

A Woman's Quest

Trying something new- despite some apprehension- can prove to be just what your body and mind need.



As I was packing for my upcoming adventure at Women's Quest Fitness Retreats in Winter Park, Colorado, I felt a bit anxious. With each T-shirt and pair of socks I stuffed into my oversize duffel bag, I thought *They're going to kill me*. There was a time when I considered myself an athlete, but my recent identity is more wife and mother. Heading for a week in the Rockies with a slew of incredibly fit women was a little intimidating, to say the least.

In my apprehension, I considered handing this assignment to someone else someone prepared to keep up with world-class athletes whipping everyone into shape. Thankfully, I didn't relinquish the task, because the experience wasn't at all the boot camp I imagined. Women's Quest Fitness Retreats is a slight misnomer. It is a workout, but it's also a vacation, a slumber party, a spa, and an education all at once. And who couldn't use a little of those?

I joined 24 other women from all walks of life from career women to housewives, twenty-somethings to sixty-somethings.

And the "campers," as we referred to ourselves, were not triathletes and world champions our nine counselors were.

Everyone arrived with different expectations and various abilities. And, I was surprised to discover, almost all came alone.



That's me, *top*, enjoying a massage after a rigorous bike ride. Colleen Cannon, the camp's founder, *above*, brings her enthusiasm and energy on each outing, as does the staff, pictured *hiking and running*

The goal of former professional triathlete Colleen Cannon, the founder of the camps, is to incorporate good health for the body and mind with fitness. She has been accomplishing this for six years by introducing women to yoga, meditation, inspirational poems and talks, fun



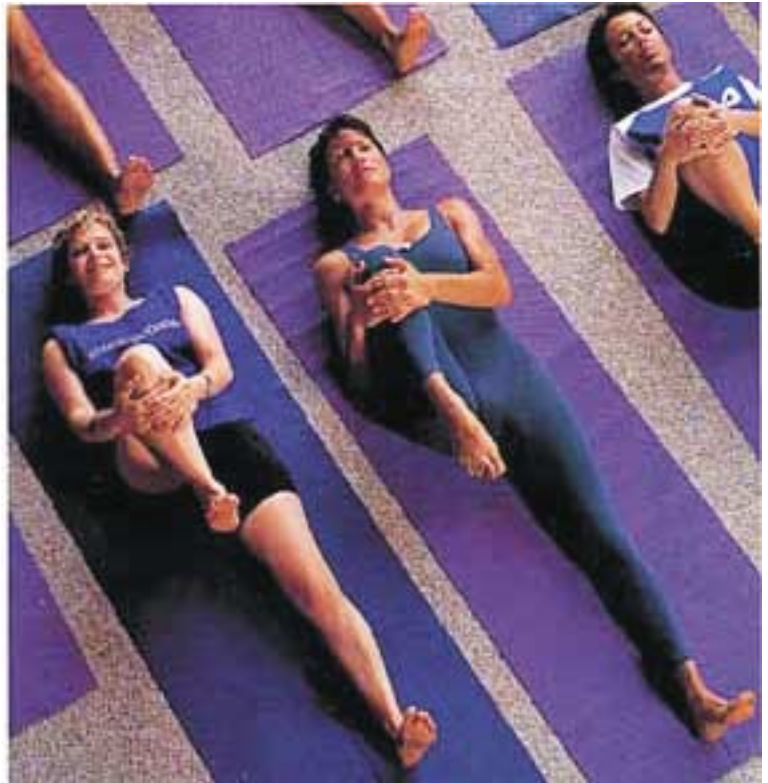
exercises, Native American traditions, and nutrition and fitness information. Each year Women's Quest offers five six-day camps, four in Winter Park and one in St. George, Utah. Three of the Colorado camps take place in the summer, featuring hiking, hiking, and swimming. The fourth, a winter camp, substitutes skis and snowshoes for tennies and tires. A fall camp in Utah changes the scenery and the focus to a desert retreat. The camps vary in physical intensity, with the first the one I attended catering to the most diverse group.

Each morning, we woke early to the sound of a soft chime, rubbed sleep from our eyes, and prepared for yoga and meditation. Although not everyone was a die-hard yogi, we all gave it a try. Besides, at 6:15 a.m., you welcome anything that involves closing your eyes. After that, it was off for a run or hike. Groups were casually divided by ability and interest without an ounce of pressure, merely encouragement.

