

**8 CELEBRITIES** LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN

# PAIN-FREE LIVING

YOUR GUIDE TO LEADING A HEALTHIER LIFE

JUNE/JULY 2018

## Summer Survival Guide

### Great Escape

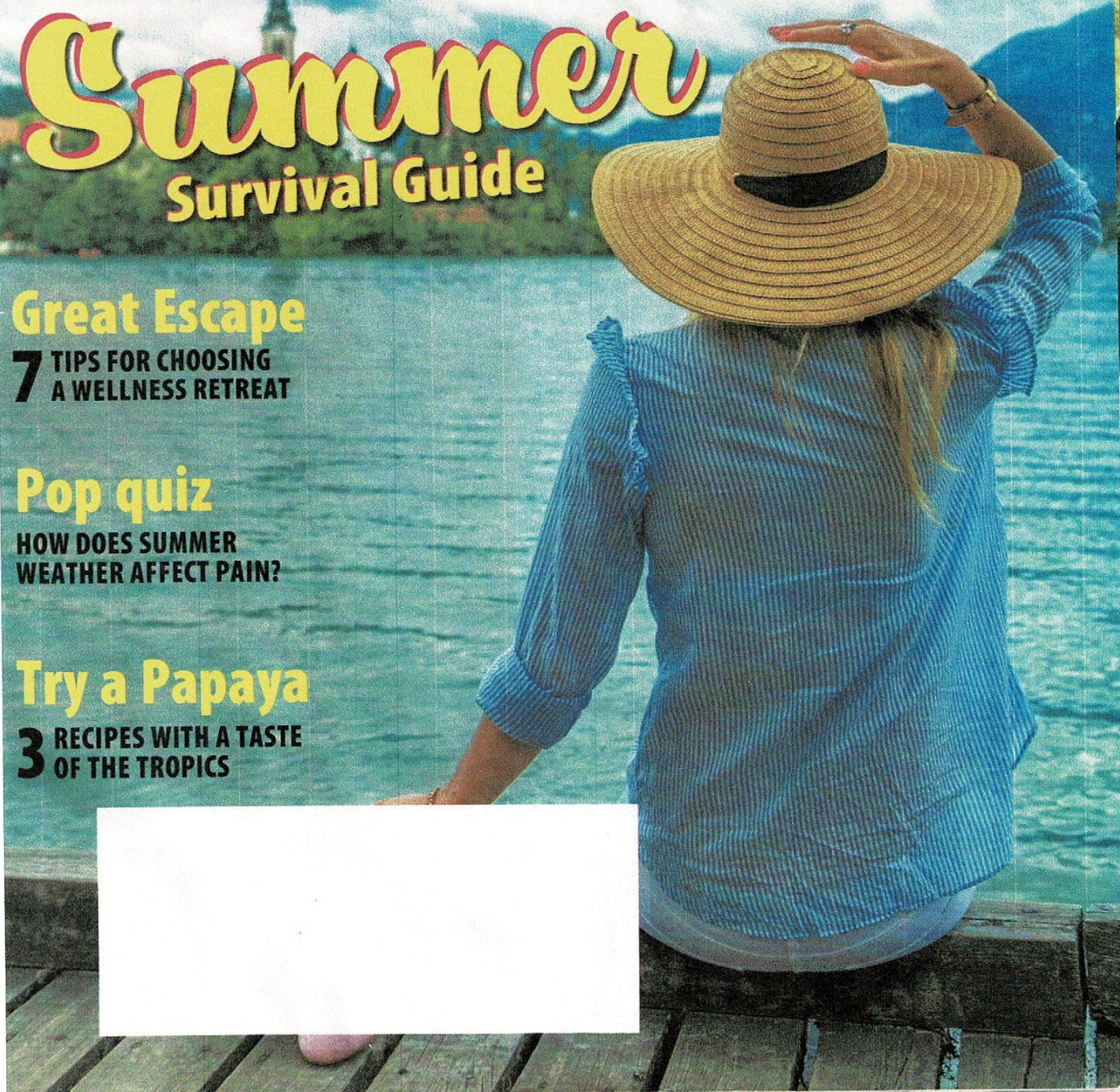
**7** TIPS FOR CHOOSING  
A WELLNESS RETREAT

