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Health & Wellness • Yoga & Movement • Lifestyle • Travel • Spotlights



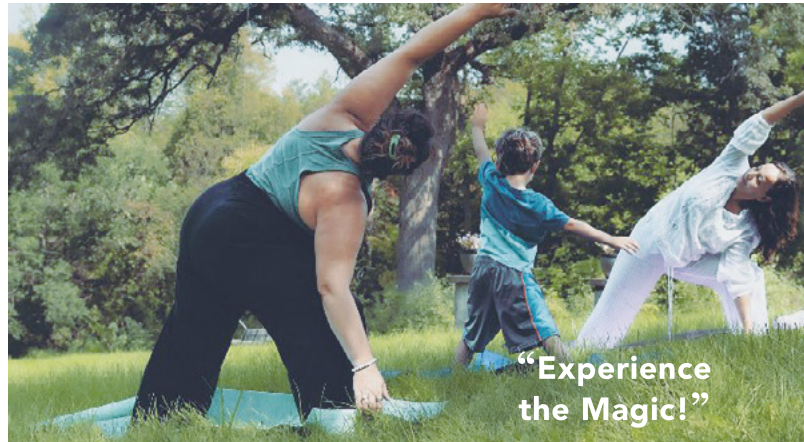
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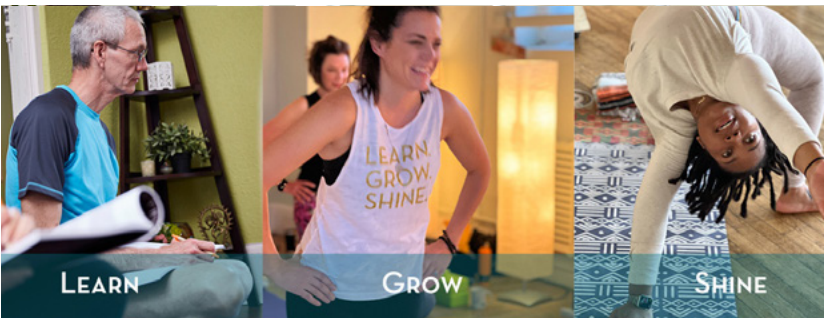
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The Fall Yoga Retreat in Rosemount, MN



OneLoveYoga at the Iowa Conference

His first quarter has been one of the bumpiest rides of my self-employed life.

There is a lot of unease in the world right now, and what we offer our community is more important than ever.

This issue of the magazine was, without a doubt, the hardest one to bring to life. Several members of my team needed to step away, my dear friend and designer has been navigating her own family crisis, and personally, I've been walking through the deep heartache of saying goodbye to my father after his stroke in February. I flew home in April to see him one final time, and was able to honor him with a eulogy at his funeral in May.

To say it's been chaotic feels like an understatement.

But if there's one thing I know about small business owners — about healers, teachers, and heart-centered leaders — it's that we carry the torch forward, even

in the storm. We keep lighting the way, because the world needs it. Especially now.

It's not easy. There are moments when the weight feels impossible. But this work — supporting wellness, offering tools for nervous system regulation like yoga, meditation, breathwork, and self-care practices — matters. And more than anything, we crave connection. That's where Midwest YOGA Magazine comes in: to link arms with you and help bridge providers with the people who need them.

As you flip through these pages, I hope you'll feel not only the love poured into every word and image but also our growing commitment to diversity, inclusion, and community.

Wishing you peace, resilience, and a heart full of hope during these unsettled times.

Amy Z.



AMY ZELLMER (SHE/HER)
editor-in-chief & publisher
www.midwestyogamag.com

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A JOURNEY OF YOGA

Wellness and Connection

Danielle Foertsch Newman's journey into yoga began when she moved to Duluth in 2013 and discovered the transformative power of a regular yoga practice. Fast forward to today, Danielle is an accomplished yoga therapist and instructor at the Snowy Cedar Center for Wellness, with a wealth of experience and a passion for helping others connect with their dharma—their life's purpose.

From Reluctant Student to Inspired Teacher

Initially, Danielle had no intention of teaching yoga. When she enrolled in a 200-hour teacher training program at Yoga North in Duluth in

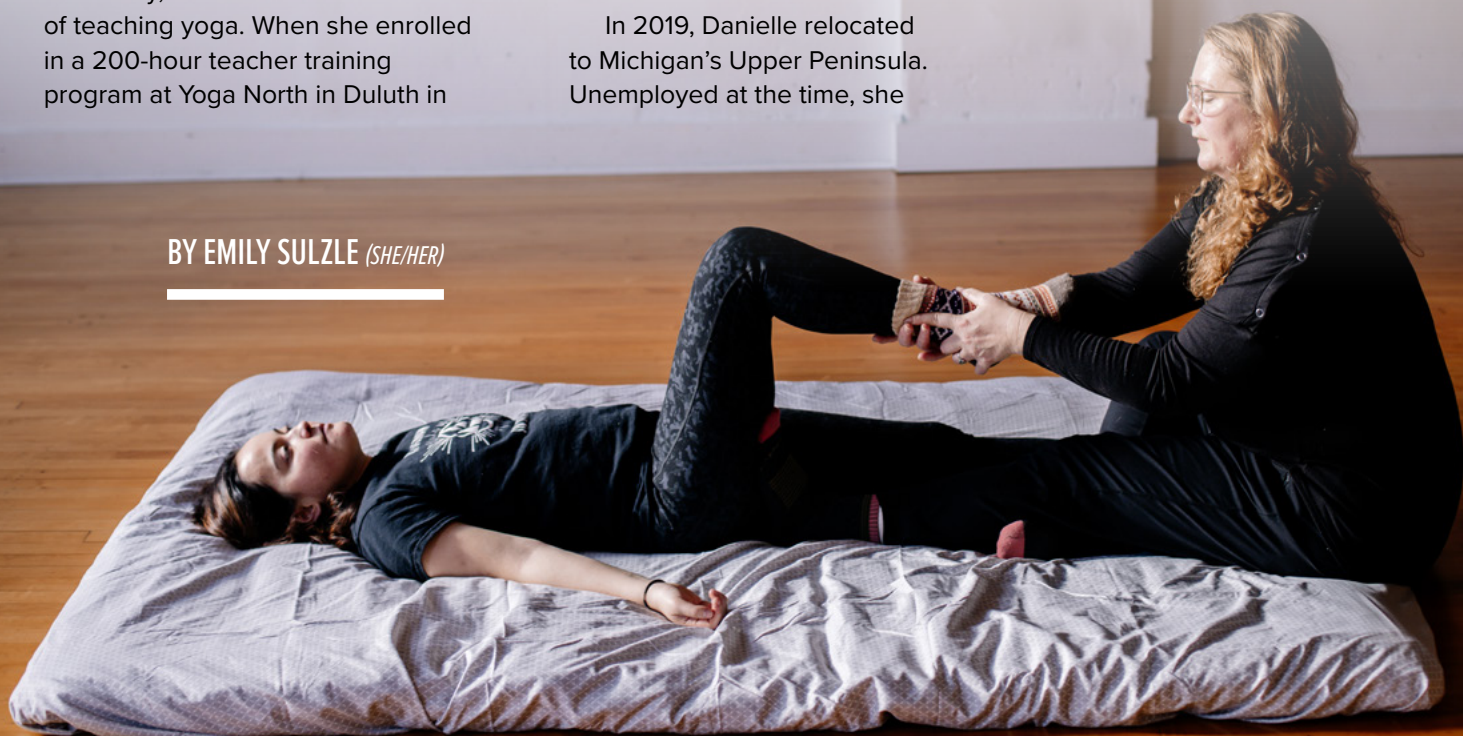
2018, it was purely for personal growth. "It's my dharma, and I'd been avoiding it," she recalls. Encouraged by her instructors, she completed her practicum teaching outdoor yoga classes by Lake Superior. In a memorable moment during her second week of teaching, a local news crew arrived to film the class. "It was nerve-wracking," she admits, "but it taught me resilience and confidence."

Building a Yoga Business in the Upper Peninsula

In 2019, Danielle relocated to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Unemployed at the time, she

decided to start her own business, hosting pop-up yoga classes wherever she could find space. Later that year, she took a position with the state of Michigan as an architect, balancing her professional career with her passion for yoga. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, she pursued advanced training, completing a 300-hour program through My Vinyasa Practice and enrolling in Yoga North's yoga therapy program, which she completed in 2022.

BY EMILY SULZLE (SHE/HER)



A Holistic Approach to Yoga Therapy

Danielle's approach to yoga therapy is deeply influenced by her somatic training and her studies of the yamas and niyamas, the ethical guidelines of yoga. Every year, she revisits these principles as part of a personal check-in. "For me, the real practice of yoga is applying these teachings in everyday life," she says. "Living well, finding joy, and letting go of attachment."

Her yoga therapy practice focuses on individuals seeking more than a physical workout. Her ideal clients are those who want to "live yoga"—people dealing with chronic stress, pain, or who simply want to deepen their connection to themselves. She has worked with a diverse range of clients, from student-athletes to elderly community members.

Balancing Yoga, Family, and Career

Danielle's full-time role with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources involves construction inspections, but she sees yoga as integral to her professional life.

"Building a community of people who care about themselves and each other is central to everything I do"

This sense of community also guides her yoga business, where she emphasizes joy, generosity, and authenticity.

Passion for Ayurveda and Personal Growth

After experiencing three pulmonary embolisms linked to a blood-clotting disorder, Danielle realized the

profound impact of stress on her health. Yoga and Ayurveda became key tools in her recovery.

"Breathwork and somatic yoga taught me to slow down and reconnect with my body"

Her favorite resource? Kate O'Donnell's *Everyday Ayurveda Cookbook*, which she recommends for its accessible and practical recipes.

Dreams for the Future

Looking ahead, Danielle dreams of growing her yoga therapy business to eventually become her primary focus. She envisions offering workshops, attending music festivals, and traveling while building a community of learners and practitioners.


In the meantime, she continues to teach at Fresh Coast Yoga in Houghton, Michigan, a studio she credits with supporting her growth as a teacher. "They've been phenomenal in making yoga accessible and welcoming to the community. I wouldn't be where I am without them."



Practicing Yoga in Rural America

Teaching yoga in rural areas comes with unique challenges, but Danielle embraces the opportunity to make yoga accessible and sustainable in small communities. She's also passionate about connecting with others, whether through in-person classes or online programs. "The pause I've taken recently has been good," she reflects. "It's given me clarity about what I want to focus on and how I want to serve."

Living Her Yoga

For Danielle, yoga is not just a practice but a way of life. "At the end of the day, people will remember how I made them feel," she says. Through her dedication to yoga therapy, her commitment to personal growth, and her ability to inspire others, Danielle continues to leave a lasting impact on her community and beyond. 

Visit Snowy Cedar Center for Wellness at:

snowycedarcenter.wixsite.com/snowycedarcenter

JULIE HILL

INSPIRED THINKING, LLC



BY MONICA DELIUS *(SHE/HER)*

Julie Hill has the energy of a teenager and a mind that moves as fast as a cheetah. There is never a dull moment with her as she shares stories of her career at the Aveda Institute and beyond.

Julie's journey into motivational speaking began unexpectedly during her time at the Horst Education Center/Aveda Institute. Initially focused on teaching hair design,

cutting, and coloring to the students in the classroom, she wasn't involved in public speaking. However, Horst Rechelbacher, the founder and visionary of The Aveda Corporation and Intelligent Nutrients, noticed her natural ability to connect with people. One day, he pulled her aside and said, "They listen to you. You need to put on a motivational class." Inspired by his encouragement, Julie created her first class, Positive Mental Attitude

(PMA). The overwhelming response from participants was transformative. Horst's belief in her talent and her students' feedback gave her the confidence to pursue this new path.

Julie began her Aveda career in 1984 as a Junior Instructor in Hair Design, eventually expanding her role to National Recruiter, National Sales Trainer, and Motivational Speaker. She speaks fondly of her journey with Aveda. Her time there

included meeting some of the most innovative and inspirational thinkers of the time. An opportunity arose to work with an Aveda distribution center, helping Aveda Salons with product sales, client retention, and value-added customer service. This experience in teaching salon teams, corporate training, and distribution laid the foundation for her future ventures. Julie has simple yet impactful advice to those who sell services or products. She says your sales and recruitment go hand in hand. If you believe in what you are doing and are passionate about it, the sales will follow. For a few years, Julie branched into radio advertising with Salem Communications. She helped clients with business growth strategies on-air and online.

Her passion for health and wellness issues led her to co-produce and co-host a radio show: "Inspired Talk on Aging and Wellness."

After years in the field, Julie founded her motivational speaking company *Inspired Thinking*, which focused on salons and women's networks. In 2011, she aligned with Vitalia Bryn-Pundyk. They combined beauty, fashion, health, and wellness and organized women's events and motivational sessions across the Minneapolis and St. Paul area. They had a wonderful partnership for ten years. Julie's passion shifted even more towards health and wellness, leading her to focus her business on conducting yoga, tai chi, and self-development programs. She teaches three yoga classes weekly at the Veterans Memorial Community Center in Inver Grove Heights.

Julie actively mentors others, encouraging them to join organizations like Toastmasters International. She credits Toastmasters with providing the network and skills to evolve into a great communicator. She stressed how impactful being a member of this group had made on her life and her career. Julie's greatest joy comes from knowing she helps others live their best lives.

She continues to share her motivational energy through yin yoga, chair yoga, and tai chi sessions at community centers, businesses, and coaching one-on-one.

