

Introduction



*And then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud
was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.*

~ ANAIS NIN

I N T R O D U C T I O N

elcome to a very special journey, a quiet journey of self discovery that has the capacity to lead you back to your self.

Somehow in the day-to-day grown-up world we slowly lose our way. We've been busy caring for others, tending home, and building community and careers. Then one day we wake up. If we're lucky, we awake in our 20's or 30's, but for many of us we reach the menopause years before we realize that we are sleepwalking through our life. And that we've not only lost our way but also lost ourselves in the process.

I believe in the life-changing potential of retreating. Not just because I've seen its results through A Woman's Way, but also because I've experienced its value on a deep personal level. After leaving a 32-year marriage in 1998, I lived on the top of a mountain, a great deal of the time in near total silence. It was a year of sadness and loss but, more importantly, it was a year of incredible magic. Because, on that quiet mountain, I found enough space to see my self.

Be still and life will bring you the answers.

~ NEAL DONALD WALSCH

That year I learned the importance of quiet, of stepping back from life in order to listen. I learned the value of journaling in order to hear what I needed to hear. I learned that self-reflection was essential for insight. And I knew that I wanted to share this information with other women.

Not everyone has the option of living on a mountaintop, nor attending a structured retreat, but we all have a few hours each month that we can set aside for quiet renewal, a special time to step back and assess who we are and where we're going and time to celebrate where we've come from and what we've learned.

This book is a reference guide. It can be used alone or shared with sisters, friends, mothers or daughters. It can be used in pieces – for a quiet lunch hour, an afternoon alone – or for a full two-day retreat. It can be used for any reason and for any amount of time.

This guide is divided into three parts – *The journey begins* (preparing for a retreat), *On retreat* (the central pieces of a retreat) and *Returning home* (concluding a retreat). As you design your first retreat, or series of retreats, plan to work through the lessons and exercises from the front of the guide to the end. As you get experienced at retreating, feel free to expand on any of the exercises. Rewrite them, combine them, create your own, use them in any order. Do the ones that speak the most to you.

There is no right way to use this guide – make it your own.

For those who would like to follow a template, at least at the beginning, you will find sample half-day and full-day retreat formats in Part IV. Once again, use the pieces that speak to you and set aside the rest.

It is my hope that the lessons and exercises in this guide will assist you in connecting deeply with your self. And that as you complete the final exercise and close the cover, you will have discovered a sense of hope and joy . . . and an understanding that quiet reflection is the threshold to a vibrant, authentic life.

As you move into the next chapter of your life, I'd like to hear from you but, more importantly, I'd love to meet you in person at A Woman's Way retreat. And when we meet, nothing would thrill me more than to see a much-used, dog-eared, written-all-over, tattered copy of *A Retreat of My Own* in your hand. For this guide is not meant to be lovingly placed on a bookshelf but to be really used. Make it your own guide, your own story, fill it with your own thoughts, hopes and dreams. And, through that process, you might find an open space and, in that space, you might feel the impulse to soar.

The authentic self is the soul made visible.

~ SARAH BAN BREATHNACH