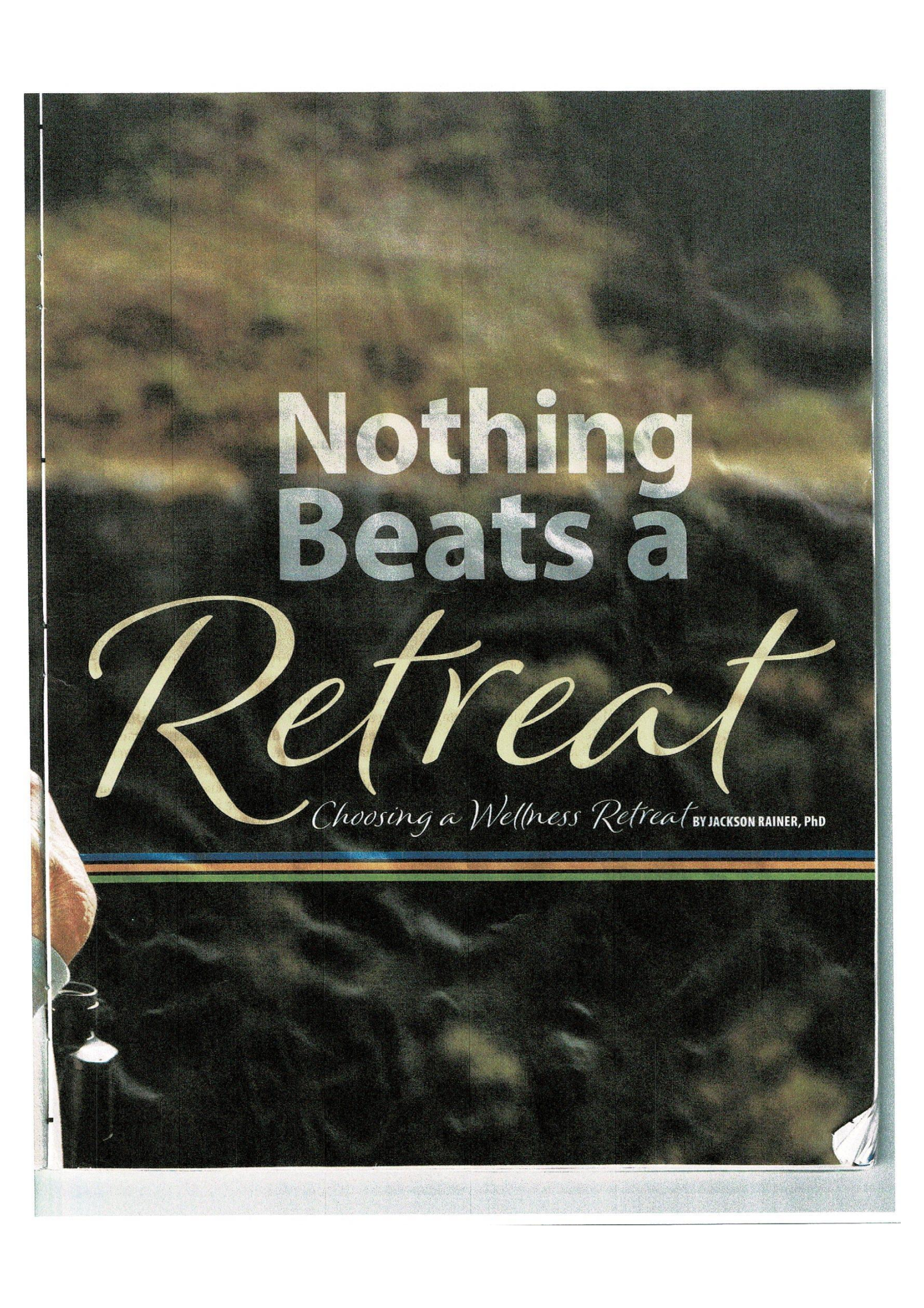
### Pop quiz

HOW DOES SUMMER  
WEATHER AFFECT PAIN?