She believes that passion and authenticity are the keys to thriving in any field. She says when you truly believe in what you're doing, success follows.

Julie reflects on two pivotal moments: Horst's encouragement after her first PMA class, which sparked her love for motivational speaking, and Mr. Nice, her 11th-grade speech teacher, who recognized her gift for public speaking and suggested she pursue it. Julie's advice is simple yet profound: "Carpe diem—seize the day." She believes in the quote from Jim Rohn;

"Don't just get through the day, get from it."

She believes in creating a ripple effect, where every action has the power to inspire and transform others.

With her tagline, "Imagine, Dream, Transform," Julie has spent over forty years inspiring others to embrace personal growth and self-improvement.

Her logo of a ripple effect symbolizes her philosophy that every action creates ripples. Be mindful of your actions, and while mistakes can happen, self-correction is always possible. She views this magazine and the Minnesota Yoga Conference as platforms to foster a supportive community within the health and wellness field, enabling professionals to connect and collaborate. Additionally, she sees it as a valuable resource for individuals seeking wellness services.

Julie Hill's story is one of vision, passion, and an unwavering commitment to helping others thrive. Her message continues to resonate with everyone she meets, inspiring them to pursue their dreams and live their best lives.

Her inspiring workshops and training programs encourage people to imagine...dream...and transform!



You can reach Julie at inspiredthinking.org

HEALING THROUGH TOUCH:

An Interview with Ka Zoua Xiong

BY TANYA BOIGENZAHN (SHE/HER)

As a teacher and passionate student of yoga and the healing arts, I couldn't help but want to share more about one of my exceptional students who is making a huge shift in her community and at large. Please meet Ka Zoua Xiong in the interview below.



TANYA: Please share a bit about your personal journey and what led you to become a Thai Yoga Bodyworker.

KA ZOUA:

A few years ago, I started teaching yoga mostly to my community. One day while teaching Yoga Nidra, I saw them lying there and had the urge to place my hands on them so strongly... a pull to "do this." I always enjoyed giving my elders massages. I started researching. In November 2023, I signed up for Intro to Thai Yoga Bodywork at Devanadi Yoga taught by you, Tanya. I came with my husband and continued from there.

TANYA: How does your Hmong heritage influence your approach to Thai Yoga Bodywork (TYB) and healing?

KA ZOUA:

The Hmong people come from a long lineage of spiritual healers with strong ancestral ties. I don't think it was a surprise that I found

the energy healing aspect of TYB the most intriguing. As modest people, most of us didn't grow up with that physical affection. So touch, and the ability to rest that TYB provides, have been so different and opposite to what the people in my community are used to. The history of Hmong moving, migrating from China to Vietnam to Laos, and eventually to Thailand... their flight and flight trauma has been passed down for generations. So having a place to come and receive and rest and be touched is so new. I was shocked it was so well received by my community. I noted I was offering practice sessions on my Facebook page and got a waitlist.

TANYA: How would you describe the connection between TYB and Yoga in promoting overall well-being?

KA ZOUA:

I'm still guiding clients to follow their breath. Some people didn't know they were as flexible and could move in that way, which is a happy surprise. The whole experience becomes a meditation experience for both the body you're working on and the giver.

TANYA: Many yoga practitioners seek bodywork to complement their practice. How do you tailor your treatments to support yogis?

KA ZOUA:

We start every session with a consultation followed by an energy reading if the client is interested. Every session is just about what's happening in the body that day... just like yoga. I can't assume that just because someone can do a bunch of yoga poses means they need a certain kind of session. Sometimes people just need a slow, gentle session to allow them to come back to the body and rest in that way.

TANYA: Can you share a memorable experience where your bodywork significantly impacted a client's life?

KA ZOUA:

I worked with a busy Hmong couple who were trying to conceive. They had sought out other alternative modalities. But after receiving TYB and energy healing, they were able to naturally conceive. They even messaged me that day, and it made me tear up knowing that just creating that place for their bodies to rest and heal allowed their nervous systems to open up to the possibilities they were hoping for.

TANYA: What misconceptions do people often have about bodywork, and how do you help educate them?

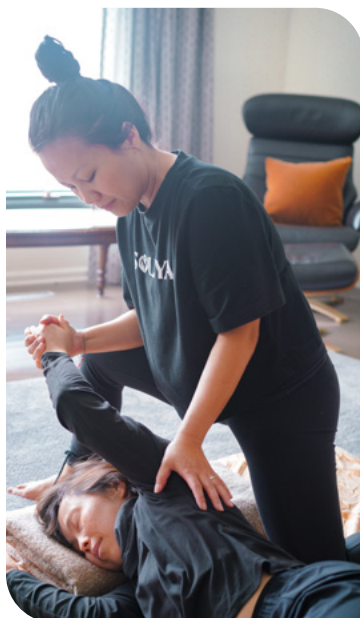
KA ZOUA:

Most think it's a table massage experience. I come from a very modest community. In TYB you can keep your clothes on, and that is a plus. I have also made mini social media videos to show what they can expect before coming in. In our consultation, I explain everything we'll do, and I also remind them that if they don't feel comfortable they can tell me and I can adjust.

TANYA: What are some challenges or rewards you've experienced as a Hmong practitioner in the wellness industry?

KA ZOUA:

One of the biggest challenges is navigating the mindset that wellness is a luxury and not an



investment in mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. But overall, there have actually been a lot of rewards. As I continue to grow my offerings, I look forward to expanding my services and connecting outside of the Hmong community.

TANYA: How can the yoga/wellness community better honor and include diverse healing traditions like those from the Hmong culture?

KA ZOUA:

I'd love to see more collaborations with different communities through bodywork, sound healing, energy work and yoga to bring healing to many people. This would be very powerful I feel.

TANYA: Are there any traditional wellness practices you wish were more widely known or understood?

KA ZOUA:

I think back when I started my spiritual journey some years ago. I didn't know about energy healing and how it's been incorporated into TYB is so special. My clients just respond, "This is like everything in one!"

TANYA: For someone interested in exploring Thai Yoga Bodywork, what advice would you give them?

KA ZOUA:

Be open to the experience and keep coming back because there's so much more that can be offered that just cannot be done in one session. TYB is a beautiful, gentle, healing practice that I wish everybody could have the opportunity to receive. Try out different TYB practitioners and see who you resonate with. Don't give up after your first try.



Learn more about
Ka Zoua Xiong:
soulyayoga.com

Learn more about
Thai Yoga Bodywork:
thaiyogabodywork.com

HEALING THROUGH *Mindfulness* Practice

© saritphotography



BY MCCALL KELLY (SHE/HER)

Life is filled with twists and turns that eventually guide us to our true path and purpose.

Sometimes, it takes years to fully understand what that purpose is. For Mary Higgs, MA, the journey has led her exactly where she is meant to be today.

Mary embodies many roles: online college English instructor, RYT 200, speaker, writer, certified accessible and adaptive yoga teacher, and respected author. Her latest accomplishment is writing her first book *Mindful Practice: A Beginner's Guide to Vibrant Living*—a guide to healing by reconnecting the mind, body, and spirit.

Mary's story took a sharp turn at just 19 years old. A devastating car accident left her with a severe spinal cord injury and a shattered sense of identity. Once a dancer and cheerleader with dreams of becoming a Broadway choreographer, she suddenly questioned everything.

"What am I going to do if I'm not a dancer?" she remembers asking herself.

After a year and a half of intense physical therapy, Mary wasn't sure if she would ever walk again. "I was mentally fighting my diagnosis," she says. Internally, she had lost her passion. Amid the struggle, Mary began writing and journaling as a way to express her emotions—a practice that would become a lifeline.

But it wasn't until decades later—at age 51—that her life shifted again. In 2015, Mary stumbled upon accessible and adaptive yoga, which she describes as "a journey of relearning how to come back into my body."

Although her doctors initially discouraged her, Mary couldn't shake the thought: If not now, when?

That first chair yoga class sparked something profound.

"After the car accident, I didn't know how to reconnect with my body. I lost the mind-body connection," she explains.

"For me, yoga is not about the poses. It's about the internal mind-body connection, finding your own journey, and learning to listen to your inner wisdom."

Yoga and mindfulness became cornerstones in Mary's life—not just for her physical recovery, but for her mental and spiritual well-being as well. Eventually, she realized she wanted to share these life-changing practices with others.

Importantly, for Mary, yoga isn't about fitness, achieving the "perfect" pose, or fitting a certain image.

"My goal is to demystify yoga and mindfulness for people," she says. "I want people to find their own journey and learn tools that will set them on their own path."

This philosophy is at the heart of *Mindful Practice*. Designed for beginners, Mary's book offers practical strategies for building a personal mindfulness routine. From mindful breathing to journaling to adaptive yoga practices, Mary provides accessible tools for everyone—regardless of age, physical ability, or previous experience—to connect with themselves on a deeper level.

"Seeking solace outside of yourself will never feed your inner wisdom," Mary explains. "We all have access to it; learning to tap into it can make a difference."

Through her own journey, Mary proves that healing isn't about returning to who we once were—it's about discovering who we are meant to become.



To learn more about Mary and her offerings, head over to yogiable.com

ASHLEY VASAS: FOUNDER OF

NOURISH & GROW YOGA

BY MONICA DELIUS (SHE/HER)

Ashley Vasas, the founder of Nourish & Grow Yoga in Minneapolis, Minnesota, discovered yoga during a pivotal time in her life. After a severe car accident in 2013 left her with chronic pain due to whiplash, she sought a low-impact fitness solution to help her heal. What she found was far more transformative than she anticipated.

Initially turning to yoga as a means to help with stress and manage pain, Ashley's journey took a significant turn in 2016 when she stumbled upon a Yoga Tune Up® class in Ottawa, Canada. The class introduced her to self-myofascial release using therapy balls. For Ashley, the results were immediate and profound. By the end of the session, her body moved much more easily than at the start of the class. This tangible transformation ignited her passion for this therapeutic modality and set her on a path to deepen her practice and eventually share it with others.

By 2020, Ashley began yoga teacher training, and that year, Nourish & Grow Yoga was born despite the challenges of starting during the pandemic. Always eager to learn more, Ashley completed rigorous training to become a certified Yoga Tune Up teacher in 2021. The week-long certification process was intense, with eight-hour training days and evening homework, but it equipped her to integrate this therapeutic approach into her work.



Ashley's training in Yoga Tune Up helps her combine self-myofascial release, movement, and yoga to target muscle tension, enhance mobility, and highlight habitual patterns in the body. Ashley describes the practice as a therapeutic, tangible way for her students to learn about their bodies and improve how they move and feel. Her classes include movement, stretching, and working with therapy balls to improve flexibility and range of

motion. This experiential and results-driven approach is what sets this modality apart.

Classes based on the Yoga Tune Up methodology identify “blind spots” in the body—areas prone to tension or imbalance. Addressing these areas improves posture, relieves muscle tension, and enhances fascia health through myofascial release.

Healthy fascia is hydrated and flexible, allowing smooth movement, while unhealthy fascia becomes stiff, sticky, and can cause pain or tension. Dehydration, lack of movement, or injury can damage fascia. Practices like yoga and myofascial release can help maintain or restore fascia health.

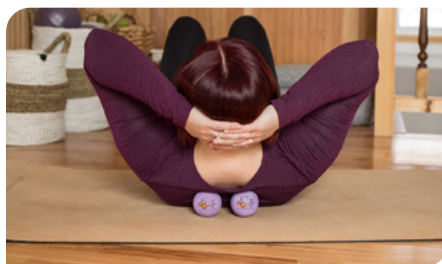
The therapy ball techniques that Ashley teaches:

- **Relieve muscle tension**
- **Improve fascia hydration and flexibility**
- **Increase range of motion**
- **Support better movement and performance**

By keeping fascia hydrated and pliable, these techniques help prevent adhesions, enhance mobility, and promote smooth movement, enabling you to stretch further, lift more, and move more freely.

Ashley's fiery passion fuels her dedication to teaching. She is committed to sharing the life-changing benefits of yoga and deep tissue work with others. Having experienced firsthand the profound impact these practices had on her physical and mental health, she is motivated to help her students achieve the same.

She credits her journey, including the challenges of recovery after surgery, with also teaching her the importance of rest, surrender, and self-care. These lessons now inform her teaching and inspire her



mission to support others in their wellness journeys.

Nourish & Grow Yoga offers virtual classes, private yoga sessions, online videos, workshops, and yoga for small groups and events. She can be found teaching in person and virtually at Odigo Wellness, a brand-new space in Uptown, Minneapolis. Odigo is a wellness space owned and run by diverse practitioners combining their various skills and passions to serve the community in a truly integrated way.

Ashley's commitment to accessibility and inclusivity is evident in her new program, Grow to Blossom. This program focuses on helping participants prevent or recover from burnout, something she has personal experience with. Her intention with this monthly circle is to help people find community and reconnect with themselves through self-care and routine. Through Odigo Wellness, Ashley is also partnering with Queermunity, a resource center and social club for the LGBTQ community in Minneapolis, offering a discount on all her offerings at Odigo to members of this group.

These offerings and partnerships reflect her dedication to fostering connection and creating a safe space for everyone.

Ashley has hosted numerous workshops and events, including presenting at the River Valley Yoga

Festival in Stillwater, and she will be returning as a presenter for the Minnesota Yoga Conference this year. She also organizes mini yoga retreats at The Lavender Barnyard in Farmington, where participants can enjoy yoga, meditation, and more in a serene, natural setting.

