

Retreating Women

It was ten minutes into the opening of the retreat when I asked everyone to take a deep breath and connect with the space we were in. One woman's eyes filled with tears. I asked "What are the tears about?" She sniffed and replied in a near whisper "I can't believe I'm actually here and that I'm doing something for myself." There were nods and sighs around the circle. She had spoken for many others.

And that's why for over eight years I've been designing, fine tuning and facilitating Women's Retreats at my home in Tobermory, Ontario. Every time I witness women stepping out of their busy lives to be still with themselves I am reminded of how hard it can be to live with the distractions that fill our days. Even in my little sanctuary I can spend hours on the internet, watch dozens of channels on my satellite television, answer calls, run errands, help neighbours, and talk endlessly with my super long distance plan. If it weren't for my husband pulling me out to the bay for spin in the little power boat I might stay glued to my desk for more hours than is healthy.

And then there are the women. They come in the spring and the fall when the tourist traffic is minimal and there's room to spread ourselves out. Even though I am occupied with taking care of the accommodation, meals and a stimulating program I am also responsible for creating the silence and learning. I can't help but soak it in as they are filled with the healing energy of the Bruce Peninsula. Here, amongst the towering cedar trees and glacier pitted rock they will find an opening into their hearts and minds. Given the opportunity they'll speak their truth, hear their own wise inner voice and receive love and support from women they may have only met a few hours before.

What they share will be etched into their life lines forever and while they may never cross paths again, many will indeed find a way to keep the thread alive. They will remember a moment when one of them suddenly knew with uncanny accuracy exactly what she needed to do next with her career. Another will have stunned the group with her heartfelt commitment to repair a long damaged relationship challenge that had been depleting her. Inevitably, someone reaches back in time and connects the dots of a current negative behaviour with a painful memory they have carried for years. And always, they will laugh out loud thinking of the hilarious outbursts that punctuated their days and nights together.

They haven't come here for luxury rooms and endless spa treatments. They are pleasantly surprised by the wholesome, healthy meals and find a homey comfort in the casual surroundings. No pressure to perform or dress up. No need to impress. And more importantly there is no one to take care of but themselves. In fact, they are reminded often to be in their own "process". They are not here to look after others beyond holding an energy of loving support. It's a gift of time for themselves. While some get a bit queasy without a "job" to do, most welcome the reprieve from endless responsibilities.

So it is that in between the periods of silence these women from different walks of life, different cultures, different upbringings, and with their own values will find common ground as they acknowledge their own and each other's courage. Each will find a way to honour what is good and beautiful and sacred about herself. They will lean on each other as they pick themselves up from the discovery of their self-sabotage, their anger, resentment and limiting beliefs. They will sit alone by the water's edge and sob or celebrate whatever is real in that moment. And they will laugh until their sides hurt as hilarious stories are passed around the dinner table.

When the time comes to leave they will linger in the driveway taking pictures, getting one more hug, making promises and vowing to hold onto the inner peace they have found. They will look different with broad smiles and fresh vitality. They will have changed in some way that is either obvious or subtle but changed they are. And as they return to their busy lives, they'll take with them, ingrained in their bodies, minds and souls the memory of renewal. This is the gift of retreating.

Ms. Daryl Wood is an Author, Certified Life Coach, Retreat Owner and Spiritual Teacher/Mentor. She has two upcoming retreats: **Women's Wisdom Retreat** – October 23rd – 26th in Tobermory, Ontario and **Who Do You Think You Are?** on November 21st – 23rd in Guelph, Ontario. For details visit: www.darylwood.com or call 1-888-596-2385.

Ms. Daryl Wood is an Author, Certified Life Coach, Retreat Owner and Spiritual Teacher/Mentor. Her passion for personal empowerment has inspired men and women from all walks of life to embrace their inner wisdom and live their lives fully. Daryl strives for integrity and is also a committed lifelong learner as evidenced by her immersion in a yearlong Leadership Program. She coaches by phone all over the world with clients crediting her intuition, support and honesty as powerful tools to help them achieve their goals. Daryl also offers group coaching by phone or in person at dynamic, interactive live workshops. What really gets her excited is when she leads Women's Learning Retreats. She is launching programs for Parents and their Children and planning her first series of Men's workshops and Retreats for 2009. She has published three books and her foundational philosophy is reflected in her upcoming book *So What Now What*. Her website is www.darylwood.com and her toll free number is 1-888-596-2385.