### Try a Papaya

**3** RECIPES WITH A TASTE  
OF THE TROPICS





Nothing  
Beats a

*Retreat*

*Choosing a Wellness Retreat* BY JACKSON RAINER, PhD



LATE ON A FRIDAY MORNING LAST SPRING, I made the mistake of walking to work without putting the prescription orthotics in my shoes (I have arthritic feet). I recognized the lack of support as I bolted down the sidewalk, but didn't turn around and take the time to go back home and properly outfit my shoes. Just a few hours later, my knees, legs and feet were achy. Prescribing for myself as I am prone to do, I called myself a name, uttered several well-chosen profanities and curses concerning my sloth, and figured I would pay penance for several days due to my inattention.

As a psychologist practicing as a psychotherapist, I spend much of my workday in a very good rocking chair. At the end of that particular day, I said goodbye to my last client and rose from the chair. My right knee buckled and I fell hard, flipping elbow over teakettle, as my grandmother used to say, and landed in a twisted heap on the floor. My client came to the rescue—which was not in our therapeutic contract—picking me up, dusting me off and helping me reorient to time and space. Not be outdone, I hobbled home on my sore haunches. "After all," I said to myself, "I live right across the street." The pain worsened

over the weekend and within a few days, I visited an orthopedist who proceeded to stabilize, medicate and inject the diagnosed collateral ligament damage in my knee. "Go home and sit down for a couple of weeks," he ordered. "You'll be better. But you must stay off of your knee." I was cinched into a hard brace extending from ankle to thigh. With great aggravation and resistance, I complied and eventually recovered.

Now, to the point of this story. As I sat watching rerun episodes of *Law and Order: SVU*, stewing over the accident and angry that the immobilizing brace was more irritating than the injury itself, I realized I was not caring for myself physically, emotionally or spiritually. I was grieving my wife's recent death, working too much and feeling aimless and lonely. So, as grace would have it, I fell, stopped to sit down and heal, and needed the time and pain to make sense of my circumstances. In my musings, I realized I needed help beyond my personal resources to help gain perspective. I would need experts to put old Humpty Dumpty back together again.

But where to get a combination of practitioners who could help heal all of me—mind, body and

spirit? Clients, peers and friends had attended retreats in the past, and I did what I knew to do—Google “wellness retreats.” The results had my laptop smoking. I was overwhelmed by the options and dismayed to not have a road map to guide my choices. Every website claimed I would lose weight, rejuvenate, and find inner peace through participation in combinations of hot yoga, gastrointestinal (GI) cleanses, reiki, shanti chants, vibrational tuning, sweat lodges and the ingestion of kale. All for a few thousand dollars, plus “add-ons.”

### WHAT DO YOU NEED?

Persisting with my online study, I found Skyterra, a beautiful retreat center in the Blue Ridge mountains, several hours from my Atlanta home. I called Teresa Ostler, RN, general manager of the retreat, to ask for help determining whether I was in the right place. I knew I was in the right frame of my life for such help, but did not know how to make an informed decision for investing time and finance. She said, “Everyone who comes here is seeking something. You will be successful if you know what it is that you need. Are you wanting more physical fitness?” she asked. “Stress relief? Do you need a restart? The more specific you are, the better you can find a good fit.” She suggested journaling to articulate what I wanted out of the experience and writing explicitly to the point that I might concretely recognize and realize how I would achieve my goals from such an experience.

It seemed as though Skyterra fit my needs. As I pondered, I came upon another realization and answered a second thought relevant to the decision to attend such a retreat: I could not achieve my goals anywhere else. Wellness retreats are not inexpensive and require more than a bit of commitment. If I had been looking to just relax and “get away from it all,” I would have gone to the beach. Had I been looking to learn yoga and meditation, I could have stayed in Atlanta and attended classes at the local YMCA. If I primarily wanted to be indulged and pampered, I could have found any number of luxury resorts capable of catering to my every whim. I learned that Skyterra had what I’d come to realize I needed—a holistic approach to health that kept my head, heart and spirit in the game while I was surrounded by like-minded people, guided by expert practitioners. The food was nourishing, alcohol was at a minimum, and the days were busy with physical activities and educational classes. Fortunately, GI cleanses were not on the menu.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU CHOOSE

Why are you going?



