freehand can become tedious. Therefore it's sometimes helpful to use things like the magic wand, which selects areas based upon pixels of like colors. So for instance, if you want to select all the tan carpeting, click the magic wand on some tan areas (to add to a current selection, use the shift key). If your wand is only selecting a little tiny piece, or if it's selecting waaay too much and when you click on the tan it's selecting some of her hair and skin, too, then you need to adjust your tolerance. If your magic wand isn't picking up enough, increase your wand's tolerance (fig. 6). If it's picking up too much, reduce the tolerance. Play with that number until it works right for you. Once you get everything you want selected (or pretty darn close), you're ready to add that to your layer mask. I like to feather the selecting by a pixel or two, usually, so the selection isn't so rigid and harsh .. but that's just personal preference (fig. 7)



6



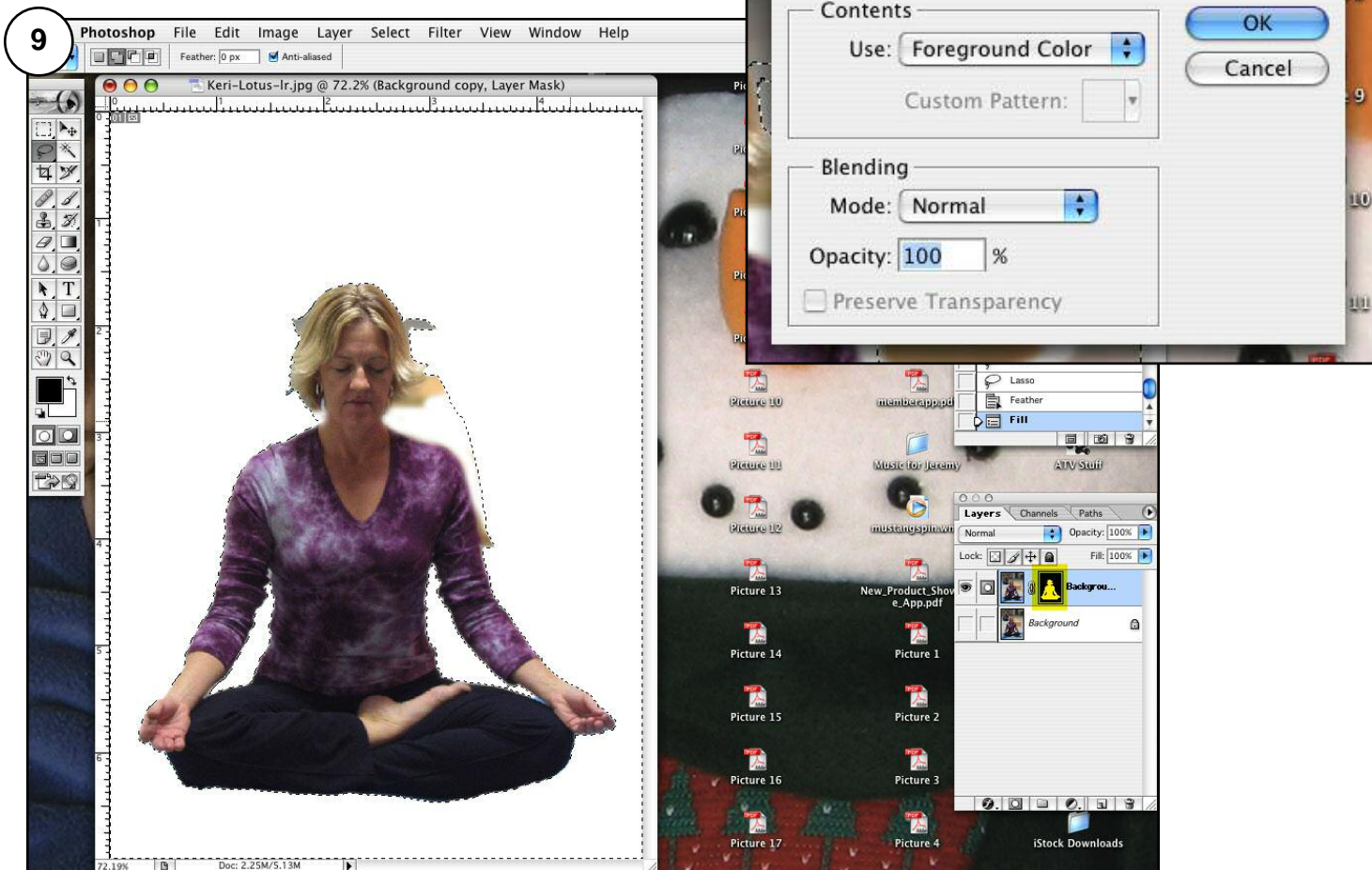
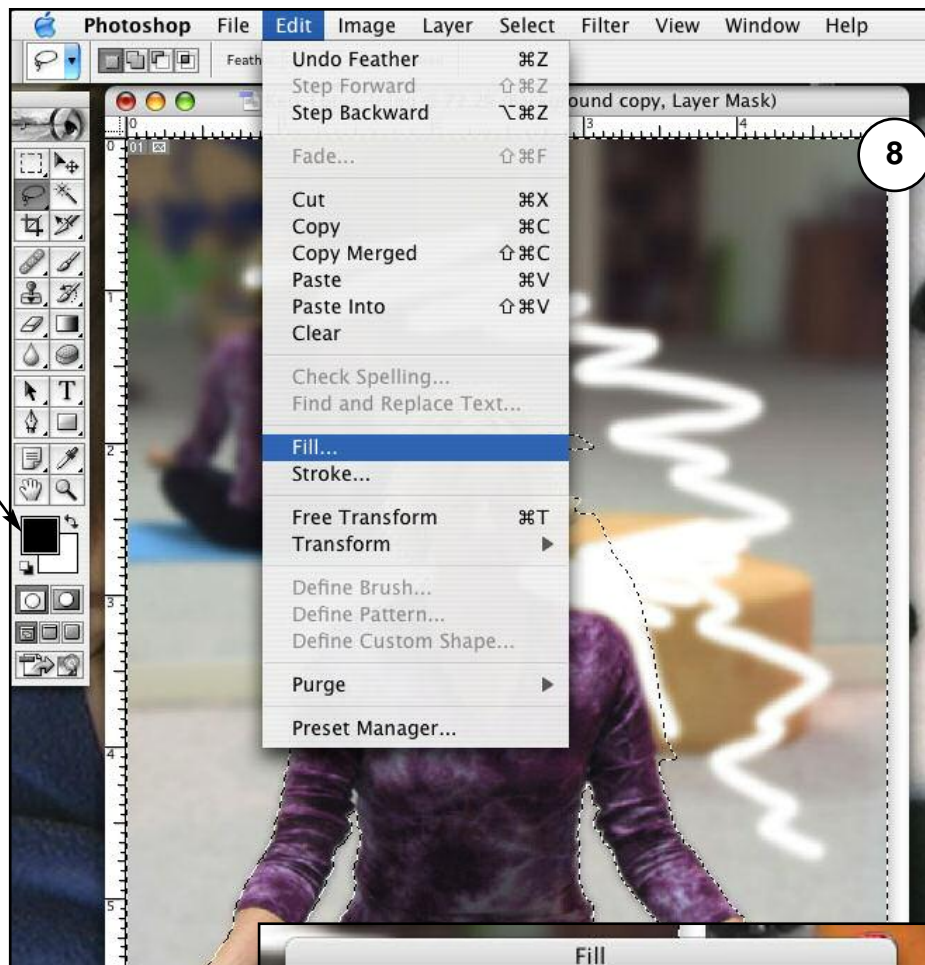
7



