

The Turquoise McDonald's"
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Reading "Sedona: Is the Whole Town Built on a Hoax? (Edited for Length) Laurie Gough

A young Travel writer ventured to Sedona, Arizona to see what all the hype was about. She writes,

I'm hiking in Boynton Canyon near Sedona, Arizona, and the woman behind me is berating her husband for not warning her to wear hiking boots. It's at this point I realize that the theory of Boynton Canyon being devoid of male-female tension because of its "vortex" is in error. Either that or we haven't reached the vortex yet, the place where soothing energy is supposedly oozing out of the earth.

Yesterday, the owner of Sedona's Center for the New Age—a shop full of crystals, tarot cards, flute music and dreamy-eyed patrons—enlightened me on the various energy vortexes around Sedona. The owner told me Boynton Canyon was special because it has both energies- magnetic (female) and electric (male). "It's balanced, so you'll notice people there are calm. There's no male-female tension in Boynton Canyon." "Wow, I'd said. Couples on the brink of divorce should hang out there. It could save a lot on lawyer fees.

Sedona is known as the New Age Mecca—or New Age Tourist Trap, depending on your astrological sign—Among the month's topics in the popular New Age magazine, *Sedona, Journal of Emergence* are: "The World Through My Dog's Sacred Vision," "The Eleventh Chakra in the Fourth Dimension," and my favorite, "Could It Be You're Already Dead?"

The vortex woman said that the best way to feel the vortex energy was to go on a guided trek. Since guides are on a "higher level of spiritual consciousness," you have a more powerful experience. At \$250, I figured my husband Rob and I could find the vortexes on our own and maybe eavesdrop on a guided tour, let leftover sacred energy spill onto us.

Near the end of the trail [in Boynton Canyon], we ask our fellow hikers, "So, do you feel anything?" "Yeah, my legs hurt," someone says. "Yep, sure am thirsty," says another. Nobody has found the vortex. Back at our van after the hike, we meet a man who gives us a more detailed vortex map than ours, and we discover that Boynton Canyon's vortex is just 50 yards from the parking lot, conveniently.

We decide to watch the sunset from Airport Vortex because it has tremendous views. It's a short but steep climb to the top of the vortex and on my way up I pass a middle-aged woman huffing and puffing coming down. "I didn't feel anything," she says to her husband. "What a darn waste of time that was." I keep climbing. When I reach the top... I stare out across the dizzying grandeur of the high desert landscape...and a feeling gradually starts to come over me: starvation. I could go for a super burrito right now.

The next day we go to Cathedral Rock, which...is the most photographed site in Sedona. We hike until we find Cathedral Rock Vortex, sit down, and try seriously this time to sense the surges of energy. Gradually I began to relax as tranquility flows through me. Then I

hear something stirring—low murmurs drifting up through the funnels of the red ground straight to my heart. Hallelujah, Mother Earth has finally reached me! The murmurs grow louder, so loud I open my eyes to see a group of people sitting in a circle across the creek. They're chanting. They're also dressed funny. Whatever the chanters are doing looks serious. We get up to leave. How can we feel anything with them babbling away like that?

On our way back we see a couple in their 60s—portly, friendly and all-American. The man is struggling to cross the stream. He shouts at us, "Hey, where is the damn thing?" "What," I say, "the vortex?" "The what? What's that?" "Well, it's supposed to be..."

"I'm looking for the photo op," he interrupts.

The fourth and last of the Sedona vortexes is Bell Rock, also a popular site for UFO sightings, and we stop there. I've given up on the vortexes and admit I don't try very hard to feel anything at Bell Rock. I recall a friend saying the only vortex he noticed in Sedona was the one sucking gas from his car when he sat in traffic for 45 minutes. Was the whole town built on a hoax? How can you have a spiritual moment when it's expected of you? Aren't these things meant to happen when we least expect it?