Can you reach your goals anywhere else?



How accessible is the retreat?



Do you want to be alone or with other people?



Who are the teachers?



What is included in the cost?



Will the effects last after you leave and return to daily life?



## RETREAT ROUNDUP

### THE LODGE AT WOODLOCH

109 River Birch Lane • Hawley, Pennsylvania 18428

1-800-WOODLOCH

Wellness programs include Rest + Well Blueprint, Forest Bathing and Mind Matters-Brain Health Program  
[thelodgeatwoodloch.com/experience/wellness-programs/](http://thelodgeatwoodloch.com/experience/wellness-programs/)

### CAL-A-VIE HEALTH SPA

29402 Spa Havenus Way • Vista, CA 92084

1-866-772-4283

Mind-body-spirit programs offers more than 20 classes, from forms of yoga, tai chi and meditation to Labyrinth and Rock, Roll and Relax  
[cal-a-vie.com/](http://cal-a-vie.com/)

### CANYON RANCH WELLNESS RESORTS

8600 E. Rockcliff Road • Tucson, Arizona 85750

165 Kemble Street • Lenox, Massachusetts 01240

877-761-9878

Geared toward those looking to relax, renew and feel truly well  
[canyonranch.com/](http://canyonranch.com/)

### WELLNESS COLLECTIVE BY RANCHO VALENCIA RESORT & SPA

5921 Valencia Circle • Rancho Santa Fe, California 92067

858-759-6490

Offers workshops, lectures and activities designed to provide you the tools to change your health and well-being  
[ranchovalencia.com/spa/spa-wellness-collective](http://ranchovalencia.com/spa/spa-wellness-collective)

### ART OF LIVING RETREAT CENTER

639 Whispering Hills Road • Boone, North Carolina 28607

828-263-4910

Offers retreats and therapies to increase energy while relaxing the body and mind  
[artoflivingretreatcenter.org/](http://artoflivingretreatcenter.org/)

### NEW LIFE HIKING SPA

2617 Killington Road • Killington, Vermont 05751

802-353-2954

Offerings includes a hiking program, physical fitness, wellness education, healthy cuisine and spa services  
[www.newlifehikingspa.com](http://www.newlifehikingspa.com)

## QUALITY OF LIFE

I registered for a week's stay at Skyterra. Several months later, the time came to pass. I packed light, went off the grid and moved into a tiny house on the campus late Sunday afternoon, having put down money and defenses to move into the spirit of change. In a later conversation with Emily Ferron, a marketing administrator at Skyterra, I agreed that I had intentionally left the noise of the world behind for a little while. Skyterra was quiet—blessedly quiet. “Health and wellness is a hot topic right now, with a great deal of conflicting advice and philosophies,” she said. “This all translates into a tyranny of ‘shoulds,’ which confounds and is unhelpful to most people. So many wellness activities are overly prescriptive and sound like one size fits all. ‘Do it this way or you will fail.’ We are different. Rather than make you fit us, when you applied, we closely interviewed for your intention and need, which we then helped translate into action. Once you were clear about what you wanted for your health, we stepped in to help you achieve it. We heard you say that your health is an expression of your quality of life—a philosophy that we fully embrace.” Ostler added, “This retreat is good for those, like you, who need a safe, assisted place to get over the threshold of consistent exercise and healthy eating.”

That said, I had not considered sustainability in my planning. Deeply embedded in my decision was the notion that I needed more than a luxury escape. I wanted to learn from the experience and put newfound knowledge into my day-to-day living. I looked at my week more as an investment than an indulgence. Ostler spoke directly to this: “We see a retreat experience similar to a family lake house or going to the best summer camp, where you renew and feel good because it comes naturally. If we can create that environment, then you’ll begin to be self-caring rather than self-punitive.” I realized that I wanted a long-term track for a sustainable return to good health and needed to be gentle rather than cynical with myself.