Next you'll want to fill the selected area in with your foreground color (presuming your foreground color is black. If it's not, click the small black/white box that is below and to the left of the larger 2-color boxes at the bottom of your tools palette, then click the little toggle arrow to get the black on top and the white on bottom). fig. 8.

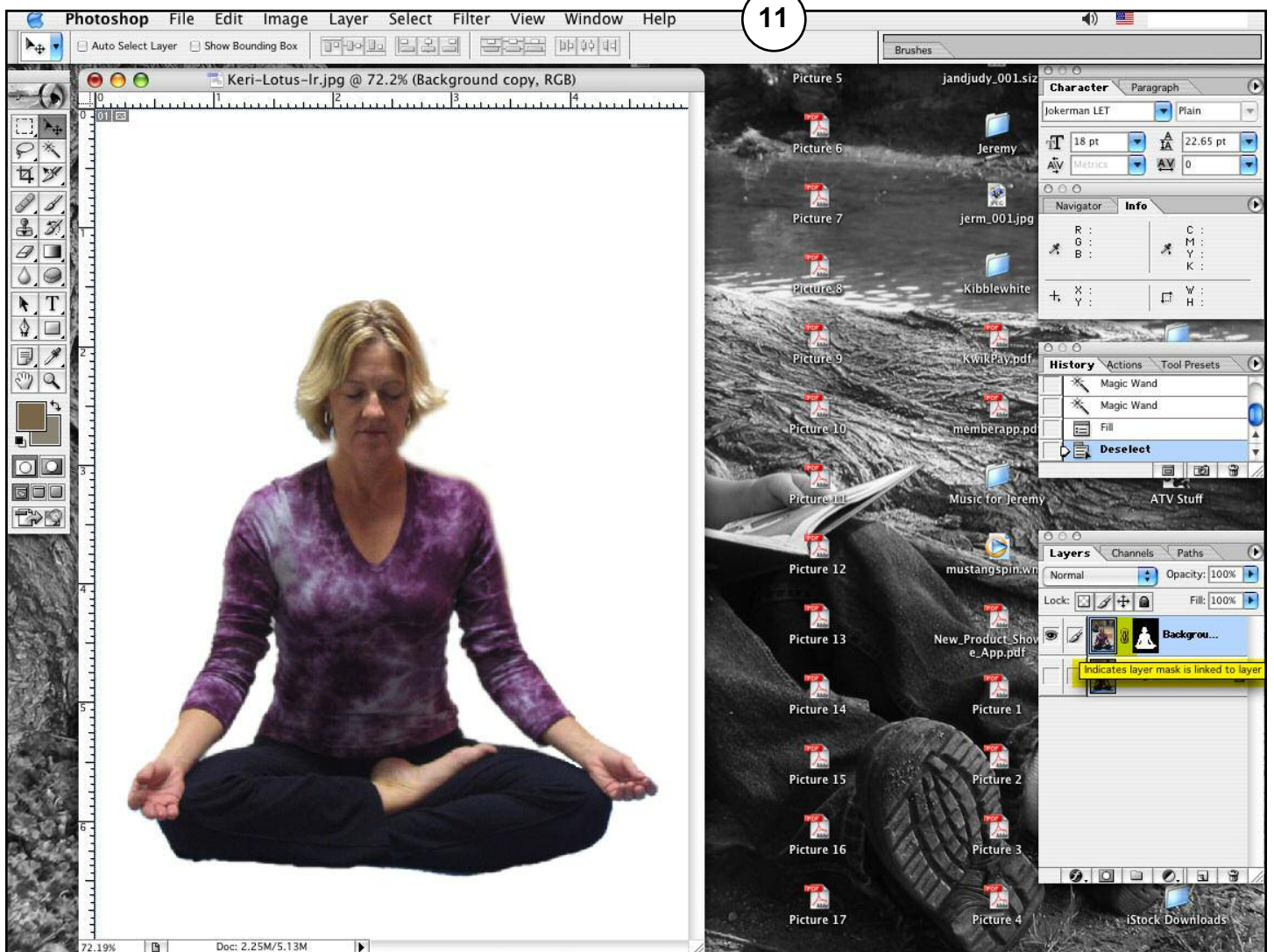
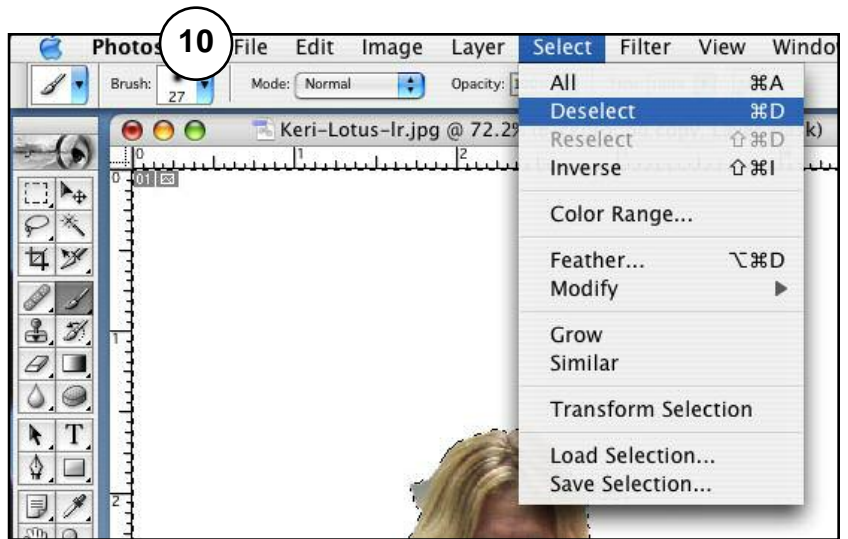
Once you click "ok" on the Fill popup, you'll see almost all your background "disappears" and Keri is floating on white space (fig. 9). Take a peek at your layer mask .. you'll see, again, that everything in the image that is white, is black in the layer mask.