Looking ahead, Ashley plans to expand her offerings at Odigo Wellness and return to the Lavender Barnyard this summer for classes and retreats. She is also growing a library of videos and online resources for clients who want to practice from home, and exploring more opportunities to host workshop, retreats, and events.

Ashley is excited about the growing demand for her work and is committed to sharing its benefits with a broader audience. As she continues to expand Nourish & Grow Yoga, her focus remains on helping her students achieve vibrant health, self-awareness, and joy through movement and mindfulness.

Ashley's journey from chronic pain to more vibrant health is a testament to the transformative power of yoga and self-myofascial release. Her teaching style emphasizes tangible results and self-awareness. Students leave her classes not only feeling better physically but also with a deeper understanding of their bodies.

Through Nourish & Grow Yoga, she is not only sharing her knowledge but also empowering others to discover their potential and lead healthier, more fulfilling lives.



www.nourishandgrowyoga.com

WHAT DO Venus Williams, Mark Wahlberg, and Sugar Ray Leonard HAVE IN COMMON?

**They all rely
on Rollga to
support their
fitness recovery.**

BY MONICA DELIUS (SHE/HER)

WHAT IS ROLLGA?

Rollga is a foam roller with a revolutionary design that sets it apart from traditional flat rollers. Featuring patented contoured ridges and grooves, Rollga reaches areas conventional rollers can't, delivering greater precision and deeper pressure for effective muscle release.

The unique shape of Rollga is engineered to cradle sensitive areas like the spine, bones, and tendons, preventing unnecessary compression or bruising. This makes it ideal for improving flexibility, reducing muscle soreness, and providing soothing massages for the back and neck. Often called the "Rolls Royce of foam rollers," Rollga stands out as a superior tool for recovery and wellness.



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- Relieves back and neck pain.
- Promotes recovery and healing through oxygen-rich blood flow.
- Restores fascia lubrication, movement, and accelerates muscle recovery.
- Neck and Skull Relief: Ribbed design fits the curves of the neck and skull for tension headache relief.

THE BIRTH OF ROLLGA

The concept for Rollga emerged in 2015 when founder Taggart Downare struggled with shin splints from marathon running and back pain from a car accident. While a foam roller relieved some of his pain, traditional flat rollers couldn't reach smaller, more targeted areas effectively.

Determined to create a better solution, Taggart and his wife Tammie began experimenting with materials like foam blocks, balls, and marbles. After over 50 prototypes, they developed the Rollga—a versatile foam roller designed to go deeper

while reducing pressure on bones for greater comfort.

Today, Taggart credits daily use of Rollga for making him more flexible than he was a decade ago. The product's success has been largely organic, with endorsements coming naturally from users.

WHO USES ROLLGA?

Rollga is trusted by a variety of professionals, including chiropractors, surgeons, physical therapists, doctors, personal trainers, yoga and fitness instructors, and professional athletes.



TO SUPPORT ITS USERS, ROLLGA OFFERS:

- **Free Educational Videos:** Helping beginners use Rollga effectively.
- **Affiliate Program:** Complete with robust resources and support.
- **In-Person and Online Training:** For wellness and fitness professionals to enhance their practice with Rollga products.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTS AND NEW VENTURES

Rollga's product line extends beyond foam rollers to include complementary tools and gear for enhanced recovery.

Taggart's entrepreneurial spirit continues to fuel new innovations, such as:

- **A yoga flow course using Rollga.**
- **A Rollga with a built-in speaker that delivers healing sound and vibrations.**
- **Dry brushes designed to alleviate stiff joints.**

As Rollga evolves, it remains a leader in the wellness space, providing cutting-edge solutions for recovery, flexibility, and overall health.

Learn more at
www.rollga.com

MEET REBECCA JAMES ALSUM:

The New Owner of

SVÄLJA WHOLE-BEING

BY EMILY SULZLE (SHE/HER)

Rebecca James Alsum has recently taken the reins of Svälja Whole-Being, bringing her passion and personal journey into the heart of this wellness studio in downtown Duluth. Formerly known as Svälja Yoga, the studio has expanded its offerings and vision under Rebecca's leadership, while honoring the foundation laid by Kyle Leia Heyesen's previous ownership. Svälja now encompasses a broader



spectrum of whole-being wellness practices.

Rebecca's path into wellness was shaped by her own experiences with health challenges and trauma. She shares, "My own suffering brought

me to something that would help me with my physical and heart body." Her journey began with Qigong, a practice that transformed her ability to meditate, be present, and heal. "Once I found Qigong, I was like, 'Wow, this is

transformative,' and I wanted to learn more."

This drive to explore deeper led Rebecca to Svälja, where she found a space to teach Qigong and expand her trauma-informed yoga training. Today, she brings her multifaceted background as a Qigong instructor, yoga guide, sexual wellness coach, and community advocate to her role as studio owner.

Six months into her journey, Rebecca reflects on the honor and intensity of this role. "It feels like an honor for me. It's a new and intense time, learning and implementing simultaneously." The studio's founders, Miriam Hansen and Kyle Leia Heyesen, remain involved as friends and collaborators, supporting Rebecca in the transition.

At the core of Svälja's mission is accessibility. Offering sliding-scale fees, Rebecca ensures that wellness practices are available to everyone, regardless of financial circumstances.

This commitment aligns with her background in community advocacy and social work.

"Pairing that with yoga, Qigong, and sexual wellness aligns perfectly with my values."

Rebecca also emphasizes collaboration with other local studios, seeing them as complementary rather than competitive. Partnerships with organizations like Recovery Alliance Duluth and collaborations with groups such as older adults and the trans community reflect Svälja's inclusive approach.

The transition from Svälja Yoga to Svälja Whole-Being reflects a broader mission. While yoga remains a cornerstone with 25 weekly classes and a 250-hour yoga teacher training (YTT) program, the studio now offers Qigong, Tai Chi, meditation, fitness, wellness presentations, employee well-being programs, and retreats.

"We're looking to exist as a healing center where people can find their own path,"

Rebecca explains. "We're not prescribing one way. All of these practices are beautiful, and

individuals get to define their journey."

The yoga school, directed by Miriam Hansen, continues to thrive with courses on anatomy, Ayurveda, adapting poses for larger bodies, and more, ensuring that students and instructors receive high-quality training.

Rebecca cherishes the transformation stories she hears every week. "People say, 'I never thought I'd attend a yoga class or try these practices,' and they discover they can be themselves or reconnect with themselves."

Svälja fosters a sense of positive community, where people work toward inclusion and healing.

"It brings me so much hope to see this inclusive community thriving and lifting each other up," Rebecca shares.

When asked about Svälja's impact on Duluth, Rebecca humbly says, "We hear stories from YTT graduates and yoga students who say they're able to be their best selves at work, heal their trauma, and love themselves and others more. I believe we're all impacted by one another's healing."

Rebecca's closing blessing in her classes reflects her philosophy of connection and respect: "So much love," or, "The light in me bows toward the light in you." It's a reminder of the shared journey toward well-being. Under Rebecca's guidance, Svälja Whole-Being continues to be a beacon of healing, transformation, and community in Duluth and beyond.

www.svalja.yoga



UPCOMING REIKI TRAININGS



***Reiki Training
with Amy Zellmer***

REIKI LEVEL ONE

Perfect for beginners or those ready to connect with their practice. You'll learn how to give Reiki to yourself and others, receive your first attunement, and begin building a beautiful daily self-care ritual.

July 10 | 6-9 PM (via Zoom)

July 26 | 12-3 PM (via Zoom)

REIKI LEVEL TWO

For those who have completed Level One and are ready to expand their practice (whether completed with me or elsewhere). You'll learn the sacred Reiki symbols, distance healing, and how to move energy more intentionally and intuitively.

August 16 | 12-3:30 PM (via Zoom)

REIKI MASTER TRAINING (4-MONTH JOURNEY)

This immersive program is for those who feel called to fully embody Reiki as a spiritual path—whether or not you plan to teach. Includes private mentoring, bridge training, group calls, and a full-day Master class.

Sep. 25, Oct. 23, Nov. 20, Dec. 18

Thursdays | 6-7:30 PM CST

CREATINGWELLNESSFROMWITHIN.COM/

WORKSHOPS

THE YOGA BRANCH:

ROOTED in Holding Space

BY MCCALL KELLY (SHE/HER)

The Yoga Branch is more than just a studio; it's a warm and welcoming space for building authentic connections and creating positive experiences. Our lives are made up of experiences that shape us and foster our growth both on and off the mat. The Yoga Branch provides a space that can literally do just that. They serve as a guide as you transform your life mentally and physically. Whether you are new to yoga or have been practicing for years, The Yoga Branch will have something to offer you. The journey of this studio and its passionate founder, Stacy VanOrnum, is a story of holding space for others.

Originally from Mound, MN, Stacy's journey to founding The Yoga Branch began in the Dakotas, where she taught yoga and always enjoyed

sharing space with others. After moving to Wisconsin, she noticed a lack of places where people could come together to practice yoga. This was the spark for her vision. She began teaching yoga in a small log cabin, creating a welcoming space for the community. But life eventually brought her back to Minnesota, where she set out to create something even more meaningful.

Stacy's first space in North Branch, MN, was modest—in the basement of an office building that could accommodate just six people. Her goal was, quite literally, to “come above ground.” When an old house from 1890 went up for sale across the street, Stacy saw an opportunity. By 2019, The Yoga Branch began to take shape, giving local teachers the chance to lease space and build their own communities. In 2024, Stacy expanded her vision even further by opening a second location in Forest Lake, hoping to create peace and

unity in the community.

Stacy's own path to yoga is equally moving. A former dance major with dreams of becoming a choreographer, she longed for movement after taking a different career path. Yoga became her outlet, helping her navigate physical and mental challenges. What began as a personal practice evolved into a deeper commitment, leading her to complete both 200-hour and 500-hour yoga teacher training. “Over the years, yoga helped me with many things mentally and physically,” she reflects. Stacy still remembers her first visit to a studio called The Dharna Room in Sioux Falls, SD, and how it left a lasting impact on her life.

“It was such a warm and welcoming studio. They made you feel like family. I wanted to create that”

Stacy's mission is simple: to provide a welcoming space where students and teachers alike can thrive. "Creating space is the way you connect with the community," she explains.

Stacy's two locations in North Branch and Forest Lake are designed to make you feel at home. With warm woodwork, neutral tones, mandalas, cozy fireplaces, and natural light pouring through the windows, the studios provide a peaceful retreat.

The Yoga Branch is more than just a place to practice yoga—it's a space where you can reconnect with yourself. Stacy believes, "Yoga is doing what feels right in our bodies. We are all our own teachers."

What sets The Yoga Branch apart is its diverse range of classes. Recognizing that everyone is on their unique journey, the studio offers classes that meet people where they are.

Yin Yoga targets deep connective tissues, while Light Yoga provides a gentle approach to the practice. For those seeking a more dynamic experience, Yoga Sculpt blends traditional yoga poses with strength training to build muscular strength and endurance. Restorative Yoga, on the other hand, offers a chance to relax and recharge. With such a wide range of offerings, there's something for everyone.

The diversity doesn't stop with class types. The studio boasts 14 instructors across the two locations—four in North Branch and ten in Forest Lake—each bringing a unique style and perspective. Instructors are encouraged to lease space and promote their services, allowing the studio to offer a rich variety of classes. In addition to regular classes, The Yoga Branch regularly invites guest teachers to lead workshops



or special sessions, adding another layer of variety to the schedule. Forest Lake, with its room for growth, is especially excited about welcoming new instructors and expanding its offerings even further.

The Yoga Branch also extends its programs beyond the mat. The studio hosts and participates in community events like Arts in the Park, Yoga in the Yard, Gratitude Month, Sound Baths, and the popular Branching Out Retreats. These wellness retreats invite participants to quiet their minds through yoga, restorative practices, meditation, journaling, and crafting, embodying the studio's commitment to fostering connection within and beyond its walls.

Giving back to the community is a core value of The Yoga Branch.

The studio hosts free-will donation classes throughout the year, with proceeds benefiting various charities. Gratitude Month, another highlight, involves collecting donations for a chosen cause.

Stacy's instructors embrace this spirit of connection, gathering bimonthly for "Communi Tea" sessions to share ideas, support each other, and continue growing as both individuals and a team.

The Yoga Branch represents more than just one limb of yoga. It's about branching out and learning all about yourself. You'll find the space and support at The Yoga Branch to do just that. If you're interested in becoming a student or instructor at The Yoga Branch, please visit theyogabrand.com and fill out the contact form to get in touch with Stacy. She'll guide you through the process and answer any questions.



ALLISSA OBLER



Photos by Kristina Lynn Photography

WHERE ARE YOU LOCATED?

Stillwater, MN

WHAT GETS YOU EXCITED ABOUT MIDWEST YOGA MAGAZINE?

I am passionate about connecting others to yoga and all that yoga is, and Midwest YOGA magazine does this in spades. It's so cool and inspiring to see all of the different practices and perspectives that your contributors have to offer—from the teachers, to the annual partners, and everything in between. Midwest YOGA magazine gives a voice to those who may not

otherwise be heard. And the REACH? Incredible! I love that it makes an impact in my community and spreads that vibe throughout the entire Midwest, elevating us all along the way.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION AS A COVER MODEL FOR MIDWEST YOGA MAGAZINE?