But as I climb Bell Rock I look to the west. The sun has just fallen behind a mountain and its afterglow is orchestrating the whole sky into swirling masses of mandarin and deep purple wine. Inside I'm quietly exploding from the aching beauty around me. This is the Earth's energy, I realize, and this is sacred.

Some tourists in Sedona, Arizona, say the turquoise McDonald's is a must-see destinations. On my recent trip, my teenager agreed. It was surprisingly hard to find even though it is on the main drag. No golden arches on a tall pole. Just turquoise colored arches, down low on the building and a turquoise railing around the picnic area.

The city of Sedona has strict regulations about the colors and heights of buildings blending in with the desert. The signature "golden" arches were too garish for Sedona officials so the first-ever turquoise arches were installed. I took a peek inside (you don't go to Sedona and eat at McDonald's) and I was disappointed to find that it looks the same as any other in America.

Like the McDonald's and the Vortexes around Sedona, finding the extraordinary may require a little extra effort. You could say that I was on a special mission as my family embarked on an 8 day trip to the Sedona area.

Thich Nhat Hanh says that, "We humans have lost the wisdom of genuinely resting and relaxing. We worry too much. We don't allow our bodies to heal, and we don't allow our minds and hearts to heal." While this was a time to relax for my son and husband, I hoped to find some new ways to learn to heal.

As you will gather from my "what I did on my vacation" pictures and sermon, I found incredible beauty but also deeper meaning in what many have called a magical place.

Most brochures or websites will tell you that Sedona is a mystical area that will cure all your ills: physical, spiritual, and mental. Aura or psychic readings, crystal healing, hot yoga, therapeutic massage, chakra awareness, colonic cleanses, or hypnosis is there for a price. With all of those choices, it's hard to know what to choose! I stuck to fairly well-known treatments primarily to treat the pain associated with autoimmune disease.

These were all offered in Sedona. But the first step in opening yourself up for relaxation and healing is to find a comfortable space.

We were very fortunate to stay in a home owned by a dear friend about 30 minutes south of Sedona. In the desert, with very few neighbors and even fewer lights, we saw more stars at night than we had ever seen. Just upon entering the house; you felt you were somewhere special. It had been built by an artist called Chay who had left the home to my friend. It's round with an open patio in the middle with critters that visited daily.

All of Chay's art remained there and her former studio still housed some of her art supplies which visitors were free to use.

As many of you know, I make jewelry, but this artist's studio was primarily for fiber and paint. This was art a bit out of my usual comfort zone.

Author Rachel Naomi Remen writes that, "At the deepest level, the creative process and the healing process arise from a single source."

My first insight or learning from my trip comes from creating art. *There is no try.* It isn't something you can fail at, so "trying" can't be used to describe it. When you make a piece, you just create art.

This is a learning came from Nancy, a person that did body work with me. She was a very petite older woman with long grey hair and native looking jewelry who seemed to ooze ancient wisdom. When you picture Sedona resident, you see Nancy. Apparently Nancy had heard me use the word "try" and in a yoda-esque way, she said, "there is no try, only do." She explained her philosophy was that we have achieved something whether it is half way or all the way. If we measure, we are only judging others and ourselves. There is no "try" only "do."

As ministers, we do our best not to judge others, but I tend to be all about what I can do better, how I can feel better, and how I can look better.

One of the first things I said to the yoga instructor was that I couldn't do much due to pain and I can never get my breathing right. Throughout the class, she reminded why I was there. Is it perfect poses, perfect breathing or helping to relax and alleviate pain? If it is helping, why worry and beat myself up about all the other stuff?

Ironically, I was too early for that yoga appointment, so I went to the Mystical Bazaar, a shop that was rated highly on trip advisor. I am not really into crystals or that sort of thing, but I had time to kill. Crystals, gems, fossils, and jewelry covered every wall and shelf. Psychic readings were advertised (by appointment only) and books on how to find your totem animals were on sale.