Now it's just a matter of going in by hand and cleaning up some of the leftover junk around her head.



Before you can go clean up the straggler stuff, though, you have to deselect the area you currently have selected, otherwise you won't be able to do anything outside that area. (fig. 10)

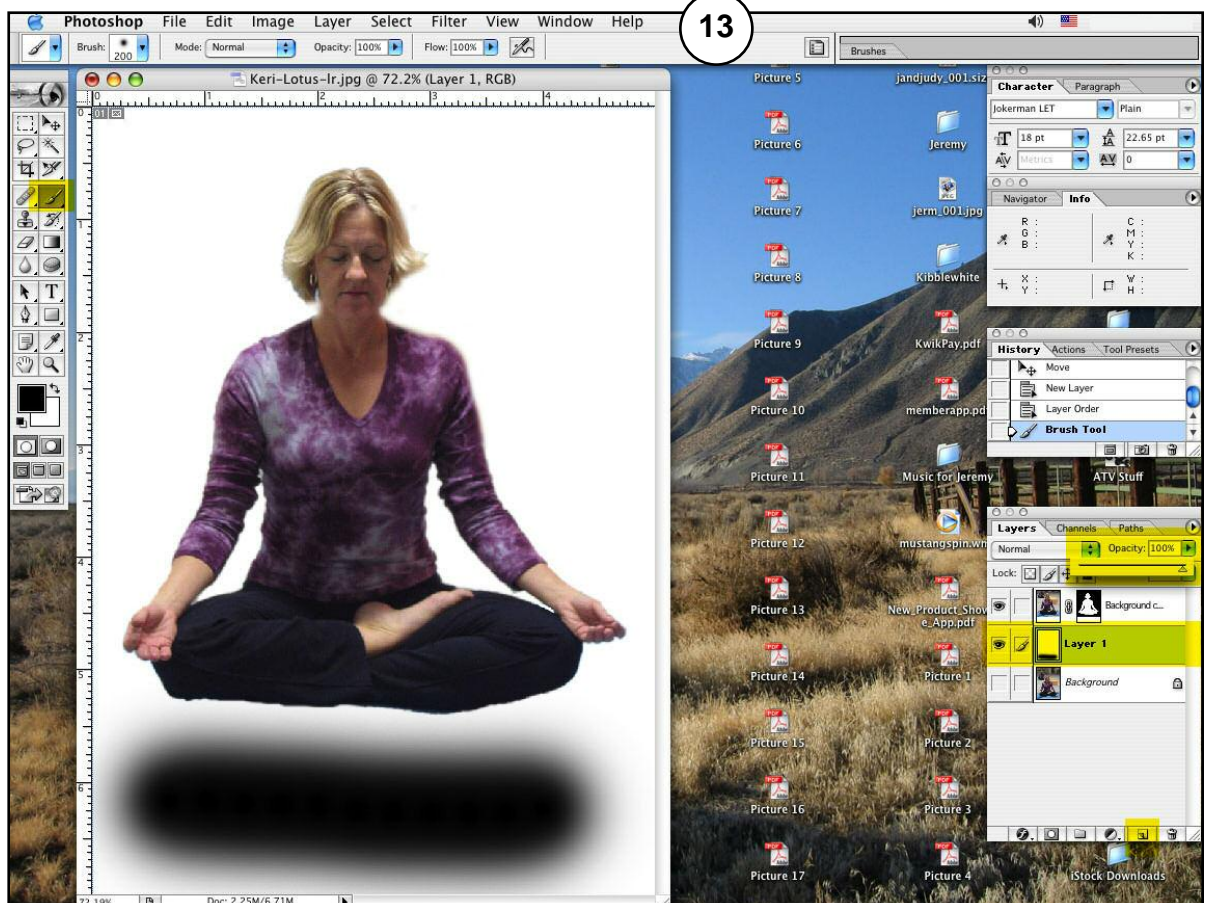
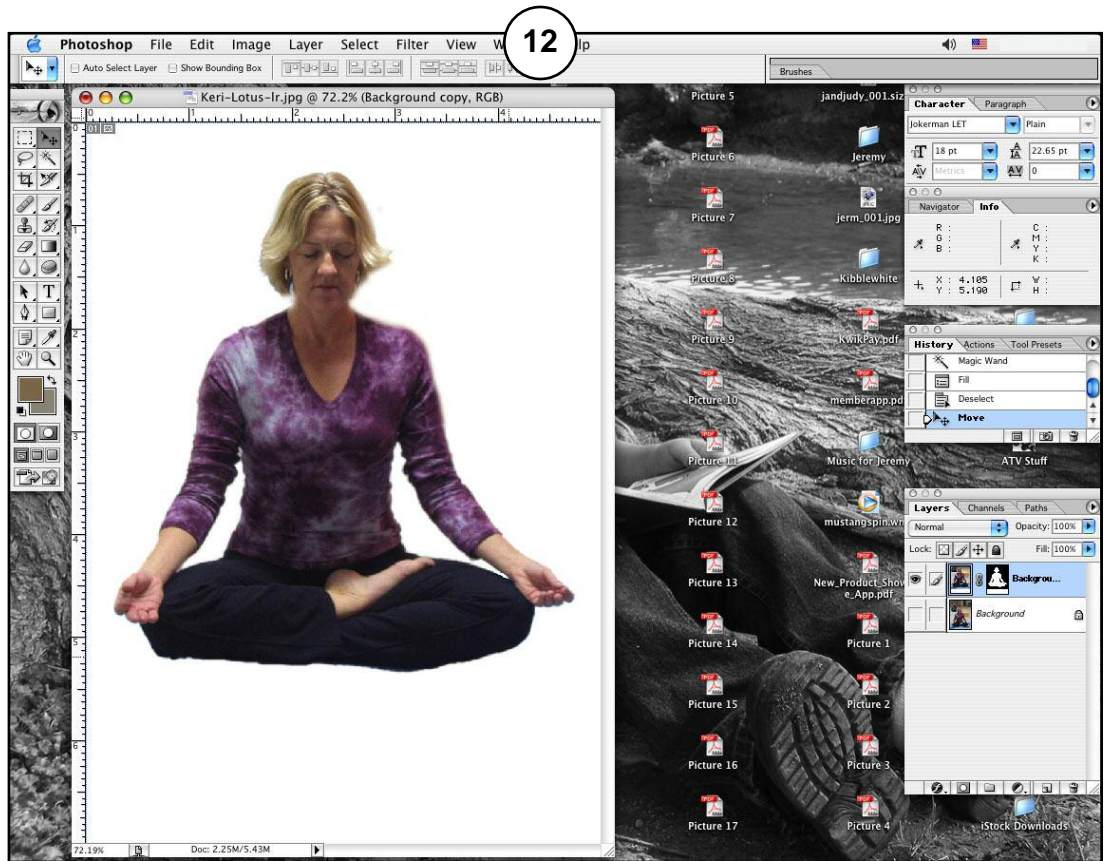
Now that my image is all cleaned up, I want to raise Keri up off the ground a little, so I can throw a shadow underneath her. I'll have to grab the Move tool (upper right of your tools palette) and click and drag her up a little ways. One thing I wanted to point out at this time is the little chain icon that indicates that the layer and the layer mask are linked (fig. 11). If you click in that area, you can turn the chain off, which means you can move your image independently of your layer mask, which can be very helpful in certain situations, but not this particular one. If you did that now, and then tried to move Keri up, her image would move, but her mask would not. So the white area would remain where it was, but the main image of her would move all around. Go ahead and give it a shot if you want .. you can always undo the effect. I just wanted to point out the link icon at this point, for future tutorial reference.





