

# An interview with The Retreat Ladies

Dawn Hopkins of Inspiritus Yoga and Sara Chesterfield



by Dr. Donna Jagielski



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## Dr. Donna Jagielski:

Provide us some background as to how you became “The Retreat Ladies”? What inspired you to do this? Where did you identify the need?

## Dawn & Sara:

**Dawn** - I serve as the owner and President of Inspiritus Yoga and The Retreat Ladies is an extension of Inspiritus. It has evolved because of Sara and I’s collaborations. Sara and I met in 2013 at Joyful Yoga in the Phoenix, Arizona metro area, where we both taught as yoga teachers. As we got to know one another, we developed a friendship and working relationship built on mutual love and respect.

We co-facilitated a yoga retreat in 2018 and discovered that we worked well together! After Joyful Yoga closed, we recognized that people really needed a safe and comforting space where they could decompress, restore, and heal from all of the stress and trauma of the past few years. So, we decided to start offering half and full-day retreats with this in mind. We offered our first mini-retreat in December of 2021 and we sold out!

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## Dr. Donna Jagielski:

Please describe some of the retreats you have led and ones in the near future.

## Dawn & Sara:

Our retreats provide a safe environment for women to restore, renew, and re-ignite their self-care practices. The way we guide women to restore, renew and re-ignite

their self-care is through: first, tapping into their inner state of wholeness and equanimity, second, increasing their capacity for healing, third, building resiliency, fourth, nourishing their body, fifth and lastly, nurturing their body, mind, heart, and spirit.

Our retreats typically include yoga and movement practices, meditation, journaling, sound healing, aromatherapy, mindful eating, women’s healing circles, and other activities to promote self-awareness, reflection, healing, and transformation. But most importantly, the essence of our workshops is to provide a space for people to connect and enjoy the company of other amazing women!

Some of the themes have been: “Joyful Journaling Retreat”, “Cacao & Fire Ceremony”, “Women’s Soul Care Retreat”, a few special holiday yoga events, and a full-day “Intention-Setting Mini-Retreat”.

Our 2023 calendar includes a full-day “Self-Love Retreat” geared toward helping women fill their own cups and make their own self-care a priority and a half-day “Night of Wonder ” mini-retreat where we will inspire wonder and awe with God’s creation and the cosmos.

As part of our planning, our goal is to offer an annual major event/retreat. This year that major event will be April 27-30. This retreat will consist of we are offering a 4-day, 3-night “Women’s Spring Renewal Retreat ” at El Rancho Robles in Oracle, AZ designed to help women heal, restore, and renew their bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits.

Our plan is to continue to offer half and

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full-day retreats on a monthly basis, with longer retreats one to two times per year. Our longer-term goal is to provide out-of-state retreats and go international in 2024!

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

What are the greatest challenges you face in organizing your retreats?

**Dawn & Sara:**

There are many aspects involved in facilitating retreats. First is location. Since we no longer have a studio space, we have been offering them at our homes, with the exception of the upcoming retreat in Oracle. Secondly, we have noticed that people are hesitant to make commitments, thus a tendency to wait until the last minute to register. Last-minute registrations can pose a number of challenges, especially when coordinating with a retreat center that requires a minimum number of people for example.

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

What are the unexpected rewards of leading such retreats?

**Dawn & Sara:**

We both have a heart for helping women, which is why we do what we do! It is amazing and so rewarding to see what can happen when you get a group of like-minded women together. A beautiful community takes shape and becomes a sacred space of healing, growth, and change. We have witnessed women transform before our very eyes in a short span of time. We feel it is an honor and a privilege to be called to do this type of work.

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

As a yoga student seeking a retreat, what should one look for?

**Dawn & Sara:**

With so many different types of retreats available in terms of length, location, focus, style, cost, etc. it can be really confusing to find the “right” retreat. Our advice is to identify your “why” before you begin your search. What is your purpose for going? What are you hoping to get out of it? How much time do you have available? Do you want to be local or travel somewhere? What is your budget? Begin your search after you have answered these questions. Be sure to check if there are any reviews and/or testimonials available as well. Trust and experience are very important when looking for a retreat. When you trust the facilitator(s), you can trust the process. A retreat typically doesn't end on the last day and the experiences you have can be life-altering.

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

Cost and time seem to be the most typical and significant barriers which prevent people from attending. What do you suggest?

**Dawn & Sara:**

Cost and time are definitely some of the biggest challenges when it comes to attending a retreat. That said, we typically find the money and make the time for the things that matter to us. As women, we tend to put other people's needs before our own. It is vitally important that we recognize that our self-care is a must. We need to fill our own cups first so care for the needs of our loved ones. If we don't make the time for health and well-being now, we will end up spending it on our illness and mental health. Remember, you are worth it!

Recognizing that people don't have unlimited time and funds, is why we offer a variety of options ranging from shorter,



less expensive mini-retreats to longer retreats that require a greater investment of time and money. We also offer early bird discounts, repeat discounts, and payment plans to make it more financially feasible.

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski**

Another barrier is companionship or lack thereof. Many times people don't feel comfortable venturing into something flying solo. What do you suggest, and how do you cultivate relationships through your retreats?

