

ONE MAN'S FLOAT

Coast Weekend contributor Matt Love tries out the new sensory deprivation tank at Prana Wellness Center in Astoria

There I was, alone, floating in saltwater, drifting here and there, naked, in pitch darkness. I couldn't hear anything.

No, not a dream. I was inside a sensory deprivation tank in Astoria, of all places. When I entered, I had a million items on my mind — an agenda — my typical cluttered state of mind.

Inside the tank, the agenda dissipated in five minutes. Then, a startling vision appeared: Saddle Mountain, the 3,288-foot peak in the Coast Range. I couldn't believe what I was sensing! Saddle Mountain was calling me to return after a 28-year absence. And it was no mystery to me why. Her name was Janet.

Some three weeks prior to the float, I had breakfast with my friend Leigh Oviatt, who had recently opened a new business, the Prana Wellness Center. The center offers massage therapy, acupuncture, infrared sauna and the Oregon Coast's first sensory deprivation (float) tank. It's a fine addition to the area's healing arts community.

Leigh was rhapsodizing about the benefits of a float, which last for 90 minutes, and she would know since she's floated 25 times. "It's like hitting the reset button on your life every time you float," she said.

Frankly, I needed a reset. I was suffering from insomnia, depression over the impending death of my 16-year-old husky, and reservations on whether I should continue my teaching career in a conventional classroom setting. My usual method of alleviating stress and finding direction in my life, walks along the ocean, were no longer working all that well.

Leigh knew of my problem and suggested I take a float; perhaps I would relax and figure out a few things. I agreed. Why not? The psychic and physical benefits of floating appear to be well documented, and I just love documentation in my life. Thus, right before I knelt in-

side the chamber, I had a firm agenda of what I wanted accomplished during my float.

As I mentioned earlier, the agenda evaporated very quickly once I found the water and allowed stillness to overtake me.

In the summer of 1987, I hiked to the top of Saddle Mountain with an extraordinary woman named Janet Donkle. I was 23 years old and truly in love for the first time. We imagined and began plotting an incredible creative Oregon life together once she graduated from design school and I started writing.

On the day of the hike, it was a sunny and cloudless. The view from the summit seemed limitless in every direction. We felt on top of the world and that anything was possible. Six months later I had blown it with Janet. Several years after that, she died from cancer, and I was never able to make amends. In the subsequent two decades, I'd suppressed my feelings about Janet and never gave climbing Saddle Mountain a second thought.

That all changed in a matter of minutes floating in saltwater and darkness. I made up my mind right there: I was going back to Saddle Mountain, this summer, alone. Answers were there. I'd be a fool not to pursue them.

I don't know how or why my float inspired this vision. It had absolutely nothing to do with the original intent of Leigh's suggestion or my expectations. Maybe that's the whole point of the experience; you don't where it will lead so don't bother trying to predict it. I do know one thing, I will float again. Who knows what else good lurks out there in my mind and body.

Matt Love is the author/editor of 13 books about Oregon, including "A Nice Piece of Astoria: A Narrative Guide." They are available at coastal bookstores and through www.nestucaspitpress.com

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Submitted photo by Don Frank

Matt Love allows his mind to drift while floating in the sensory deprivation tank.

**Prana Wellness Center is located at
1428 Commercial St. in Astoria.**

**Visit www.pranawellnesscenter.net or on Facebook.
A float costs \$50.**

Coastal Life

Story by MATT LOVE