As a cover model, I hope to invite in a different way to view diversity. I am a person who likes to go beyond the surface to see what lies beneath—especially when I don't understand something. Curiosity is such an important tool, one that can open doors

and make sense of things that may not seem sensible on the surface. I'm not sure when we lose our sense of curiosity, but I hope perhaps my story can inspire others to get curious, dig deeper, seek more, and judge less. Let's get back to seeing things through the eyes of oneness, recognizing that the light within us is the same light that shines in others.

HOW DO YOU INTEGRATE YOGA INTO YOUR LIFE/ WORK BALANCE?

Like most of us, the majority of my yoga happens off the mat. From my

ALLISSA OBLER *(She/Her)*

very first class, I knew that yoga would change my life. There was a felt sense that it wasn't about what happened on the mat—what I could or couldn't do—and that has proven to be 100% true. I love that yoga offers something for wherever you are on your journey. Because, let's be honest, not every situation calls for the same practice. Sometimes we need meditation, sometimes we need gentle movement, and sometimes we need to pound it out. That's how I integrate yoga into my life/work balance. I build my toolkit by exploring different practices that serve different purposes. I work diligently to be a witness to what is happening in my body, mind, and spirit, and then, each and every day, I weave in what I need—from breathing and meditation, to physical asana, or grounding in nature.

WHAT DOES “DIVERSITY” (THEME OF THE ISSUE) MEAN TO YOU?

I love diversity. That may sound odd, but it's true. I am a seeker and always have been. I seek out experiences and people that are different from me to learn more, see more, and be more. I'm not a fan of labels, and it pains me when people have a limited mindset and can't see beyond. Diversity is what makes us unique and makes the world a more interesting place. And yet, being different is hard. I have a neuromuscular disease that makes me different from others in many ways. Fine motor skills, balance, and coordination have always been a challenge for me. It was difficult to fit in as a child and well into adulthood, especially considering my condition isn't visible. My inability to do things in a way that feels natural to others invites a certain dismissiveness, judgment, and a general lack of understanding. People often don't understand what they see, so unless they get curious and look beneath the surface, how could they possibly understand what they can't see? Yoga has been a blessing to me. It has

created a space for me to embrace my differences and has offered a depth of healing that inspires me to share the practice with others too.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE COLOR?

Oh dang. Favorites are hard for me. Hahaha. Today I will choose yellow. Yellow like the sun. Yellow symbolizes JOY, and that's what we're all about here at Mudita Wellness. (Mudita is a Sanskrit word that means taking joy in the happiness of others.)

COFFEE OR TEA?

BOTH! However, tea is where my heart truly lies. Drinking tea makes me feel a strong connection to the land. I'm a flower lover and like to drink tea that includes the beauty of the earth. Taking in the aroma, the texture, and the beauty of the leaves really speaks to me and makes it so much more than just a beverage.

Allissa is the owner and founder of River Valley Yoga Festival and Mudita Wellness, a boutique yoga studio in Stillwater, MN. With over 28 years of yoga practice, Allissa is an ERYT-200, a RYT-500, and a YACEP through Yoga Alliance. She has specialty training in SomaYoga, restorative yoga, and meditation, and has also completed Level 1 yoga therapy training. Allissa has a passion for connecting others to the power of yoga and enjoys sharing the softer side through meditation, breathwork, and somatic movement. Allissa recently relocated her Stillwater studio, Mudita Wellness, to a space that invites larger workshops and teacher trainings. Check it out and explore the possibilities!



YOU CAN FIND ALLISSA:

WEBSITE:

muditawellnessmn.com
rivervalleyyogafestival.com

SOCIAL MEDIA:

@muditawellnessmn on FB and IG
@rivervalleyyogafestival on FB and IG

LIFE IN THE ASHRAM:

A Yogi's Journey



BY TIFFANY REINITZ (SHE/HER)

Stepping off the busy streets on the outskirts of Rishikesh and through the gates of Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama (SRSG) ashram is like entering a haven. No honking cars or motorcycles whizzing by, no garbage strewn everywhere, and no wandering cows (the ashram has its own herd, but they are contained). I first set foot on the grounds of this ashram in January 2006 during my first trip to India, as part of a traveling course through the University of Minnesota. The ashram is affiliated with the Meditation Center in Minneapolis, both founded by Swami Veda (a disciple of Swami Rama) to provide a place for the study and practice of the Himalayan Tradition of Hatha Yoga and its philosophy. I have returned to the ashram several

times for various purposes—most recently, leading my own group of people experiencing India for the first time. Swami Veda left his body (mahasamadhi) on July 15, 2015, at the age of 82, and his successor, Swami Ritavan, now heads the ashram.

After checking in at the office, we are shown to our room in one of several cozy cottages—all with their own bathroom (or two), two to three rooms, and a kitchenette. The morning begins at 5 a.m. with a puja (fire ceremony) to start the day with intention, followed by morning prayers and either silent or guided meditation for an hour. Afterward is gentle Joints & Glands Hatha Yoga for 1½ hours. Breakfast follows at 8 a.m., usually consisting of porridge, fruit, toast, and even peanut butter (the only kitchen in India where I found it!).

Karma yoga follows breakfast, when everyone gathers to be given tasks. Usually, this consists of cleaning the yoga hall—folding blankets, vacuuming, or other various jobs (including cleaning your cottage). One day, because it was close to Diwali, we hand-rolled cotton wicks for oil lamps.

At 10 a.m., there is a class on a topic such as the philosophy of Hatha Yoga, the importance of breath, or similar subjects, depending on the group's experience or learning needs. Following the philosophy class is a breathing class prior to lunch at 1 p.m. Lunch and dinner both consist of healthy, sattvic foods free from garlic or onions. Rice, dal, vegetables, and chapati bread are typical. Dairy is served in the form of warm milk (fresh from the ashram cows), and occasional paneer or yogurt.



After lunch is digestive breathing, followed by free time until chai tea is served at 4 p.m. Gentle Hatha Yoga is practiced at 4:30 p.m., then silent meditation at 6 p.m., also attended by the resident swamis. Supper is taken at 7 p.m., followed by another philosophy class at 8 p.m. and evening prayers at 9 p.m. Thursday is a day of silence and intensive meditation at the ashram.

On Saturdays, there is usually a cultural program such as kirtan or traditional dancing.

When I first started coming to the ashram, I was in my 20s and had just started dabbling in yoga and meditation. I was just finishing college, had gone through a divorce at age 22, and was discovering my newfound freedom—having the time of my life. To get up at 5 a.m. when the ashram bell rang seemed completely absurd, so I rolled out of bed a few minutes before the 8 a.m. breakfast bell and skipped half the activities.

Fast forward to a few ashram visits later: I'm in my 40s, in the middle of my career as a critical care pharmacist, and also working on the side as an Ayurvedic practitioner, hoping to make that my full-time job. I am married and the mother of two kids—getting up at 5 a.m. now

(or earlier!) for work, kids, or some precious me time is totally normal. My spiritual practice has evolved to be deeper and more intentional. This time at the ashram, I looked forward to getting up at 5 a.m. to start my practices. SRSg has become my spiritual home and refuge—a place of deep healing, practice, and peace. 🌸



BY MEGHAN CRUSE (SHE/HER)

All too often, the behind-the-scenes tasks of business operations can make even the most passion-fueled ventures feel overwhelming. Is there a way to both love what you do and make a living doing it? Can you truly have your cake and eat it, too? With some forward thinking, a little soul-searching, and a large serving of ingenuity, it's absolutely possible.

What is it that those thriving businesses that seem to “have it all”—you know, those yoga instructors who still enjoy teaching and haven't lost their spark while managing the details of running a business—have in common? They're structured in a way that focuses on systems and profitability, so the passion can thrive even on tough days.

Looking to build a business around what you truly love, so that every day feels meaningful and fulfilling? There's no way to guarantee that every day will be perfect, but with a solid foundation, you can build a strong business that stands the test of time.

KNOW YOUR RHYTHMS

While all businesses follow the same general operations outline on paper, the tech-heavy world we live in offers more options than ever for streamlining processes, offloading daunting tasks, and automating systems. Structure your business with a focus on the things you enjoy doing, and don't be afraid to hand off tasks to hired help (like a social media manager or accountant, if those aren't your forte) or an automated system (such as an email marketing flow or accounting software to save time come tax season).

HOW TO STRUCTURE A BUSINESS *around*

WHAT

YOU

LOVE

DEFINE YOUR “WHY”

A business with a purpose is far more sustainable than one focused solely on profitability. Let's get real—if we didn't need the money, most passion-led businesses would've remained hobbies. With a well-defined “why,” you can create a mission statement and business plan to keep coming back to, keeping the business grounded in its fundamentals for the long haul.

BRANDING IS KEY

There is a stark difference between an overall brand narrative and a company's brand story. The brand story tells a company's mission and values through storytelling and visual representations, often in an

emotional and compelling fashion. The brand narrative, however, is a broader look at the overall brand of the business. It includes the elements that infuse the brand story into all aspects of the brand.

This could involve identifying key words from the brand story, highlighting compelling pieces of the company's history, or consistently using visual cues like color, font, and imagery—and carrying them through to each piece of collateral the business produces. This creates a brand that is easy to remember and resonate with, and often leads to a personal, deeply committed following of customers and clients.

FOCUS ON RESILIENCE

No plan is set in stone. While the initial phase of opening a business and gaining those first few clients can feel exhilarating, what do you do a few years in, when the novelty has worn off? What do you do when life happens and pulls you in a different direction?

The best thing you can do is double down on a well-established resilience practice and pivot in a direction that better suits your lifestyle. A great example of this is female business owners navigating childbearing years. In those early years, it might make sense to hire help for day-to-day operations. Later on, it may be more beneficial to outsource the tasks that don't light you up instead.

The beauty of owning your own business is being able to infuse your own style into how things are done, and to pivot when things aren't working. With a little planning, you can create the sustainable, impactful, and heart-led business of your dreams.



THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF RETREATS

Finding Balance in a Busy World

BY ELHAM JALALI (SHE/HER) & HOSSEIN JALALI (HE/HIM)



In today's fast-paced society, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the constant demands of work, family, and personal obligations. The result is often stress, burnout, and a sense of disconnection from ourselves. This is where retreats come in—offering a much-needed opportunity to pause, reflect, and renew.

What Is a Retreat?

A retreat is a dedicated time away from the hustle and bustle of daily life to focus on personal rejuvenation. While retreats have long been associated with spiritual practices such as meditation or prayer, in today's world, they encompass a wide variety of experiences. Whether focused on wellness, creativity, or self-discovery, retreats provide a meaningful way to reconnect with oneself.

Why Retreats Matter in Our Modern World

The need for retreats is increasingly critical in our world of constant connectivity and information overload.

Taking time to retreat offers many advantages:

1. RELIEF FROM STRESS:

A retreat allows you to step back from the pressures of daily life, providing a safe space for relaxation and mental restoration. By disconnecting, you can ease stress and feel recharged.

2. PERSONAL REFLECTION AND GROWTH:

When we leave behind the daily routine, we create space for self-reflection. Retreats often encourage introspection, helping participants gain deeper clarity about their values, goals, and life purpose.



3. BOOSTED CREATIVITY AND MOTIVATION:

Stepping away from everyday tasks allows for a fresh perspective. This break can spark creativity and inspire new ideas that carry over into everyday life, enhancing both productivity and problem-solving.

4. PHYSICAL HEALTH AND VITALITY:

Many retreats focus on holistic wellness, offering programs that integrate yoga, mindful movement, and nutritious meals. These practices support not only mental clarity but physical well-being, encouraging a healthier lifestyle.



Exploring Different Types of Retreats

Retreats come in all shapes and sizes to cater to diverse interests:

WELLNESS RETREATS:

Focused on nurturing the body and mind, these retreats offer activities such as yoga, meditation, spa treatments, and nutrition workshops. They are ideal for those seeking physical rejuvenation and mental calm.

CREATIVE RETREATS:

Designed to help participants reconnect with their creative energy. Whether through art, writing, or music, creative retreats offer an environment free from distractions, allowing individuals to explore their artistic potential.

NATURE RETREATS:

For those who find solace in the outdoors, nature retreats provide immersion in natural surroundings.

These retreats emphasize reconnecting with the earth, often incorporating outdoor activities such as hiking, nature walks, and meditation in serene environments.

How to Choose the Right Retreat for You

When planning a retreat, it's essential to consider your personal needs and aspirations. Take time to reflect on your goals—whether you're looking for relaxation, self-discovery, or creative inspiration. Selecting a retreat that aligns with your intentions will ensure that you gain the most benefit. Whether it's a short weekend escape or an extended stay, a well-planned retreat has the power to bring balance and renewal to your life.



Conclusion

Retreats offer an invaluable opportunity to disconnect from the busyness of life and reconnect with yourself. Whether you're seeking stress relief, personal growth, or a renewed sense of purpose, a retreat can be the transformative experience you need. Make time for a retreat, and discover the profound impact it can have on your physical, mental, and emotional well-being.



WORDS MATTER

BY DAWN JENKINS (SHE/HER)

Many of us embrace mindfulness or meditation practices as part of our wellness journey. My favorite benefit of these practices is the ability to create space between stimulus and response. That space allows us to act, instead of merely react.

I'd like to propose that we use some of that space to consider the impact our words have—whether we are thinking, speaking, or writing.

The importance of words became clear to me on a visceral level many years ago. I was part of a blended family. I love all my siblings. I don't differentiate where they come from or who shares a parent with me. But I witnessed family members making distinctions about who they felt was their "real" grandchild. Without meaning to, they created divisions and caused pain in children who were every bit as real and lovable as the rest. It wasn't malicious, but it was thoughtless and utterly devoid of empathy.