I’m happy to report that I got more than I had expected. By the end of the week, I was hiking 10 miles on trails along the Blue Ridge Parkway and sleeping more soundly than I had in months. I was progressively able to shift my obsessive and ruminative thoughts into gentle courses of action. I was lucky to have found the right fit of a wellness retreat, since I didn’t know how to assess interest, need and the structure of such a program. There



were many unknowns as I started the journey that began with my injury.

#### **FIND YOUR SERENITY NOW**

Based on my experience, I've identified several markers that increase the likelihood of finding your ideal wellness retreat. Here are thoughtful questions to ask and answer as you consider such an investment of time, energy and money.

**WHY ARE YOU GOING?** What do you hope for? Be explicit with yourself in need, capacity and desire, and be prepared to discuss this with facility staff. Remember there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

#### **CAN YOU REACH YOUR GOALS ANYWHERE ELSE?**

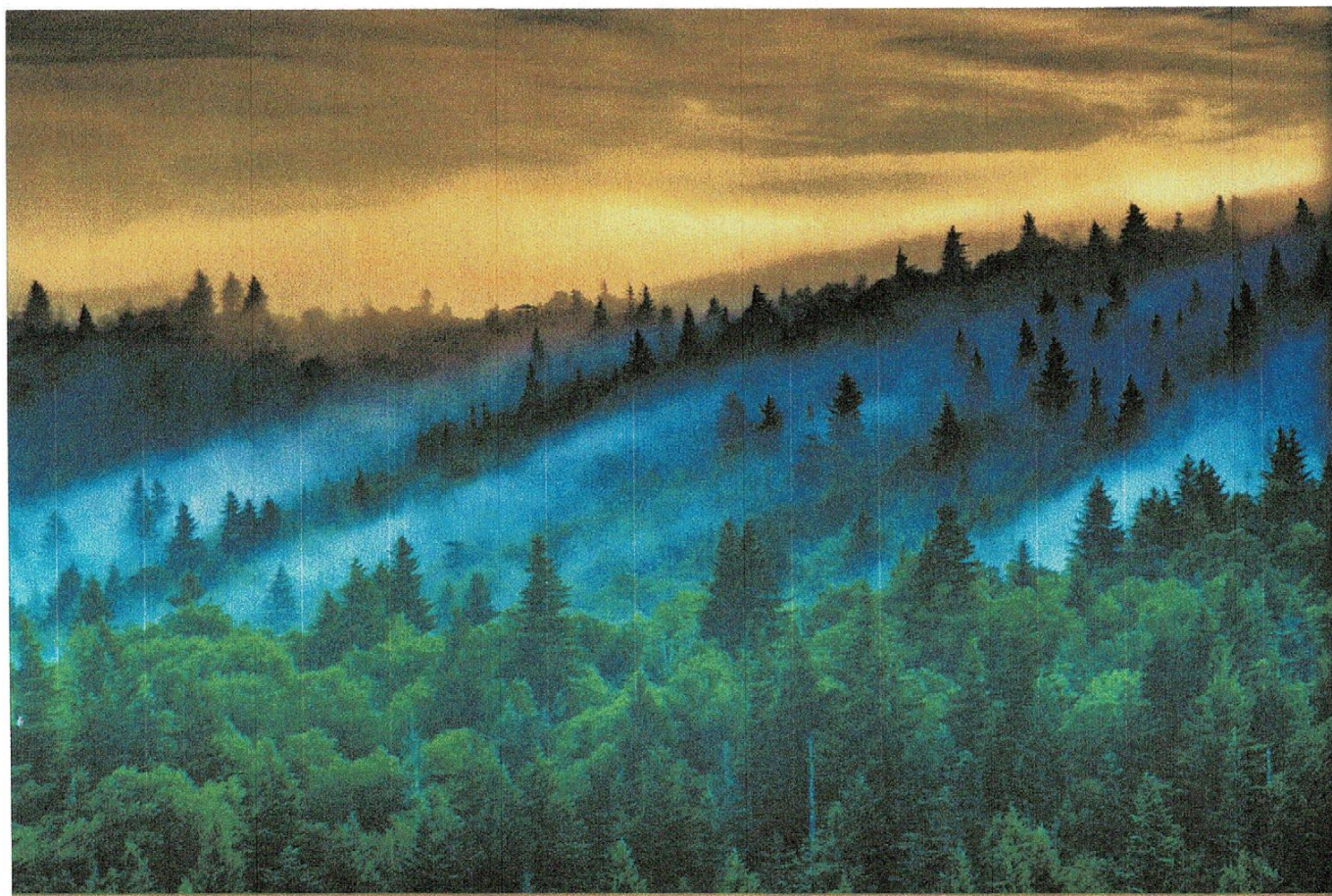
Wellness retreats are educational, active, and most effective when you are a curious and lively participant. There is no need to attend such an experience as a passive observer.

