



*Student meditating on the beach.  
Photo by Ann Nelson*

## Vacation with A Purpose Finding Myself Again

By Ann Nelson

**I**t happened when I quit watching TV. As a "baby boomer," I thought, like many others that I was close to being financially set. Then suddenly, everything changed in the fall of 2008. I felt numb, incapacitated, and shocked. Could this really be happening? Could I be losing what I've worked for and built up over the last twenty or thirty years? I felt paralyzed and started numbing myself with extra food and lots of TV.

I muted the commercials to give my mind a few quiet minutes to rest and then, the volume was on again. Senseless, pointless, I would watch almost anything. I was beginning to feel brain dead and empty. My first decision towards choosing sanity was to cut off the cable. If the options were limited, maybe I would cut down on my viewing time. It worked! I began to write down what I really wanted in life, and to take stock of what I was doing to myself. I knew I had a choice.

I could continue to go down the path of numbness and mediocrity, or accept the fact that

I did suffer a major financial loss, and it was now up to me to make a decision to move forward or to wither away like a grape on a hot summer day with a malfunctioning sprinkler system.

I started searching the Internet for someone who could help me climb out of my hole in a healthy and spirit-filled way. Sedona Spirit Yoga and Hiking caught my eye immediately. I read reviews of former clients and decided to take a leap of faith and make the phone call. I booked a three-day individual "Self-Renewal Yoga Retreat" in Oceanside, California.

Johanna Mahesvari Mosca, the developer of the retreat, has led personal-growth yoga workshops and retreats for over fourteen years. She is a former New York City school teacher and staff developer. Johanna started teaching yoga in New York City in 1990. She studied yoga intensively with Rama Jyoti Vernon for over ten years and studied "The Healing of Yoga" for six weeks in India at the Krishnamacharya Yoga School with TKV, Kausthub Desikachar and staff.

Johanna is passionate about

"yoga as a way of life," and was the perfect person to help guide me through my journey of self-renewal after receiving a blow I never expected. She is kind, gentle, and intuitive. I encouraged her to be brutally honest with me, and she was. Johanna had a knack for accessing my core, and telling me how I was wasting my energy dwelling on the past. She showed me how to rebuild my strength, confidence and spirit through talking and yoga. I felt safety in opening up to her because I could feel her unwavering support.

Johanna says "sometimes we get caught up in issues that prevent us from enjoying life fully, like clouds obstructing the sun. The method I believe in, and use in my practice is a way to: focus on an issue, feel and release the emotions involved, investigate what the issue is a need for, and consciously let go of that need. As a result of letting go, we gain freedom around what used to be an issue and experience renewed clarity."

During the retreat Johanna listened, taught me new methods of yoga, breathing, meditation, shared her wisdom, and encouraged me to write in my journal. We visited the meditation gardens in Encinitas and walked on the beach. We enjoyed healthy home-cooked meals. I slept like a baby each night I was there. I knew I was being honest with myself and moving forward. And, I felt protected.

The four-day yoga and hiking retreats through the Sedona Red Rock wilderness developed by Johanna was listed by Sunset Magazine as the "Number 1 Smart Vacation in May, 2008." Johanna believes in the basic premise that she talks about in her book "Yoga Life, 10 Steps to Freedom" and she incorporates these principles into her work. "When we learn to live a 'yoga life,' consciously incorporating these principles into our way of being, we can achieve consistent balance, peace and harmony." Teaching others how to incorporate this into their daily lives is the backbone of her work.

More than ever, I am realizing how important it is to not

try to "control" my life, but to let it unfold and to "relax into it" in a natural way. When I first heard about this concept, I remember thinking it was totally crazy! Now that I'm on a path of spiritual growth, I no longer question this concept at all. In fact, it makes perfect sense.

After my weekend experience, I realized firsthand the importance of yoga and meditation. In order for me to move forward, this must be an essential ingredient of my daily life. Johanna says, "as a yoga instructor, I create a safe space for my clients to go deeper within. Through the breath, we let go of all concerns and create a bridge from the mind to the body. I encourage my students to go to a soft edge, stretching gently beyond the body's initial movement into an extended stretch that is steady and comfortable. I guide students to focus within and find the inner sanctum where there is a feeling of total peace and well-being."

Considering what is going on in the world now, this lesson may be more important than ever before. In her book "Broken Open", Elizabeth Lesser says, "if we do not suffer a loss all the way to the end, it will wait for us. It won't just dissipate and disappear. Rather, it will fester, and we will experience its sorrow later, in stranger forms."

I remembered this lesson during my personal retreat, and my goal was to go home without baggage.

My drive home was quiet and peaceful. I was honest and truthful with myself and with Johanna. I felt a renewed clarity, and felt stronger. During this retreat, I was able to put my "mistakes" into perspective and proud of myself for having the courage to attend the retreat. The road ahead now was much clearer. I knew I was on the right path.

*Ann Nelson is a freelance writer, presently living in San Diego, California.*

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Sedona Spirit Yoga and Hiking  
& Self-Renewal Yoga Retreat  
(928)-282-9900  
www.yogalife.net

*Prices vary, depending upon program.*

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