A sales women approached me and being who I am, we got to talking about why I was in town and the next thing I know, she plops a tray of rings down in front of me. "You need rose quartz," she said. "Don't look at the price, I'll let you pay what you can. You must have rose quartz –it reinforces self-love. You are too hard on yourself. You can't love others completely until you love yourself. Choose one." Ok, I fell for it, and here it is.

The weird thing is, she was right; I am a little low on self-love. I've been unhappy about my appearance due to the way medications affect my body, I've been down because I hadn't been able to be who you and my family need me to be when I was ill, and I feel there is always more that I can and should be doing especially when I look at other people and compare myself to them.

As in the yoga class, I had told the mediation instructor that I was hopeless at mediation. I was too restless, my mind wandered, and I couldn't breathe right.

Like the yoga instructor, she said her philosophy is that there is no right way to do meditation. If you feel better who is to say that is not correct. After an hour together, I actually felt like I had accomplished something. Forgetting to love ourselves *can* affect our physical and emotional health. It all made sense.

It was almost like these people were conspiring against me – or maybe for me? As if I needed further proof, one clinician I saw said that not only are unhealthy foods a problem but also equally harmful are unhealthy thoughts that we allow in. Loving ourselves means feeding the body and soul.

Thus my second major learning, *be careful about the toxins I put into my body and mind*. Obviously the key to the toxins of the body is to watch what we eat. I don't think I have ever encountered the word "cleanse" so many times from so many different people in the span of a week! Or seen so many juice bars! But what about the more spiritual or *mind* toxins?

How do we cleanse our psyches? For me, the raw, physical beauty of the places I saw seemed to wash away negativity and open me up to the healing and holy I sought.

19th Century Unitarian Minister, Thomas Starr King, put it this way, "I believe that if, on every Sunday morning before going to church, we could be lifted to a mountain-peak and see a horizon line of six hundred miles enfolding the copious splendor of the light on such a varied expanse; or if we could look upon a square mile of flowers representing all the species with which the Creative Spirit embroiders a zone; ...our materialistic dullness would be broken, surprise and joy would be awakened, we should feel that we live amid the play of Infinite thought; and the devout spirit would be stimulated so potently that our hearts would naturally mount in praise and prayer."

This is not to say that we must go away to find awe-inspiring beauty. We can find it in our own backyard in a flower, a bird, in a child's smile.

But once in a while, going away helps us re-set our appreciation for the lives we have. Of course it isn't true for everyone because they can't find things to be happy about if you hit them in the head with it.

One of the tag lines in a Sedona tourist pamphlet reads, "God created the Grand Canyon but he lives in Sedona."

We drove to the south rim of the Grand Canyon our first full day in Arizona and at one of the overlooks I heard someone comment, "Well, this isn't all that great." Perhaps not for her, but I even found the downed trees with delicate patterns of years unbelievably beautiful.

Maybe this is being overly dramatic, but every place, every lovely little thing I saw helped me to return home feeling more positive, happy, and loved, and loving.

Some even made me consider my mortality. There are a great many Indian ruins in and around Sedona.

Some are just piles of crumbling stones. My son and I joked that it would be a real disappointment if 100 years from now if archeologists discovered that one of these piles were found to be just that just piles of rock after millions of people had made sacred pilgrimages to them. Some ruins were very intact and had pictures telling stories about the lives of the people that lived there.

It made me wonder what I want to leave behind. Not physically like these people, but how do I want to be remembered? I asked my son what he would remember. He said first

and foremost my sense of humor- I guess that could be worse. So do I want to be remembered as?

Someone that did not just try?

Someone who loved herself and others fully?

Someone who finds the positive inside and out?

Those are pretty good things. But it occurred to me that I really didn't need to go to Sedona to learn these things.

Although it is nice to go away to re-charge and re-new and some people prefer the help of mystics, psychics, vortexes, and crystals; more often than not, what we really need is with us all the time. We just have to do one simple thing as Author Robin Hoffman writes, "Listen. Eavesdrop on your own heart." May it be so.