I try to imagine having grandchildren and referring, even in my own mind, to

some of them as my real grandchildren and others as—what? Fakegrandchildren? That feels dissonant, distancing, and judgmental.

Each time we open our mouths or take to the internet to share a thought, we are also sharing information about who we are, what we value, and how we see the world. If you are meditating regularly or practicing mindfulness, you have the potential to be more intentional, thoughtful, caring, and empathetic with your words.

It makes a difference in my life—and in the experience of my yoga students—when I refrain from immediately asking the gender of a grandbaby they mention. Instead, I allow the baby to simply occupy the space of child, where there are far fewer assumptions and expectations than those placed upon a "boy" or "girl." In that way, I'm not making the child's gender the most important factor in how I think of them, speak to them, or talk about them.

When designing icebreakers for a group, I don't assume that everyone has a partner—or that they need one to be valid human beings. Choosing the word partner also conveys my respect for all types of unions.

Over the last 20 years, some things have become very clear to me. When I meet people, it is not helpful to assume anything about them—that they are housed, fed, where they are from, what they know, what they value, who they love, or how they experience themselves and the world. To find out some of those things, I need to truly listen. Maybe ask a few questions—but mostly, listen.

At a time when passing judgment on others has become increasingly

normalized, I try very hard to remember a Hindu teaching one of my yoga teachers once shared with me:

"There are a hundred paths up the mountain, so it doesn't matter which path you take. The only one wasting time is the one who runs around and around the mountain telling everyone else that his or her path is wrong."

Put even more simply in modern terms by Brené Brown:

"All I know is that my life is better when I assume that people are doing their best. It keeps me out of judgment and lets me focus on what is, and not what should or could be."

It all starts with using the space we create between stimulus and response to be more intentional about the words we use—to think, to talk to ourselves and others, and to express ourselves in writing. When we do that, we are practicing *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *svadhyaya* (self-study). Through these practices, we can find more peace, clarity, connection, and compassion.



NEURODIVERGENT

DESIGN THEORY

BY MEGHAN CRUSE (SHE/HER)

In the interior design world, there are many conceptual rabbit holes to dive down—from trauma-informed design (the integration of design practices that avoid trauma triggers) to biophilic design (the idea of bringing the outdoors into our indoor world). The data supporting many of these theories is robust, but it is often gathered in the context of large commercial spaces.

What if there were a way to apply the best parts of each design concept to our homes, yoga studios, or even individual rooms like an office or bedroom? What if we could create spaces that support overall health and wellness in a way that is accessible to anyone with a little ingenuity and interest? Neurodivergent design is the answer.

**A Neurodivergence—
a term used to describe
“those whose brains develop
or work differently”
(Cleveland Clinic, 2025)
—broadly includes both
diagnosed and
undiagnosed conditions.**

It is a nonmedical concept that is becoming increasingly recognized in the mental health space.

In neurodivergent design theory, spaces are used as a healing modality by focusing on the way our environment directly impacts the nervous system. Much like how stepping into certain yoga

classes can feel like a warm hug, neurodivergent design aims to help people feel supported and rejuvenated in their everyday environments as well.

Focusing on lifestyle and the five senses is key in neurodivergent-friendly design. Some starting points to improve your own space include:

A Focus on Space Planning

Functional and supportive spaces should incorporate a minimalist approach that is easy to navigate, free of visual disturbances and obstructions (think oddly placed furniture or disorganized items), and laid out in a way that supports the intended use of the space. For example, this might include curated shelving with baskets to hide clutter and help items feel organized with minimal effort. This reduces overwhelm by visually giving the space a sense of order and ease. A well-planned space also allows for natural movement within the room, making space for physical activity, easy cleaning, and a simpler, more supportive environment overall.

Air Quality Matters

Air quality is affected by many factors, including intentional fragrances like candles, building and furnishing materials, a building's ventilation system, waterproofing,

and more. In the health and wellness industry, it's considered a gold standard to have a space that naturally has minimal odor—implying no residual moisture, no off-gassing of materials, and no artificial scents that can cause harm to sensitive individuals.

In the real world, however, this is often unattainable, and we need to be responsive instead. Adding an air purifier, addressing any sources of moisture, and avoiding artificial fragrances whenever possible can go a long way in creating a supportive and healthy space. Harsh smells—whether pleasant or unpleasant—can be especially detrimental to neurodivergent individuals by causing sensory overload and should be avoided if at all possible.

Materials Make All the Difference

As with air quality, the materials used in furniture and décor can off-gas harmful substances, which may lead to both direct health issues and heightened sensory input. Additionally, many neurodivergent conditions require extra consideration for safety when choosing materials. This includes avoiding harsh fabrics, sharp objects or corners, and anything overly stimulating to the user of the space. Instead, opt for calming and soft materials that contribute to a sense of peace and respite.



My HEART ATTACK

BY DAN BLACKBURN (HE/HIM)

My wife and I were walking through the Macalester College campus in February. It wasn't a strenuous walk—especially compared to the hiking and snorkeling we'd done in Costa Rica one month earlier. Running through Miami International was significantly more stressful than the stroll we were on. So, I was a little surprised as the pain behind my left shoulder became more and more pronounced.

I'd recently been having issues with the left shoulder. In January, I'd fallen down the stairs while washing the studio's yoga blankets. One had slipped between my arms onto the staircase while taking the next step. I was lucky. Landing on my left side and forearm caused bruising, but nothing broke. I'd been addressing the shoulder issue with somatics, yoga, PT, and massage.

But this time was different. The pain was deeper. It felt like a spear had been lodged into the back of my shoulder blade, pinning it to my ribs. The pain remained even as I moved through a slow range of motion. Nothing was stuck back there. The pain worsened, spread, and started to wrap around the front of my shoulder, causing me to stop and reflect.

"This really f-ing hurts," I said to Ann. "I mean, it's incredible." And then, "I wonder if this is a heart attack."

We stopped and concentrated on a calming breath—low and slow into the belly. The pain eased, and we continued to the studio just two blocks away. In retrospect, this could have been the time to call 911. But I was calm and started to plan. We unrolled a couple of mats and began a practice consisting of small, isolated movements. The goal was to use interoception, curiosity, and discernment to guide me. Soon, the pain was completely gone. After the walk home, I made the



earliest cardiology appointment I could. Luckily, it was only a few days away.

Here's the thing: at first glance, asking for a CT artery scan might seem over the top. With a resting heart rate of 60 BPM, no swelling or edema, total cholesterol only slightly high, and blood pressure on the high end of normal, everything appeared to be functioning as it should. The EKG didn't show proof of an event. Sure, I could lose a few pounds, but I didn't initially present as a high risk for a heart attack.

Lifestyle? Three days a week at 5 a.m., you'd find Ann and me at the local YMCA doing circuit training. I teach 3–4 yoga classes a week. My diet consists of a lot of vegetables, beans, rice, and fiber, with fish and the occasional chicken. At most, 1–2 glasses of red wine are consumed occasionally.

All that being said, I'd left a stressful executive job just three years ago. Stress and cortisol can do a lot of damage. I'd had COVID. And lastly, you can't outrun genetics. My father died of a heart attack when he was 44. I was about to turn 62. There was reason to be concerned.

The CT scan revealed enough to require an angiogram. An angiogram uses X-rays and a tiny tube (catheter) to inject dye directly into the arteries

feeding the heart, creating a clear picture of what's really going on. With that knowledge, there's potential to insert a balloon (angioplasty) and/or a supporting screened mesh (stent) inside an artery to expand the arterial walls, improving blood flow where narrowing has occurred. I was hoping for stents. Unfortunately, the damage was too great. I needed triple bypass surgery—and quickly.

What do you do when a life-altering surgery is nine days away? You set intentions for a positive outcome, ask for help, and rearrange life for the next several months.

Surgery affects more than the person receiving it—there are ripple effects. While I communicated with students, paused client work, and ensured our finances were in order, Ann rescheduled a retreat and training, informed clients, and found substitutes for the studio schedule. We told the kids together. I could expect extreme light duty for a while. Friends and family adjusted their schedules to support us. I am forever grateful.

Note: The following is a simplified general description of open-heart surgery. It should not be considered an expert explanation. Surgery varies from patient to patient.

Coronary Artery Bypass Graft (CABG)

is one of the most common surgical procedures in the U.S., with over 400,000 performed every year. The patient is anesthetized. IVs are inserted, an intubation tube is placed, and machines take over cardio-pulmonary function. A vein used for bypass is typically harvested from the leg. The sternum is split top to bottom, revealing the chest cavity and heart. The heart is placed in a potassium bath during the procedure. Two drainage tubes are inserted through the abdominal wall—one to relieve fluid buildup around the heart, and the other around the lungs.

Once the arteries are bypassed and sutured, the heart is rinsed in warm blood, and the chest cavity is closed. Surgical wire is threaded through the ribs and sternum to pull the ribcage back together—similar to how stitches close a wound. The wires are permanent. They show up on X-rays but won't trigger security scanners.

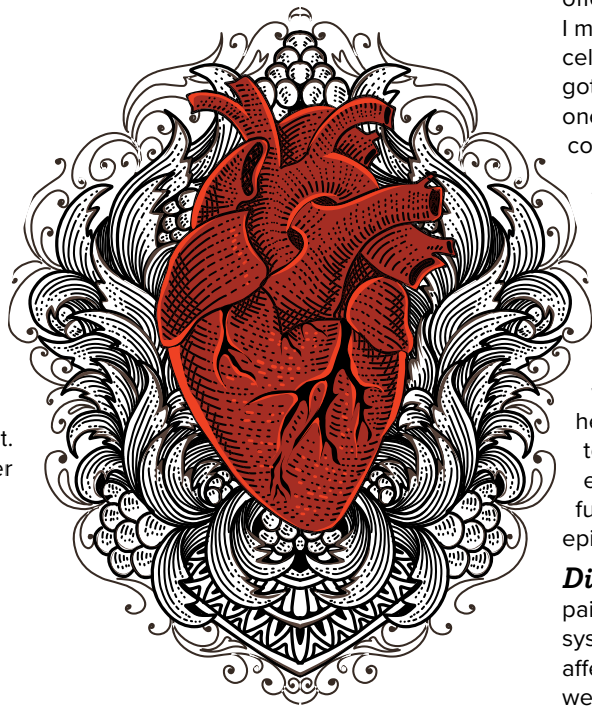
While it may appear like another day at the office for the surgeon and staff, it wasn't for Ann and me. The good news: my surgery was planned, not an emergency. With preparation and no complications, the procedure was relatively smooth. I woke up in ICU on heavy pain medication. If the presence of mind cultivated through yoga helped prepare me for an unexpected surgery with a positive outcome, **ICU is where my yoga practice got real.**

At 6:30 a.m. the morning after surgery, the staff had me sit up and get out of bed. The catch? I couldn't use my arms. Any pushing or pulling affects the ribs. With my sternum split in half, using my arms could lead to serious complications. Getting up required core strength. The next test: standing up, then sitting back down—again, no arms. After performing these seemingly miraculous feats, Ann looked at the staff and repeated something she'd said before: "We teach people how to do this every day." I was out of ICU in 24 hours and discharged a few days later after proving I could walk up and down stairs and breathe using my diaphragm.

Yoga practice does more than build physical strength.

Mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, every kosha layer is affected during a traumatic event.

The first few days home were emotional. Sometimes, the best I could do was sit on the couch and cry—happy tears. Tears of extreme gratitude. **DAMN.** It's profoundly amazing to be alive. Feeling the diaphragm draw down and fill the lungs became a constant point of focus.



Shame? How could this happen to a yoga therapist? A coach? Someone who spent nearly three decades in the health food industry? I could have chosen to beat myself up—but honestly, it only came up once or twice, and briefly. We all have choices in how we spend our time. I didn't have room for shame.

Some damage is visible. Some is not. The numbness in my leg from harvesting the bypass vein isn't seen. Nor is the sunburn-like sensation and numbness along the sternum, extending 2–4 inches on either side. It's actually a good sign to feel that sunburn sensation. The nerves may be unhappy, but they could heal. No pain might mean less healing—or slower healing.

Mentally, there's plenty to process.

Painkillers? I gratefully accepted them in the hospital, but pain meds come with hooks. I felt I'd be better off with a clear head and manageable pain. With focus, patience, and lots of rest, I was off all pain meds within a week.

Psychologically, it's difficult to be present when you're lacking the strength and mobility you had yesterday—or even last week. Simple tasks required assistance. I went from being a provider to feeling like a burden. Still, every day was (and is) a celebration. Every day offered an opportunity for gratitude. I measured my walking distance. I celebrated small wins. The dishwasher got emptied one glass, one plate, one utensil at a time. Every day, my confidence grew.

Sleep became a milestone.

After heart surgery, lying flat is not an option. We bought a foam wedge, added pillows for my arms, and used mouth tape to prevent snoring. I looked like I was sleeping in a fully extended recliner. For nearly two weeks, I would wake feeling like my heart was restarting. My body would tense, as though experiencing a mild electric shock, and I'd break into a full-body sweat. Gradually, those episodes subsided.

Digestion? Affected. Opioid-based painkillers shut down the digestive system. Trusting my gut took time—and it affected how far I could walk. Distances were measured by bathroom access. Probiotics were essential. The first time I walked a mile before needing to sit down? A milestone.

Sex? Let's keep some things private.