**Dawn & Sara:**

Cultivating community is a huge part of what we do. Women need each other, and there is nothing more beautiful than women supporting other women! Our retreats include opportunities for women to get to know one another and connect. We include activities that facilitate discussion, sharing, play, and more!

Often people bring a friend or relative with them to our retreats. Joining a friend or relative can also be a great way to bond more deeply with them! Just be sure to expand your horizons while you're there because you may meet one of your new best friends during the retreat, whether you're an extrovert or an introvert!

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

After the retreat is over, how do participants keep the momentum and maintain what was experienced?

**Dawn & Sara:**

There is a common language women want/need to hear: You are safe, we are listening, and you are being heard, recognized, and validated. That language is an integral part of our retreats.

After a retreat ends, we encourage people

to continue to do the work they started. We offer journaling prompts, resources, and other tools they can take home to continue the journey. We also continue to stay in touch with our retreaters by offering monthly events. We have found that most of our people are "repeat retreaters" and they love coming back to see their new (and old) friends!

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

There seem to be plenty of yoga retreats in general but not Christ-centered. Why do you think there is currently a lack of such availability?

**Dawn & Sara:**

Specifically, Dawn used to have a retreat business called The Living Well Retreats offering exclusively Christ-centered yoga and women's retreats back in 2009. I also owned and operated a non-profit Christ-centered wellness studio from 2011-2014. I found that people were not willing to pay much in either environment because they viewed it as "ministry", and I was unable to sustain either business from a financial perspective. Over time, I expanded offerings to serve people of all faith backgrounds, not just for financial reasons but because I felt led to do so. This expanded reach serves people who don't identify as Christian, might be questioning faith, are not connected to a faith community, or who were carrying spiritual wounds and trauma. Having gone through this herself, Dawn understands times of transition well and wants to help as many people as possible.

Specifically, from the Christian perspective, Jesus meets us where we are, loves us as we are, and doesn't exclude anyone. That is why we have an open community where anyone is welcome to experience the love of Christ, regardless of

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their faith background or where they are in their spiritual journey.

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

What are your suggestions for someone just starting in the retreat world? What do you suggest as the planner's first steps and the attendee's first steps?

**Dawn & Sara:**

If you are interested in facilitating retreats, we suggest you attend a few first to understand what it's like to attend a retreat from the attendee's perspective. Be clear on what you're offering and who is your target audience. Test the water with shorter events and build a community and a following. Suppose you need help with aspects such as determining a location, event planning, marketing, budgeting, retreat execution, and follow-up. In that case, it's a good idea to take a class or workshop on retreat facilitation.

If you want to attend a retreat, begin with your "why" and what you hope to get out of it. Identify your budget, your available time, what type of retreat you are looking for, and whether you want to stay local. Then search for retreats. Many retreat groups are available on Facebook, Instagram, and elsewhere. You can search Google to find what you are looking for regarding a retreat.

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**Dr. Donna Jagielski:**

Anything else you would like to add/or suggest?

**Dawn & Sara:**

Our final advice and encouragement would be to give a retreat a try. When you do, show up fully, have a willing heart, remain open, and trust the process. Be still...and leave the rest to God. You'll be so glad you did!



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# Get to Know

Dawn Hopkins

Founder & President of Inspiritus Yoga, Co-Founder of The Retreat Ladies



I am the Founder and President of Inspiritus Yoga: Wholistic Wellness & Training Centers, an international yoga school with training centers in Chandler, Detroit, and Saskatoon, SK.

I have been helping people along their health and wellness path since 2002 when I owned and operated a women's fitness franchise. I began teaching yoga in 2006 and have been training yoga instructors since 2008.

I currently own and operate Inspiritus Yoga where I help people find tap into their inner wholeness through various modalities of yoga, wholistic wellness programs and coaching, mindful eating, yoga teacher training, continuing education, and master's training. I also offer private healing services, facilitate yoga and wellness retreats,

and speak and write on wellness and yoga topics regularly.

It is my soul's purpose and calling to help people find healing, growth and transformation through yoga and mindfulness practices. I feel honored and blessed to share the power of these practices with my yoga community.



# Get to Know

**Sara Chesterfield**

Teacher at Inner Vision Yoga & Co-Founder of The Retreat Ladies



I'm just a woman trying to figure out this life we are given with grace and ease, but some people like to see the experience behind the yogi.

I am trained as a 500E-RYT, Certified Chair Yoga Instructor, Certified Yoga Nidra Instructor, and 200 Medical QiGong Instructor. I started this yoga journey in 2007 and haven't looked back. I have spent time learning, listening, and practicing from the amazing teachers around me. Inspiration is everywhere. This led me to study at Zen Wellness Center to receive my 200 Medical QiGong Certification. There was something about the TCM way that inspired me like nothing else. My Medical QiGong lineage is through Master Michael Leone at the Zen Wellness Center in Arizona.

I received my 200 and 300 YTT through Inner Vision Yoga in Arizona. I am forever grateful to the teachers that came before me and the teachers that will continue their lineage.



**THE RETREAT LADIES**  
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