When you've moved her up a bit (with your image and layer mask linked), you can see in your layers palette that both the image and the mask moved up together (fig. 12).

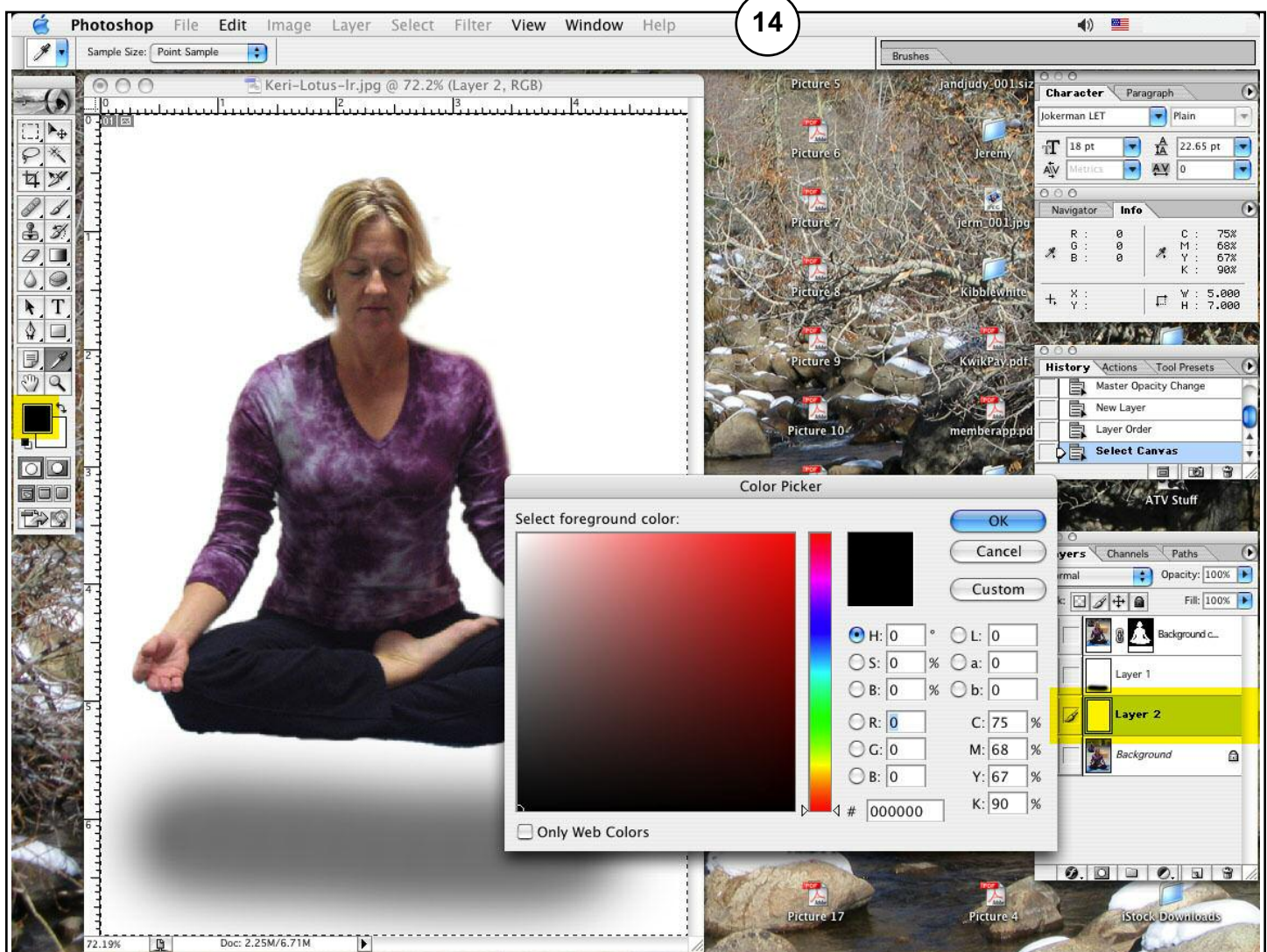
What I wanted to do next was add a shadow beneath her to give the illusion that she's actually floating. So I created another layer (by clicking the new layer icon in the layers palette - fig. 13), and placed that layer below the layer that Keri is on (you can drag and drop to position your layers). I then used my paintbrush icon and a big brush to just paint a big ol' black shadow beneath her. The reason that I placed that layer beneath the layer Keri is on is so that any bleed of that big black splotch wouldn't run over the top of Keri. Layers, just as the name indicates, present the data with the layer on top taking precedence over all layers beneath. Now, since that big fake shadow looks, well, big and fake, I'm going to change the opacity (or "strength", for lack of a better term) of that layer by using the opacity slider (fig. 13) on the layers palette.