**HOW ACCESSIBLE IS THE RETREAT?** I made a very good choice knowing that Skyterra was within driving distance. I considered several retreat centers that would have required flights and change

of time zones. I didn't need to return to my daily life jetlagged and tired from the travel itself.

#### **DO YOU WANT TO BE ALONE OR WITH OTHER PEOPLE?**

I arrived in a vulnerable state. I knew I wanted group support but also craved a sense of privacy. Ostler spoke to this, saying, "As you make a decision to attend any retreat, you will want to know the guest-to-staff ratio and how the retreat center values the importance of community. Ask about preparations for classes, how accommodations are managed and how attention is personalized." Over the course of the week, I felt my group of 12 to be progressively unified. The Skyterra staff-to-guest ratio was 8 to 1 during my stay, and several one-to-one sessions were included in the overall cost. I did purchase two add-ons: an individualized exercise program planning session for use upon my return home and a massage. My privacy was respected. The center was large enough that I could wander and ponder alone to my personal satisfaction. While the staff knew of my reasons for attendance, particularly related to the acute grief I was dealing with resulting from my wife's recent death, such



information was respected; I was allowed to hold and disclose at my own pace and level of comfort.

**WHO ARE THE TEACHERS?** Ferron said, "The price of a program should include well-credentialed teachers, coaches and instructors. For example, a person who comes primarily for weight loss should have a registered dietitian supervising their program. Guests should be able to feel that teachers know what they are talking about, based on solid training and experience." She also suggested, as a general rule during the application process, to ask if interns teach classes and guide guest experience independently or under supervision of senior staff.

**WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE COST?** Seven-day retreats cost between \$800 and \$5,000 or more depending on what is included and the quality of the teachings. Most retreats include lodging, food and activities. Skyterra offered an inclusive price, which I found appealing. Don't assume everything is included. Ask about extra costs for services and budget accordingly.

**WILL THE EFFECTS LAST AFTER YOU LEAVE AND RETURN TO DAILY LIFE?** The goal of a wellness

retreat isn't just to relax while you are there, but to provide inspiration to live a healthier life upon your return home. Sustainability is key to the value of a wellness retreat. You should receive new ideas, techniques and motivation for living a healthier lifestyle. The time at such a retreat should be an investment in personal growth and well-being.

I approached the idea of a wellness retreat with a good deal of serious intent. With a head full of steam, I hit the point that I was ready to transform my lifestyle in a more positive way, even though I had no idea how to go about satisfying this internal urge. I found the wellness retreat fortified my body, mind and spirit connection and improved my self-compassion and good spirit about myself. Not bad for one week away. I hobbled in, I hiked out. A year later, I'm happy to report that I am still hiking and have learned to love Brussels sprouts more than French fries. ■

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*Jackson Rainer, PhD, is a board-certified clinical psychologist who practices with the Care and Counseling Center in Atlanta. He specializes in work with individuals and families dealing with chronic illness. He is the editor of our "Pain Q&A" column (page 14).*