It took three weeks before I rolled out my yoga mat. I started with small, standing movements and strict attention to form. The moving meditation I practiced before surgery was temporarily gone—maybe forever. This practice was now about getting to know myself again. Arm movements stayed close to the body. Extending the arms adds load and impacts the sternum. An injury would only set me back.

In week four, I had a follow-up appointment and X-rays. Good news: I could start rolling onto my side during sleep and begin driving again. Weight restrictions increased to 10 pounds. Cardio rehab began in week five.

It's now been 10 weeks since surgery, and life continues to improve. My first class back to teaching was a Saturday morning—eight weeks after surgery.

My gratitude knows no bounds.



BY JULIA RAJAGOPALAN (SHE/HER)

HI, MY NAME IS JULIA, AND I'M AN ALCOHOLIC.

If that sounds familiar, then you've probably heard of Alcoholics Anonymous, also known as AA. AA is an international recovery organization that, according to its website, is a fellowship of people who come together to solve their drinking problem.

Most people have heard of AA—and for good reason. It's the world's largest recovery organization, boasting over two million members worldwide, and has helped tens of millions of people. It's free, and with the advent of online meeting tools, there's a meeting nearly every second of every day.

What you might not know is that there's an increasingly diverse set of resources that support people with many different beliefs. These groups are typically free or donation-based, are available online, and help with recovery not only from alcohol addiction but, in many cases, from process addictions like shopping or gambling.

I've been sober for three years, and I can tell you personally that I wouldn't have been able to do it without the help of my therapist and these organizations. Dealing with addiction feels like trying to tread water in the middle of a hurricane, and finding the courage to make a change was the most difficult thing I have ever done. Going to my first meeting was terrifying, but I found each group welcoming, kind, and supportive of a variety of philosophies and beliefs.

Here is a diverse list of recovery organizations. It is by no means exhaustive, but it's a great place to start.

THE DIVERSITY OF RESOURCES

for People in Recovery

Secular Alcoholics Anonymous

www.aasecular.org

Secular AA is the nonreligious spin-off of traditional AA. Like traditional AA, meetings consist of attendees sharing their struggles with addiction. Meetings can be in person or online and use the 12 steps as part of their program. Some groups offer sponsors, and attendees often exchange phone numbers to foster a sense of community in recovery.

SMART Recovery

www.smartrecovery.org

SMART Recovery is an evidence-based program that uses psychological therapies to support people with substance dependencies and problem behaviors. It helps people maintain motivation to recover, cope with urges, manage thoughts and feelings, change behaviors, and live a healthy, balanced life.

Meetings are 90 minutes long and typically begin with a check-in, followed by a discussion on a recovery topic. Finally, attendees explore strategies for dealing with triggers and use readings and worksheets to focus on practical tools for life in recovery.

Recovery Dharma

www.recoverydharma.org

Recovery Dharma is a Buddhist-inspired—but not required—recovery program that relies on seven principles: Renunciation, Meditation, Meetings, The Path, Inventory, Community, and Growth. Based on the teachings of the Buddha, Recovery Dharma helps people

address the cravings that come with addictive behaviors and that form the root of human suffering.

Addictions addressed in Recovery Dharma can be substance-related or behavioral, including codependency and other process addictions. A core aspect of the program is its trauma-informed approach, helping participants explore the underlying causes of addiction. Meetings are available online and in person, and typically include readings, guided meditation, and sharing.

Mentorship is also available for those seeking additional support.

Y12SR (Yoga of 12-Step Recovery)

www.y12sr.com

Y12SR is a recovery program that combines the cognitive tools of 12-step recovery with the body-based practices of yoga. Yoga teacher Nikki Myers founded the program in 2009 and still leads meetings every Monday.

Y12SR offers meetings in yoga studios across the United States as well as online. Each session includes a sharing circle where attendees discuss their recovery, followed by a yoga class focused on bringing peace and stability to the body. Meetings are open to everyone, including those dealing with food and behavior addictions.

For more information on addiction and mental health services, visit the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#).

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS,





SlowLIVING

BY MEGHAN CRUSE (SHE/HER)

From the convenience of Amazon same-day delivery to the always-connected, social media-based culture we live in, our current world demands constant action. Slow living challenges us to do the exact opposite—it requires intentionality, meaningful connections, and approaching life as simply as possible.

In the world of yoga, it's no secret that slowing down and turning inward benefits our mental state and overall outlook on life. But what if we learned to apply that mindset to any situation, regardless of what room we're in?

It may sound like an uphill battle to go against the grain and try to live in a way that is the opposite of most. However, following through with what viscerally feels natural to us has enormous benefits.

At face value, living in a slow and intentional manner can seem synonymous with mindfulness—and while mindfulness is definitely part of the slow living movement, it's only a small piece. Slow living builds upon the principles of the mindfulness movement and includes things like:

Focusing on Nature

Whether designing a home, cooking a meal, or choosing what clothing to wear, the connection we have as humans with nature is undeniable. Our busy world leads us to believe that we are entirely separate entities, but in our current midwestern culture, our connectedness

could not be more clear. Bringing the outdoors into our indoor world—through farm-to-table or locally grown food, incorporating natural colors into our built environment, or growing plants and herbs indoors—can do wonders for our health.

Being Where Your Feet Are

Much like in yoga, focusing on presence and awareness in everyday life can make all the difference. While our busy lives demand a fast pace most of the time, finding little moments to recognize when you're unnecessarily rushing (hello, morning routine!) and slowing down through a mindfulness or gratitude practice can bring you back to the present moment. Adding a few minutes to your morning routine or building in extra time to linger at the dinner table with family are great first steps.

Mindful Connections

It's no secret we're all connected at all times, often both demanding and responding to every email, text, or social message with urgency. However, being aware of how some of those connections make you feel can positively impact your mental health—and can even slow your heart rate, which has obvious benefits across the board. Setting firm boundaries with others when you need to is meant to benefit your own well-being, as is making intentional time to spend with those who light you up instead.

Quality Over Quantity

Speaking of boundaries, it's important to remember that in all aspects of life, quality is always more important than quantity. Whether you're referring to groceries, friends, or pairs of shoes, a focus on quality nourishes us in far more ways than a focus on quantity ever could. Finding a brand or local health food store that you love, one that offers high-quality options, is always worth the splurge. It just takes a little time to unsubscribe from the "consumption mindset" and turn on the intentional and slow living thought process.

Make Time for Things You Love

Oftentimes, the internet is full of perfectly curated photos of people in their gardens, making time for a beautifully plated dinner, or holding the most impressive inversion you've ever seen. All too often, we "like" these photos, then feel a twinge of jealousy. But what if, instead of feeling jealous, we made a list of the things that made us feel inspired and celebrated—and actually incorporated them into our daily lives?

Getting started with slow living in both our personal and professional lives can have a profound impact on our overall quality of life. Make sure to create a life you love—after all, we only get one.



EDITOR'S PICKS

BY AMY ZELLMER (SHE/HER)



OJAS

\$39.99 www.ojas.store

Ojas is an herbal energy and vitality latte mix, packed with six powerful Ayurvedic herbs. Ojas is gluten-free, sugar-free, dairy-free, vegan, and caffeine-free. We set out to create a delicious coffee alternative without mushrooms, and we nailed it! The best part—it's perfect for bedtime and can even help you relax and fall asleep. 🌸

MOXIE MALAS

\$44 www.moxiemalas.com

This collection is inspired by the flower shop I grew up in. My family owned a flower shop throughout most of my life and this is my homage to that experience. Each flower has its own energies and aligns with the birth months! Perfect for Mother's Day.

This is like a mama's garden of kids' birth months! These smaller 4mm beads are a beautiful addition to any bracelet stack! 🌸



WELL FOCUSED, LLC

\$35 www.wellfocusedhealth.com

Our Tridoshic Herbal-Infused Massage (Abhyanga) Oil is thoughtfully crafted to de-stress, deeply moisturize, and rejuvenate both mind and body. A luxurious daily ritual, this deeply hydrating blend promotes overall well-being while leaving your skin soft, nourished, and radiant. Made with 100% organic oils and herbs, it's the perfect partner for balanced, natural wellness. 🌸



OAK AND THISTLE HEALING

\$30 www.oakandthistlehealing.com

Utilizing similar herbs from traditional Masala chai recipes, but substituting dandelion root and chicory in place of black tea, we have a spicy potent cup that is also good for the GI tract, and warming to the soul. Flavor is spicy and pleasing and is beautifully tan and opaque in color. We recommend mixing with a milk of your choice and using a frother! 🌿

CAMBIO ROASTERS®

\$12 www.cambioroasters.com

Cambio Roasters is redefining the single-serve coffee market with innovations driven by sustainability, quality, and social impact. Led by CEO Kevin Hartley, formerly of Keurig Green Mountain®, the company focuses on delivering the finest organic coffees in the world's most recyclable pods. Cambio Roasters' mission is to transform the iconic coffee pod for the next 25 years, blending third-wave coffee culture with a positive environmental and social impact, while also elevating the entire coffee consuming experience. Through focused farm-to-pod sourcing, community engagement, and product excellence, Cambio Roasters invites coffee enthusiasts to enjoy a richer, more meaningful coffee experience while contributing to a more sustainable future. 🌿



GARDENING WITH DIVERSITY

in Mind and Heart

BY PAT THOMAS (SHE/HER)

Nature can be our model for creating diverse, beautiful, and beneficial gardens. From trees to ground covers—and everywhere in between—diversity unlocks the garden's door to amazing possibilities.

Imagine walking down a city street with flowers blooming along the sidewalks and vines covering fences. You glance up and see a hummingbird visiting flowers on a balcony, then follow a monarch as it flutters toward a patch of milkweed. This space used to be an empty lot—until neighbors came together



to plant trees and flowers. Now, people sit and read, tend vegetable gardens, join yoga or drawing classes, or simply listen to birds singing from the branches while bees and butterflies gather nectar from blossoms.



Now, imagine looking into a large patch of flowers and noticing how certain shapes provide easy access to nectar and pollen.



Butterflies, bees, moths, flies, wasps, and spiders all taste with their feet. Daisy-shaped flowers offer a perfect platform to perch and taste. One of these flowers is composed of many small blooms, which means lots of pollen and nectar. Single-petaled flowers are best—not doubles. Daisy-shaped flowers include sunflowers, asters, coneflowers, cosmos, and native roses.

Cluster-shaped flowers have stalks that originate from one point and open like an umbrella. Their spreading platforms offer hundreds of individual, small, shallow, closely spaced blooms. All insects can use these, especially those with shorter tongues. Good choices include cilantro, dill, parsley, milkweed, and goldenrod.

The spike shape also offers many flowers along each stem, allowing multiple insects to nectar together. Flowers like hyssop and liatris have this shape.

Native plants inspire and empower us to garden in diverse conditions. Some native plants thrive in sand, clay, wet, or dry soils. Others grow in sun or shade, and some even do well in containers.

Keystone plants are vital for our gardens. Professor Doug Tallamy calls them the backbone of local ecosystems because they support the most species of insects. In the Midwest, important keystone plants include goldenrod, sunflowers, and asters.

Diversity in the garden includes not only beautiful flowers, but also incredible insects. When we stop using pesticides, our gardens become safe for these essential creatures. Some insects pollinate, while others help manage pest populations. You may be surprised to learn that aphids are part of a healthy and diverse garden. When aphids



begin to accumulate on plants, they attract a variety of beneficial insects. Aphids are food for flower fly, ladybug, and lacewing larvae. You might even spot a tiny aphid wasp gathering them to feed her young.

Diversity brings our gardens to life and makes our world more beautiful—for people, plants, and insects alike.



Books to Read

Diboll, Neil, and Hillary Cox. *The Gardener's Guide to Prairie Plants*, University of Chicago Press, 2023

Holm, Heather. *Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe, and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants*, Pollination Press, 2014

Johnson, Lorraine, and S. Calla. *A Northern Gardener's Guide to Native Plants and Pollinators*, Island Press, 2023

Tallamy, Douglas. *How Can I Help?: Saving Nature with Your Yard*, Timber Press, 2025

Tallamy, Douglas. *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*, Timber Press, 2019

Prairie Nursery Catalog
– A helpful resource for selecting native plants, with detailed descriptions and recommendations.

Websites to Visit

Find more information and plant lists specific to your region:

[The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#)

[Prairie Nursery](#)

[Homegrown National Park](#)

An excerpt from

MINDFUL PRACTICE:

A Beginner's Guide to Vibrant Living

MANTRA: I AM HERE TO FLOURISH. I AM BLESSED.

"I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship." Louisa May Alcott

BY MARY HIGGS (SHE/HER)

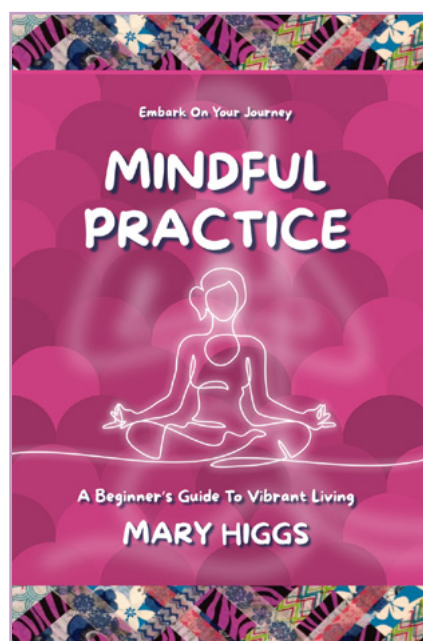
I was raised to believe we can make anything happen if we work hard enough, and working hard brings fulfillment. Part of my work (teaching inclusive, mindful practices via [YogiAble](#)) is to teach others that adversity can make us stronger, but we can grow just as much, if not more, when we cultivate ease and joy in our lives. We don't have to fight the world or change ourselves to evolve. All we need is a desire to be authentic.