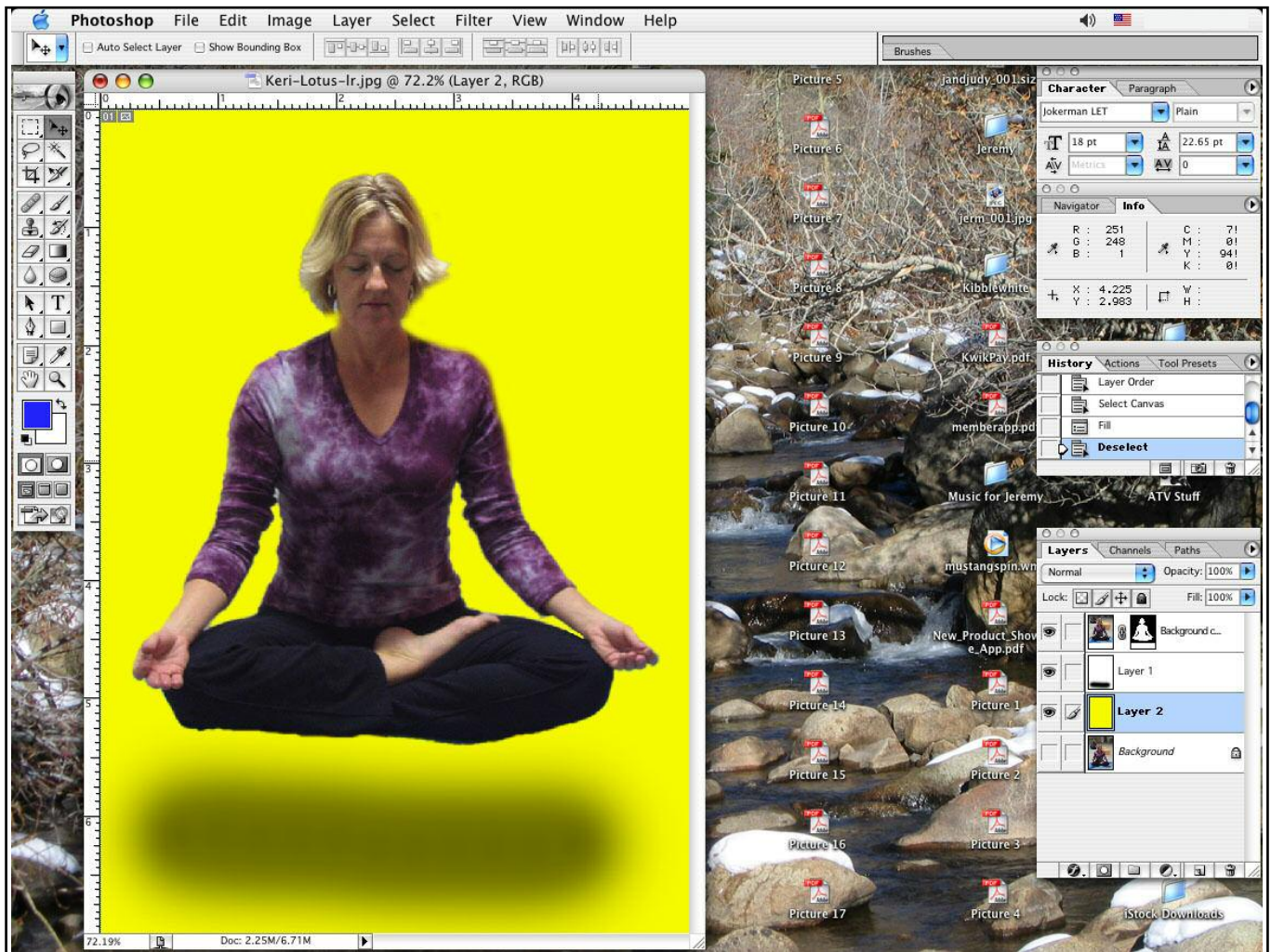
As you can see, the shadow has become a lot more “shadow-like” after you change the opacity to, say, 50% or so. Next, I wanted to put a big ugly yellow background behind the whole image. Don’t ask me why .. I think I may have a fetish for big ugly yellow things. So I created another layer in my layers palette, and placed it below the shadow layer (again, so that the shadow lays on top of the yellow background I’m going to place, as opposed to the yellow covering the shadow). To choose a color, click on the foreground color box (black one) in your tools palette, and you’ll see a color picker pop up (fig. 14). You can either use the slider to choose a color, or, if you have a particular RGB or CMYK or even html web value you want to type in, you can do that, as well. Once you select your color and click ok, fill the layer with your foreground color (same process as back on fig. 9).