With the morning jaunt complete, we gathered for a hearty breakfast and then headed out on our bikes complete with helmets, gloves, and water bottles. Once again, we could choose our rugged route by gauging the soreness of our backsides or the challenges we hoped to under take. Along the skinny mountainous trails, all the counselors showered us with shouts of encouragement and instruction, but none more than former triathlete Diane Israel, who I enjoyed calling "the resident liar." She was

especially effusive with her motivational exclamations and loved telling us that each hill was our last. Somehow we never really caught on, blithely spinning the gears of our bikes uphill for another mile. The afternoon generally included some free time and a chance to get a massage. (I don't think it was a coincidence that two of our tireless staff were professional massage therapists.) For those who couldn't fit in a rubdown, there were always the hot tubs or a quick nap.

One of the features of the camp I feared most was swimming, which alternated as an afternoon activity. Despite my status as a Pisces, I am not not very fond of pools. But with the instruction of Robin Saltonstall, a 12-year veteran United States Swim Team coach, and Anna Pettis Scott, a former member of the United States National Swim Team, I got very comfortable



Yoga, *above* and *below*, and other mental exercises were incorporated into each day's routine. Campers were encouraged to experience what interested them and to otherwise simply enjoy the mountains.

doing the drills and gliding through the cool water. (After miles of hiking and hiking, a pool feels really good under any circumstances.) And I didn't worry for a second about what the other campers thought of me in my goofy swim cap; it was a sisterly camaraderie without judgment.

In the evenings, we enjoyed another savory meal at the Woodspur Lodge, which the group commandeered for the



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To accommodate each rider, everything from custom fit bikes to bottomless bottles of water, was provided by the retreat.



“It’s not like you have to go out and do yoga,” says camp founder Colleen Cannon. “We try to give you the tools and let you fit them into your reality. Once you can connect someone to nature like this, it may stick with them.”



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week. Colleen carefully chose the healthy menus. In my precamp state, I imagined cottage cheese and lettuce. Instead, I ate pasta, stir-fry, black-bean burritos, and dessert! We were actually encouraged to eat. After we loaded ourselves with food, we gathered for instruction about nutrition, fitness training, aromatherapy, or journaling. One night we listened intently to four-time Olympic marathoner and bronze medalist Lorraine Moller share her life story. Even though I have never had any intentions of running a marathon (or a 5K, for that matter), I was sucked in by her tale. It was incredible to hold a experience. It's challenging yourself to climb the mountain and then not noticing that it was a workout. When we reached the

summit of our climb, we each threw a rose which we had carried from the camp over the edge. Each flower had a goal or dream attached to it. Sending them free-falling into the Rockies was our way of putting our dreams into motion. The hike lasted five hours (remember, some of it is downhill), but I never wanted it to end.

It was hard leaving Women's Quest. As a displaced Colorado native, I always find it difficult to return home to Iowa, but driving down from Winter Park this time

was even tougher. I learned so much from soaking in the experiences of other moms, from commiserating with other career women, and from those athletes, who incidentally never even breathed hard during our adventures. They challenged me and reminded me that I am still an athlete even if that means pushing a jogging stroller through suburbia instead of conquering the Rockies.

The retreat accomplished what Colleen had intended. It was a total experience for the body and mind. Now, when I get overwhelmed by this giant computer that sits on my desk or the chaos that surrounds me at



home, I will look at the rock given to me along our extended hike and remember the physical accomplishments, the fresh air, and the ferocious laughter. *

For more information about Women's Quest Fitness Retreats, call 303/443-5930 or e-mail Colleen Cannon at colleen@womensquest.com. Or go online: <http://www.womensquest.com>. The cost for the camp is approximately \$1,150, including lodging, meals, and equipment.



Danielle Laramie, *far left*, not only enjoyed the yoga, she also taught the group about her Native American heritage by introducing us to a sweat lodge.



Everyone who attended the retreat was excited to experience new things. Many women had never tried yoga, below; and a couple of them had never ridden a mountain bike.



“[Other fitness camps] offer one dimension,” Cannon says. “When people think about fitness, they don’t think about the mental side. What women really need to be healthy. We’re not PhD’s but we do have life experience.”