We can spend our lives searching for happiness outside ourselves, but everyone benefits when we share ourselves exactly as we are: raw and exposed. Humanity wins when we celebrate uniqueness.

In addition, I've found that my life flourishes when I embrace and accept all life's experiences. American sociologist Corey Keyes defines this as flourishing. In general, Keyes says if we feel good but lack a higher purpose, we may find

ourselves settling for less. On the other hand, Keyes also says if we are functioning well but lack happiness, we are striving, pushing too hard, and may feel unfulfilled.

The upshot: true transformation comes from within. Big leaps are possible when we follow inner



wisdom and trust what shows up. If we're bold enough to embrace fear and doubt, our life can unfold in

incredible ways. We all can do this—we just need to trust ourselves.

While my journey continues to evolve, and I've just begun a new chapter publishing this book, I believe the world is working in our favor, and life experience brings us closer to a higher purpose. My journey has taken more than 40 years, but once I embraced vulnerability and claimed my authentic truth, I found gratitude and radical self-acceptance; everything became fuel for growth.

Therefore, I want to encourage people to stop searching outside themselves and cultivate acceptance within. I teach people how to explore, trust, and connect with their inner wisdom—this is where joy thrives—this is our birthright. We don't have to wait for difficulty to connect internally. It's available, portable, and free.

In the end, when we live in our flawed, whole being, and stand in our authentic truth, the path to wisdom is abundant. Learning to sail your own ship is possible if you stay true to yourself. The possibilities are endless.



Mindful Practice:

INNER SELF HUG

From a seated position and from hands at heart center, stretch arms out to either side in a “T” formation.

Inhale and bring arms forward and around to give yourself a hug. Keep breathing as you observe the feeling of embracing yourself.

What sensations come up?

Enjoy this hug. This is your time—your practice.

Keep breathing, inhale, and exhale as you hug yourself.

Feel the nourishment.

Rock gently from side to side - notice which arm is on top.

Feel the rhythm of this pose in your body.

Breathe.

Release arms.

Now, repeat Inner Self Hug with the other arm on top.

Keep breathing in and out through your nose.

Variation: for a somatic approach, try tapping your hands one at a time while embracing yourself in Inner Self Hug.

Release your arms back to center and take a cleansing breath.

When ready, prepare to answer the following prompt.

Exploratory Writing Prompt:

Are you sailing your own ship? That is, think back to a time in the last month when you did exactly what you needed for yourself.

Write for 10 minutes on how that felt. Describe the feelings and sensations in your body. Did it lighten your load or increase your confidence? If so, how can you bring more of that into your life?



AN EXCERPT FROM: *THE YOGI'S WAY*

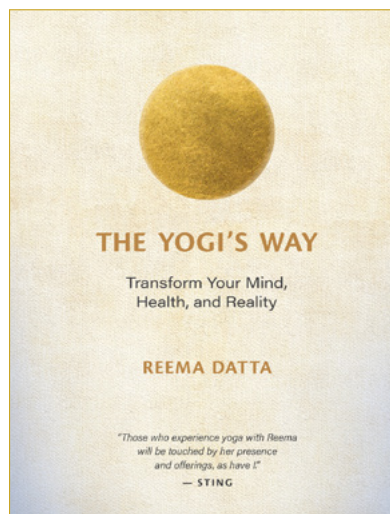
BY REEMA DATTA (SHE/HER)

Scientific research increasingly supports what ancient yogic wisdom has long taught: Our mental and emotional states deeply influence our physical health. Studies in neuroscience, psychology, and epigenetics show that our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs profoundly influence our health, behavior, and life experiences. Both science and spiritual traditions affirm that changing our thoughts reshapes our perceptions, reality, and the way we respond to the world. For instance, neuroscientists have shown how the amygdala — the main area of the brain associated with anger, anxiety, and fear — becomes smaller in meditators. Participants of such studies didn't change anything in their environment. They changed themselves — the way they respond to their environment.

Additional studies show that emotions such as anger, jealousy, shame, anxiety, fear, and depression can lead to adverse health outcomes, including weakened immune functioning, cardiovascular issues, and increased risk of chronic conditions like heart disease and dementia. For example, shame is linked to negative changes in the immune and cardiovascular systems. Loneliness significantly heightens the risk of heart disease, stroke, and dementia. Anger and anxiety disorders are associated with higher risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Conversely, emotions tied to love, hope, connection, worthiness, joy, and peace have been shown to enhance physical health. Compassion is connected to improved mood and decreased blood pressure, stress, and loneliness. Inner peace is associated with a slower heart rate, lower cholesterol, slower aging, reduced anxiety, and healthier immune functioning. Whereas low self-worth can contribute to poor concentration, fatigue, irritability, insomnia, and depression, greater self-worth is linked to improved well-being and life satisfaction. Optimism is associated with an 11 to 15 percent longer lifespan.

A study on the placebo effect published in the Journal of Neuroscience revealed how a person's thoughts and beliefs about the effectiveness of a treatment can trigger the release of endorphins and other neurotransmitters, resulting in significant pain reduction. Numerous scientific studies provide evidence suggesting that beliefs and emotions such as positive expectations and optimism can lead to better health outcomes, such as lower levels of inflammation, healthier lipid profiles, and better immune function and cardiovascular health.



These scientific insights align with yogic teachings that thoughts and emotions shape our health. Tailored sequences of movement, breathing techniques, visualization, contemplation, and mantra can deepen our understanding of the subtle body and help us navigate through specific kleshas, or negative mental states. This approach lies at the heart of the Yogi's Way.

The Power of Visualization

When we believe we can heal ourselves, it makes a difference. When we start to link our health with our thoughts, we can visualize what we want to experience and send the body messages to heal. There is specific research demonstrating how

visualization can improve various aspects of physical well-being, including pain management, stress reduction, immune function, cardiovascular health, and rehabilitation. Numerous studies have also shown that the power of visualization can lead to dramatic improvements in sports performance, skill acquisition, and goal achievement. For example, visualization is a way for athletes to mentally rehearse movements and strategies, leading to enhanced skill development, confidence, and focus. In addition, visualizing goals has been shown to increase motivation and persistence. Studies have found that individuals who vividly imagine themselves succeeding in their goals — whether related to athletics, health, or healing — are more likely to take action and overcome obstacles to achieve their desired outcomes.

It takes practice and repetition for visualization to have such powerful impacts. Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to change and adapt. Studies in neuroplasticity reveal that altering our behavior requires repetition. When we do something new, we create new neural pathways in the brain. We have to do the same thing again and again for those neural pathways to become established. As they are, new habits are created, and old ones fall away. The shape of our brain changes, as do our perceptions and personal reality. It is no wonder that yogis emphasize a daily and consistent practice filled with repetition. This is how lasting change occurs.

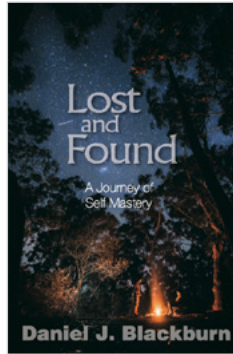


REEMA DATTA is the author of *The Yogi's Way: Transform Your Mind, Health, and Reality*. Since 2002, she has taught yoga and Ayurveda workshops, retreats, and trainings in twenty countries across five continents. Her students include Sting, Paul Simon, Edie Brickell, Zainab Salbi, Sujatha Baliga, and thousands of other practitioners globally. Visit her online at www.ReemaYoga.com

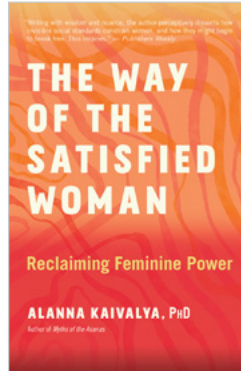
Excerpted from the book *The Yogi's Way: Transform Your Mind, Health, and Reality*
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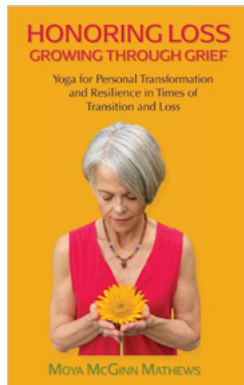
WHAT WE'RE READING



LOST AND FOUND



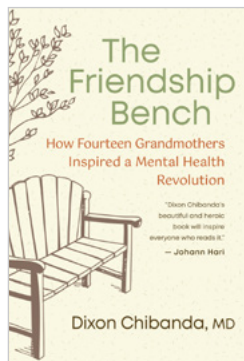
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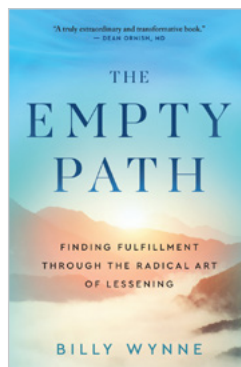
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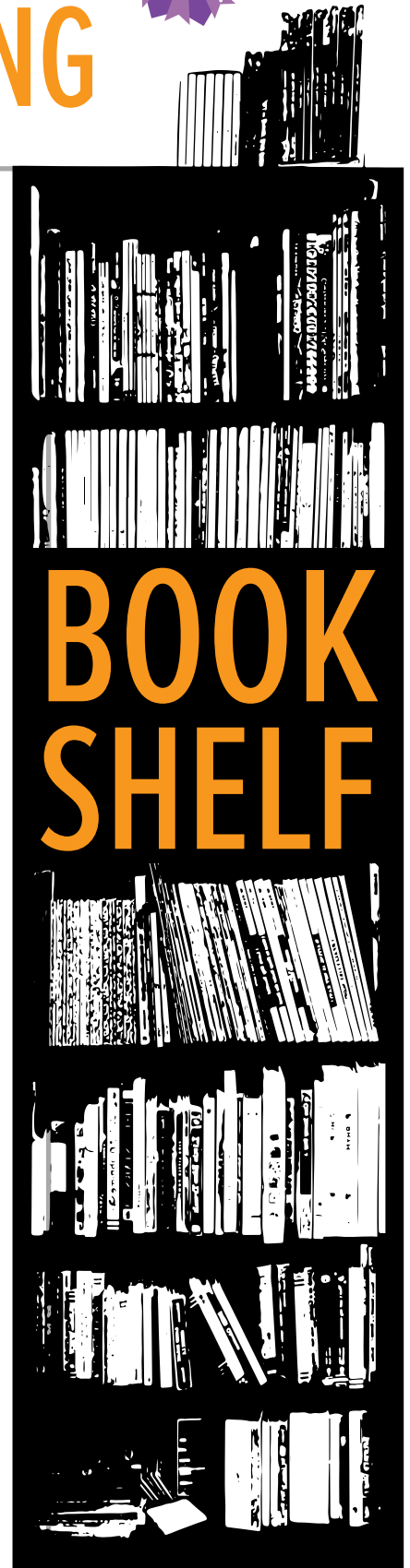


THE FRIENDSHIP BENCH
How Fourteen Grandmothers Inspired a Mental Health Revolution
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THE EMPTY PATH
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BOOK SHELF





MUST-HAVES

for Spring

BY AMY ZELLMER (SHE/HER)



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SPRING RECIPES

BY TAMARA DEMINOV (SHE/HER)

As the weather becomes warmer, our bodies naturally crave lighter, fresher meals and these recipes are perfect for spring. They use canned wild Alaskan salmon, a convenient and nutrient-rich ingredient packed with omega-3 fatty acids to support brain, heart, and hormone health. Whether you're starting your day with protein-rich egg muffins or enjoying a quick, balanced lunch with salmon quesadillas, these meals are easy to prepare and full of flavor.

SALMON QUESADILLAS



This easy-to-make lunch option has everything you want in a balanced meal. Fresh veggies add the perfect crunch and plenty of fiber, guacamole provides healthy fats, and almond flour tortillas keep the meal gluten-free.

INGREDIENTS (MAKES 4 QUESADILLAS):

- 4 almond flour tortillas
- 1 (6 oz) can wild Alaskan salmon
- 2 oz shredded cheese
- a handful of baby carrots, celery sticks and sliced cucumbers
- guacamole (store bought or home made)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat an electric grill on high.
2. Place the 4 tortillas on a plate. Spread ¼ of the salmon onto half of each tortilla, then sprinkle shredded cheese on top.
3. Fold the empty half of each tortilla over the filling and place all four quesadillas on the electric grill. Close the lid.
4. Cook for 5–7 minutes, or until golden brown and the cheese is melted.



SALMON OMELETTE MUFFINS

A perfect make-ahead breakfast option for the week, or even to freeze for later. These savory egg muffins are made with eggs, salmon, veggies, and cheese, and baked in a muffin tin. They offer a balanced mix of protein, fiber, healthy fats, and complex carbs, won't spike your blood sugar like a sweet breakfast can, and will keep you feeling full. Use the ingredients in the recipe, or swap in whatever veggies you have on hand.

INGREDIENTS: (makes 6 regular muffins or 12 mini muffins)

- 6 large whole eggs
- Avocado oil cooking spray (for the muffin tin)
- 1 (6 oz) can wild Alaskan salmon
- 1/2 cup frozen spinach
- 1/2 cup diced artichoke (frozen or from a jar)
- 2 oz feta cheese, crumbled

To prevent egg muffins from sticking to the tin, follow these steps:

1. **Grease the muffin tin well:** Use avocado oil spray to coat each muffin cup thoroughly, including the sides and bottom.
2. **Use silicone muffin pan:** Consider using a silicone muffin pan or liners, which are naturally nonstick.