14

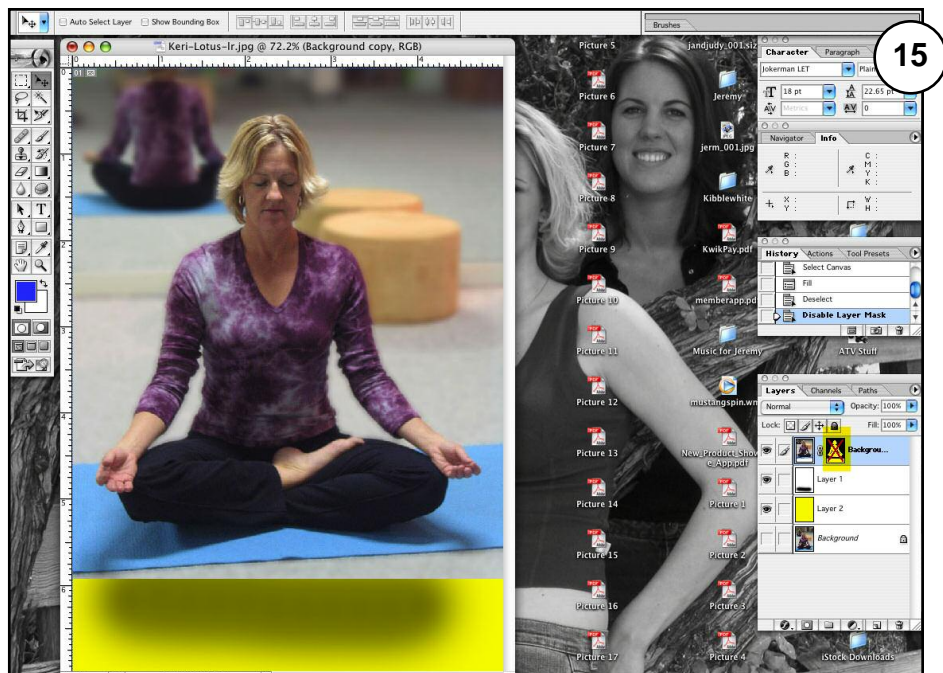




whoooo, boy, isn't that gorgeous? \*laugh\*

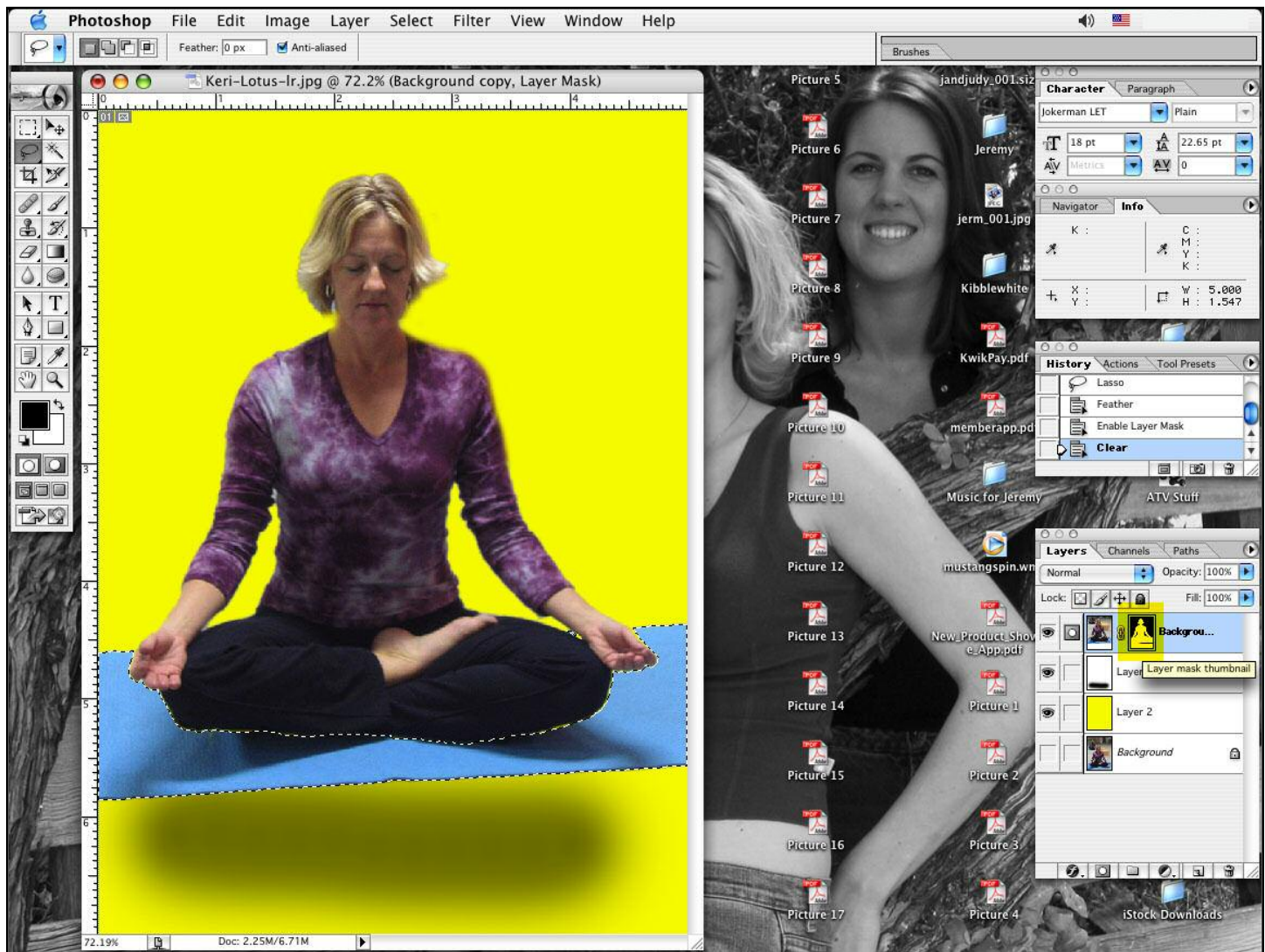


Problem is .. now I've decided that I want the mat back under her, to give the illusion of a “magic carpet”. If I had actually DELETED all that background stuff around her, I'd basically be screwed and have to start all over. Good thing I used a layer mask instead! So what I'm going to do is temporarily turn off the mask, by shift-clicking on the mask, which then shows me my original un-masked image. Then I'll use my magic wand to select the blue mat. I also used the lasso to select some of the darker shadowed parts, as the magic wand kept capturing part of her pants. Once the mat was selected, I turned the layer mask back on (shift-click it again), and then DELETED that selected area, which removes from the layer mask, but in effect adds BACK to the image ...

