

# Women laugh, cry, share at annual weekend retreat

by Heidi A. Hoffman  
Feature Editor

This weekend I experienced something wonderful. For several women this weekend was the beginning of a new life. It was the third annual "Focus on Women" weekend retreat.

The weather was great and that only added to the already overflowing energy of the 100 of women who joined together in song, dance and friendship.

The retreat began at 5:30 p.m. on May 3 and continued through May 5.

This weekend wasn't just an experience. It was a feeling.

"Wow, just feel the energy in this room," commented Leslie Woods, one of the musicians who led songs at the opening event Friday night.

This was a really good chance for women to focus on their life without the outside pressures of children, bills, school or any other stressful things that are experienced every day.

It made me feel, as it did many others, like I can do anything that I want to. The women's weekend showed me that I can "be my own hero."

The theme of the weekend was "Celebration," and the feeling was truly of celebration.

The women who came to the celebration were from all different backgrounds, different cultures and even different states. They all, however, shared one common characteristic . . . they were all women.

There were sisters, mothers and daughters, and even a mother,



The song circle was a great experience. Even if you didn't know the words you could just hum along. The music was part of the joy.

daughter and grandmother combination.

This weekend I learned that it's alright to have a shape and size that is different from everyone else. That is what makes me, me. I know that I can do almost anything that I set my mind to and I know that I can do it by myself or with the help of others. I know that every choice that I have in life is mine to make no matter what anyone else says. In other words, this weekend I discovered "me."

"Thanks to everyone for help-

ing me celebrate the woman that I am. I had temporarily misplaced "me," commented Nancy Newcomb, a participant.

For some this retreat was the first time that they have ever shared a weekend with women only, and for others they had gone all three years. No matter how many times they'd gone, there is still a new feeling every time.

"I have been all three years and this, to me, is a celebration of living," said Karianne Kenyon.

One of the most memorable experiences of the weekend was the gift of song. There were several song circles and concerts. At any given time you could just start singing and everyone else would join in.

"How could anyone ever tell you, you were anything less than beautiful? How could anyone ever tell you, you were less than whole? How could anyone fail to notice that your loving is a miracle? How deeply you're connected to my

soul," sang all of the women in unison.

I felt so comfortable, like everyone there, whether I knew them or not, was instantly a friend, a sister.

For me, this trip was something extra special. I have a sister that I haven't seen for several years and on this trip, I met some of her friends. I may even get to see her soon.

This weekend was a weekend of miracles, celebration and pleasure. I have never felt so good about myself and the world around me.

Other women felt the same way.

"It was great to be around other women going through the process of becoming instead of just 'being,'" said Pat Fontaine, information specialist.

I think that everyone came away from this trip with something different.

The coordinators of the trip Linda Vogt, Ellen Burbridge and Rene Rathburn organized several activities. There were several work-

shops ranging from learning to give a massage, to working on your relationships. There were dancing classes available, song circles and even hiking and a rafting trip. And every woman had the opportunity to receive a massage done by a professional masseuse. For some it was their first time.

"I feel really relaxed," commented one of the women.

I have never gone on a trip that I never wanted to leave . . . until now.



The theme of celebration really showed up often. Especially when the celebration fairy kept mentioning all the different holidays around the world.

**"I was very moved by some women willing to share, trust and feel safe to share their life history and emotions."**

**"I appreciated the opportunity to be a part of the woman energy this weekend. I felt welcomed, accepted and loved."**

-Cheri Snell

**"It's wonderful to have the diversity of ages and experiences and the shared warmth. And the freedom to do as much or as little as one desires."**

Photos by  
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The weekend allowed you to do what you wanted without being criticized. Janet Little helped celebrate with some decoration.



Hugs were a big part of this weekend. Everyone shared a lot of emotions.



On Sunday there was a closing ceremony. For some it was difficult to hold back the tears. The coordinators led the group in song. From left are: Kathleen Fallon of Motherlode and Coordinators Ellen Burbridge, Linda Vogt and Rene Rathburn.