3. **Let muffins cool before removing:** After baking, allow muffins to cool for at least 5–10 minutes. This helps the egg pull away from the edges and makes removal easier.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Generously spray your muffin tin with oil.
2. Sauté the artichoke and spinach in a skillet for 3–5 minutes.
3. In a bowl, whisk the eggs. Add the canned salmon (broken apart with a fork), crumbled feta, and sautéed spinach-artichoke mixture.
4. Mix everything together until well combined.
5. Fill muffin cups with the egg mixture.
6. Place the muffin tin in the oven and bake for 30 minutes, or until set.

Keep these omelette muffins in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 4 days, or freeze for later use.

For more variations of these omelette muffins using different ingredients, visit welltitudecoaching.com/recipes



OKOBOJI, IOWA:

BY AMY ZELLMER (SHE/HER)

A Lakeside Gem **IN THE HEARTLAND**

Tucked away in northwest Iowa, Okoboji is a delightful blend of natural beauty, nostalgic charm, and vibrant community spirit. Whether you're seeking sun-soaked adventures or tranquil retreats, this lakeside haven offers something for everyone.

Okoboji is part of the Iowa Great Lakes region, a series of interconnected lakes formed over 14,000 years ago by retreating glaciers. Among them, West Lake Okoboji, known for its clarity and depth, is one of only a few lakes in the world without algae, thus giving it the non-scientific characterization of a "blue lake". These pristine waters provide a playground for boating, fishing, and water sports enthusiasts.

At the heart of Okoboji's entertainment scene is the historic Arnolds Park Amusement Park. Operating since 1889, it boasts 23 rides, including the famous wooden roller coaster, The Legend. The park also offers go-karts, a river cruise on West Lake Okoboji, and live entertainment, making it a must-visit for families.

For a touch of nostalgia, the Iowa Great Lakes Maritime Museum and the Higgins Museum

of National Bank Notes provide fascinating insights into the region's history and heritage.

Nature lovers will find solace in the area's state parks. Gull Point State Park offers scenic trails, a sandy beach, and rustic CCC-era architecture, making it a favorite for campers and hikers alike. Meanwhile, Elinor Bedell State Park provides a quieter setting with its oak savannahs and prairie landscapes, perfect for birdwatching and peaceful walks.

Okoboji's culinary scene is as diverse as its landscapes. From lakeside eateries serving fresh catches to cozy cafés offering homemade treats, there's a flavor for every palate. Be sure to explore local favorites and discover the tastes that make Okoboji unique.

While summer is a popular time to visit, Okoboji's charm doesn't wane with the seasons. Autumn brings a tapestry of colors, winter offers ice fishing and snowmobiling adventures, and spring heralds the return of migratory birds and blooming wildflowers. Each season paints Okoboji in a new light, inviting visitors to experience its ever-changing beauty.

Whether you're planning a weekend getaway or an extended

stay, Okoboji promises memories that will last a lifetime. Embrace the serenity, indulge in the adventures, and let the spirit of this lakeside gem captivate your heart.

The Oakwood Inn: ***A Cozy Hideaway*** ***with Heart***

I spent three nights at **The Oakwood Inn** in Spirit Lake, and I have to say—this place is something special. Tucked just minutes away from all the lake action, it's a serene, adults-only retreat surrounded by lush gardens, tranquil ponds, and the kind of stillness that invites you to slow down and breathe a little deeper.



From the moment I checked in, I felt like I was staying somewhere intentionally crafted—and that's because I was. Owners Bill and Bridget fulfilled a lifelong dream when they purchased The Oakwood Inn in 2016. Bill is a third-generation innkeeper who quite literally grew up in the hospitality business—he checked in his first guest when he was just 12 years old at his family's Best Western in Worthington, MN. Bridget, originally from Wells, MN, spent the early part of her career as a journalist before finding her calling in hotel management, with decades of experience at top properties across Minnesota, Colorado, and Texas.



Their paths eventually crossed while working at the Sheraton Steamboat Resort in Colorado—and when they decided to get married, they chose Okoboji, their favorite destination, as the place to say "I do." A few years later, they returned to open The Oakwood Inn and bring their shared vision to life.

And wow, what a vision it is.

Each of the 11 rooms is thoughtfully designed for comfort and peace—think fireplaces, whirlpool tubs, and private verandas. I stayed in a suite with garden views and

spent each morning sipping coffee while watching the birds flit through the trees. Speaking of mornings: let's talk about the breakfast. As someone who eats gluten-free, I'm used to having limited (or no) options at most places. Not here. Every single morning I was treated to a gourmet three-course breakfast that was not only safe to eat, but delicious. One morning even featured biscuits and gravy that were entirely gluten-free—and honestly? I'm still dreaming about them.

What sets this inn apart isn't just the comfort, or the beautiful setting, or the amazing breakfast (though all those things help)—it's the heart behind it. Bill and Bridget don't just run a business; they've created a space where people feel welcomed, cared for, and at home. You can feel it in the way they greet you, the thoughtful amenities, and even the homemade cookies left out for guests.

If you're looking for a peaceful place to unwind during your Okoboji getaway—with a touch of luxury, a lot of heart, and a homemade breakfast worth waking up for—The Oakwood Inn is your spot. Trust me, you'll leave feeling rested, refreshed, and maybe even a little inspired.

theoakwoodinnokoboji.com

Maxwell's: Classic Lakeside Dining with Heart

I enjoyed dinner at **Maxwell's Beach Café**—and it was one of those meals you just know you'll be thinking about long after vacation ends.

I ordered the ribeye (medium rare, because that's how it should be). The steak was perfectly cooked, beautifully plated, and full of flavor—

and the service? Impeccable. My server was warm, attentive, and knowledgeable, the kind of experience that makes dining out feel extra special.



Maxwell's is definitely not a place you just "pop into." Reservations are a must—they book out days in advance during peak season. But it's worth the wait.

What makes Maxwell's even more special is the story behind it. Owners **Steven and Leah Jensen** bring a deep love and respect for the Okoboji region to everything they do. Both spent almost every summer of their lives here and even got married at the lake in 2018. They met at Emerald Hills Golf Course in 2013 and have since made Okoboji home, where they're now raising their two daughters.

Since taking over Maxwell's, they've committed to preserving what has made this place a local favorite since 1986—elevated dining, a refined menu featuring local Iowa beef and pork, fresh seafood flown in daily, and an extensive wine list. It's fine dining without the fuss, where you can enjoy classic cosmopolitan dishes with a lakeside breeze on your skin and a glass of wine in hand.

They also credit much of their success to **Chef Tim Stephenson**, who's been with Maxwell's for over 17 years. His dedication to crafting flavorful, innovative dishes ensures there's always something new to try—while keeping the time-honored staples that regulars love.

Every detail at Maxwell's feels intentional—from the polished service and elegant ambiance to the way Steven and Leah make you feel like a welcomed guest in their home.

Whether you're celebrating something special or just craving a top-notch dinner with a view, Maxwell's is the place to go. It's not just one of Okoboji's best dining experiences—it's a tradition, built on community, connection, and a whole lot of heart.

maxwellsbeachcafe.com

The Nutty Bar Stand: A Sweet Slice of Summer Since 1945

After my delicious dinner at Maxwell's, I did what any local would insist you do—I walked just around the corner to grab a **Nutty Bar** for dessert. It's practically a rite of passage when you're in Okoboji.

The **Nutty Bar Stand** has been an **Arnolds Park icon since 1945**, serving up that perfect mix of simple and nostalgic: vanilla ice cream on a stick, dipped in rich chocolate, and rolled in chopped peanuts. It's the kind of treat that instantly brings you back to childhood, whether you're five or fifty-five.

This sweet little stand has been **satisfying Okoboji's sweet tooth for generations**, and they've proudly kept things simple—the **highest quality ingredients at the lowest prices**—making it a beloved stop for

families year after year. It's that rare gem that still feels like a small-town treasure, even with the crowds lining up for their frozen fix.



Whether you're strolling through Arnolds Park Amusement Park or wrapping up a lakeside dinner, this place is always buzzing with happy energy. You'll spot people of all ages sitting on benches, laughing with friends, sticky fingers and all. It's the essence of summer in the Iowa Great Lakes.

The Nutty Bar Stand isn't just a stop for dessert—it's a tradition. Come have a treat, snap a pic under the red and white awning, and let this iconic stand be part of your Okoboji story too.

nuttybarstand.com

The Okoboji Store: Good Food, Great Vibes, and Gorgeous Views

If you're in Okoboji and looking for that perfect patio meal with a view—you need to head to **The Okoboji Store**.

I stopped by for lunch and grabbed a table out on the patio (pro tip: always sit outside if the weather's nice!). With the sun on my face, a cocktail in hand, and boats bobbing nearby, it felt like the very definition of a summer day well spent. The vibe here is laid-back yet lively, and there's often live music adding to the already vibrant atmosphere.

The Okoboji Store isn't just a restaurant—it's a piece of local history. The original building was constructed as a skating rink in the 1800s. By 1884, it had transformed into a general store, post office, boat rental, and livery. It's safe to say this little spot has seen a lot over the years!

In May of 2015, it reopened as the renovated restaurant and gathering place we know today. While the space has been beautifully updated, it still carries that sense of lakeside nostalgia—with a modern twist. And the views? Unreal. You can see **both East and West Lake** from different spots in the restaurant—whether you're dining lakeside or perched up top for the panoramic scene.



What makes it even more fun? You can **arrive by car or by boat**, thanks to their boat valet service. Pull up dockside and come right in—no dress code, just good energy and great food.

From casual lunches to dinner with friends and everything in between, The Okoboji Store has become a staple for locals and visitors alike. It's the kind of place you'll want to return to again and again... and maybe bring a few new friends along with you next time.

theokobojistore.com

A Stroll Through Spirit Lake: Small-Town Charm Just Minutes Away

Looking to explore beyond the lake? Head just a few minutes north to **Spirit Lake** for a quaint downtown experience that's full of charm and local flavor. Stroll along Hill Avenue, pop into unique boutiques, and discover spots that feel like well-kept secrets—like the coziest cafés and handcrafted apothecary goods. It's the perfect way to slow down, sip something delicious, and soak in a different side of the Iowa Great Lakes.

Spice & Lemon Café: My Morning Ritual in Spirit Lake

I was told to head to downtown Spirit Lake for the local shops—and I'm so glad I listened. That's how I discovered **Spice & Lemon Café**, tucked inside the charming Allure & Co. building. After one visit, it became my daily stop.



Their cold-pressed coffee with salted caramel cold foam? LIFE-CHANGING. I'm not even being dramatic. I went back every single morning of my trip. The space is cozy and cute, and the kind of place where the owner remembers you and your order. I also grabbed lunch here one day and it was just as delightful.

If you're anywhere near Spirit Lake, make sure this café is on your list. (Rumor has it she is opening a second location soon).

[instagram.com/spice.lemon.cafe](https://www.instagram.com/spice.lemon.cafe)

Megan & Co Apothecary: Nature-Infused



Self-Care

Just down the street from Spice & Lemon, I wandered into **Megan & Co Apothecary**—and I'm still thinking about it. Megan handcrafts all her products in-house, blending herbal remedies with intention and care.

I left with a new sunscreen and a body spray that smells like summer in a bottle. It felt like the perfect way to round out my vacation—taking a little piece of Okoboji wellness home with me.

www.meganandco.com

Until Next Time, Okoboji

Whether you're soaking up the sun on the lake, savoring a patio lunch with a view, or strolling through the charm of downtown Spirit Lake, **Okoboji has a way of wrapping you up in its magic.** It's a place where summer slows down, traditions are made, and every moment feels a little more golden.

From lakeside dinners to Nutty Bars and cold-foam coffees, I left with a full heart—and already dreaming about my next visit.

Here's to long days, warm nights, and the kind of places that feel like coming home.



[Okoboji Travel Guide](#)

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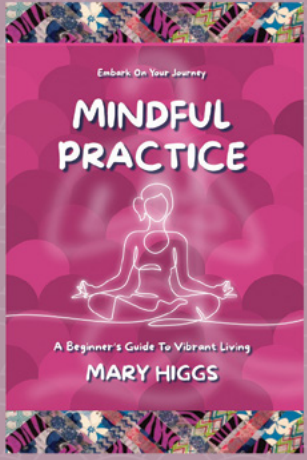


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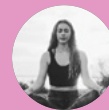
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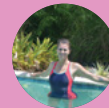
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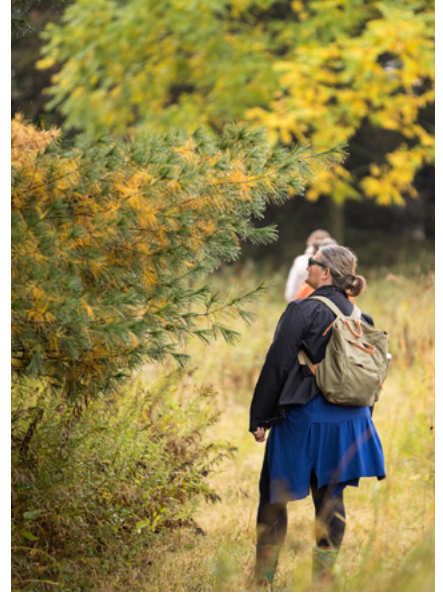
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