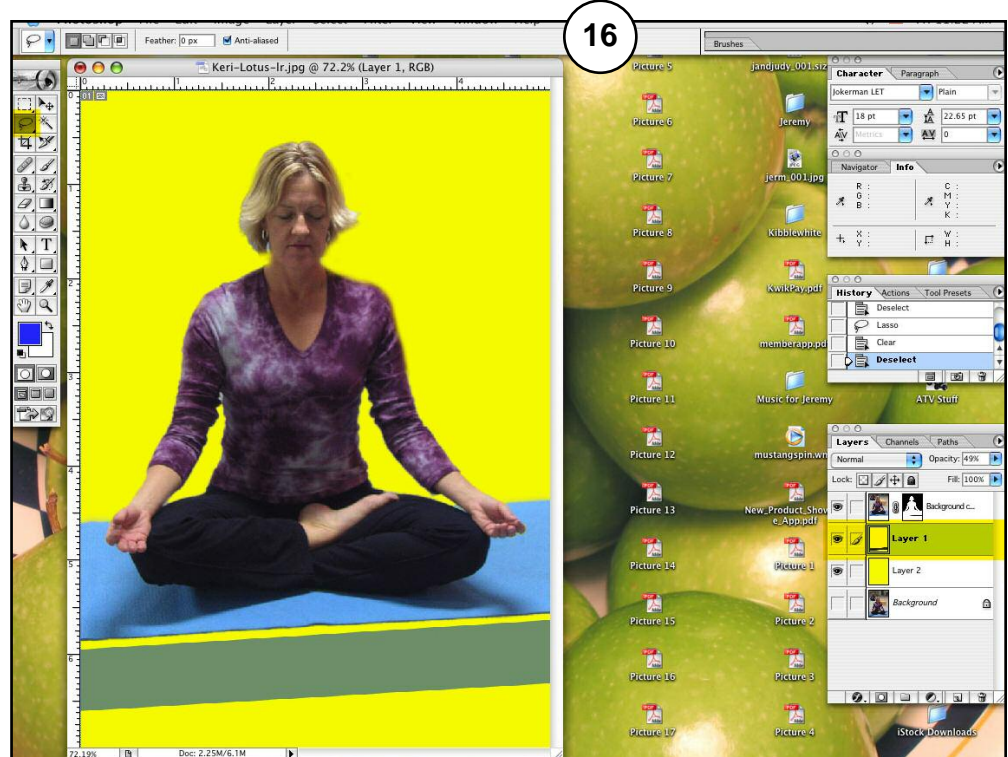




With this being the result.

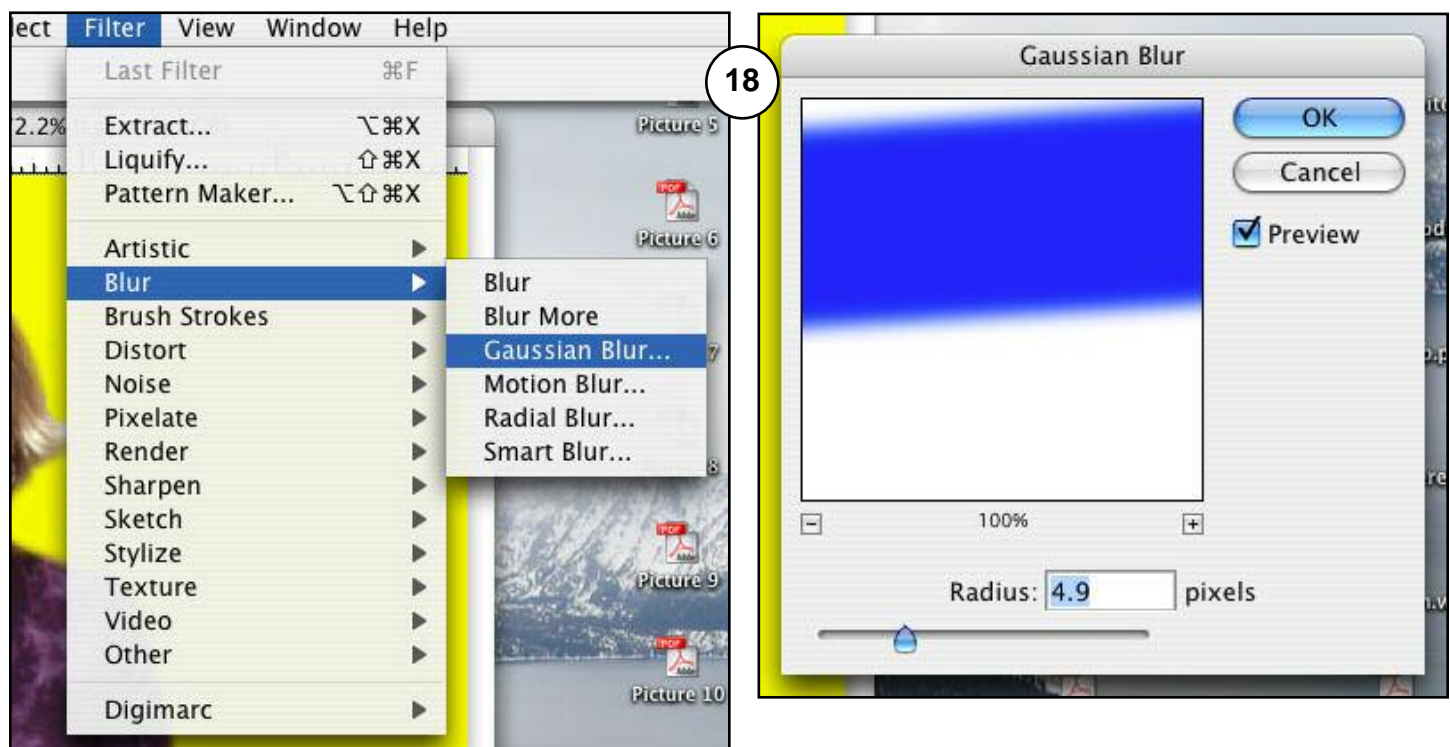
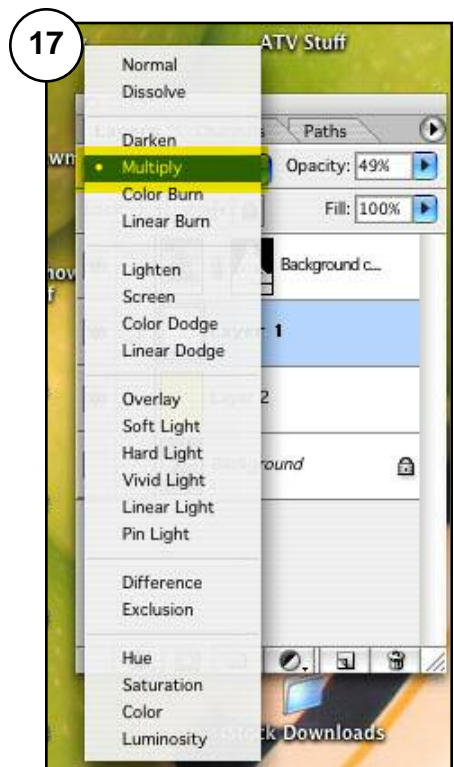


And now that I put her mat back under her, the shadow doesn't work. So I'm going to use my lasso and select an area something like the mat's shape, and fill it with a blue color, so that it looks like it's "reflecting" the blue of the mat, because shadows always reflect a little of the color of the object casting the shadow, too (fig. 16).



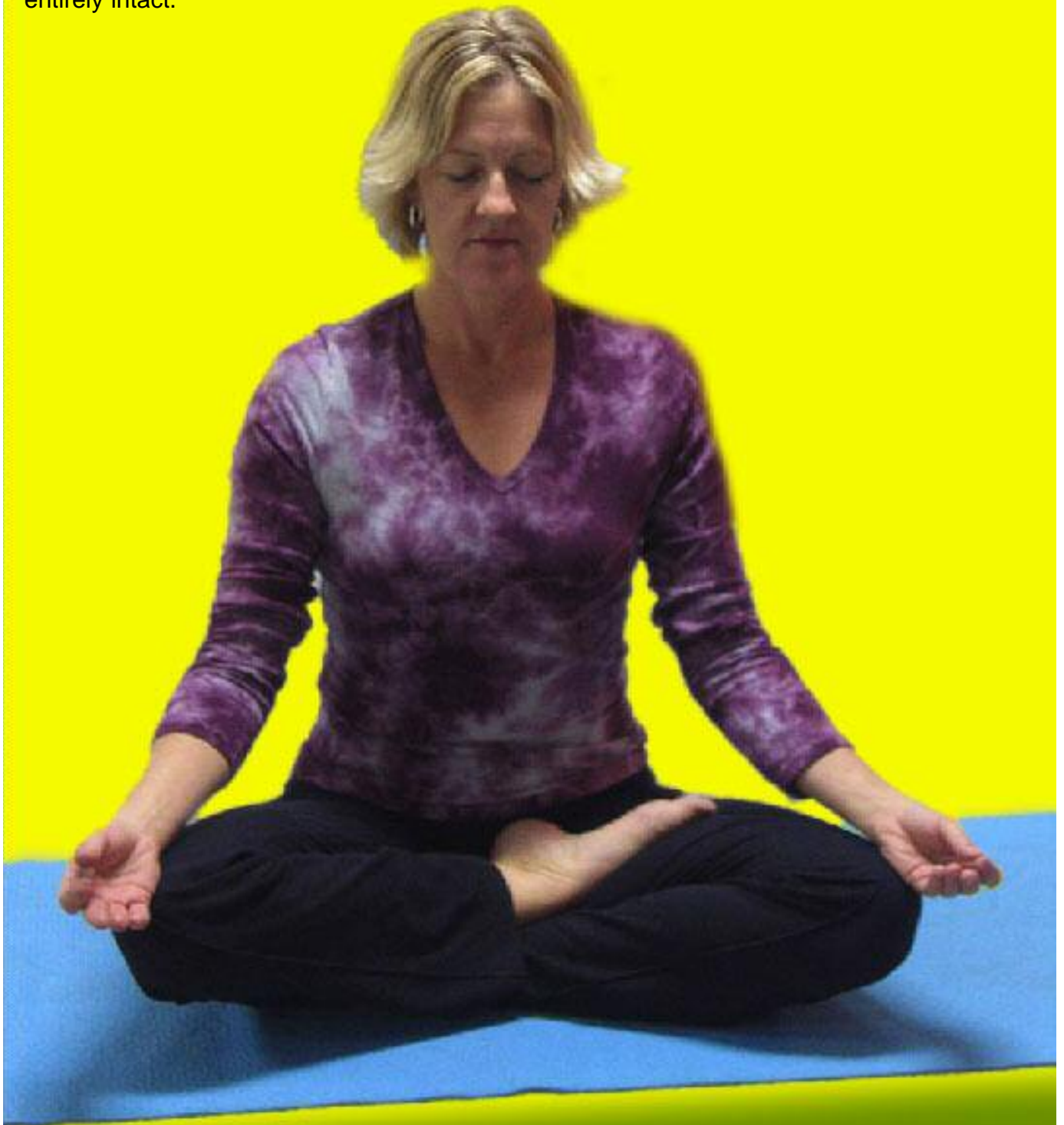
With that shadow's layer selected, I'm then going to mess around with the blending mode and change it to "multiply" (fig. 17). Blending modes are phenomenal mathematical-type effects for layers in PS. For more detailed info regarding the actual technical effects caused by these modes, please take a peek at my "tips & tricks", for which a link can be found in the DRProjects Links section, under "Cool graphic-design type stuff". For this exercise, suffice it to say that "multiply" takes the pixel values on one layer and multiplies them with the pixel values underneath, to give a more realistic idea of what a shadow would really be like.

Then I'm going to give it a quick gaussian blur, to soften the edges (fig. 18)





And voila! Instead of yoga-girl, she's "magic carpet ride" girl. And you haven't deleted a single thing! If you were to shift-click the layer mask on Keri's layer, you'd see the entire image is still entirely intact.



I hope this wasn't too basic of a lesson, but I wanted to make sure I took it step-by-step for those unfamiliar with Photoshop and how it works. Assuming anyone's interested in it, my next layer mask tutorial will cover how to make fun and funky custom borders around your photos.