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Marty Harger

Following Her Heart in Heber

COVER PHOTOS BY LEXIE CLAYBURN - TAKE A HIKE PHOTOGRAPHY

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Following Her Heart in Heber

BY BETSY DEMANN • PHOTOS BY LEXIE CLAYBURN - TAKE A HIKE PHOTOGRAPHY

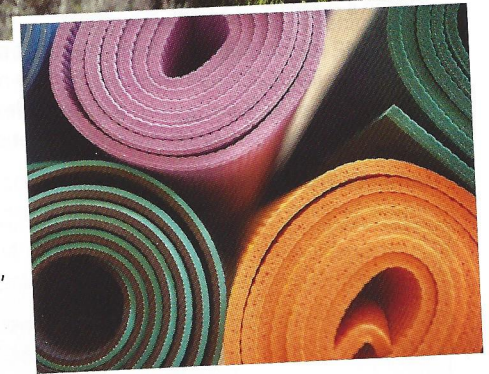
"The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you will know when you find it." - Steve Jobs

Looking back over the last two years, it is clear that many of us will never be the same. The pandemic has altered nearly every aspect of life, and the workforce is no exception. In 2021, millions of people left their jobs, specifically in corporate America, even though the economic outlook was not rosy. In September, October, and November of last year, more than 4 million people quit each month, earning last year the moniker The Great Resignation.

Although Heber resident Marty Harger decided to leave corporate America, where she "made good money but became increasingly miserable," to pursue a career in massage therapy years before the COVID pandemic, she understands the desire to chase passion over paychecks. "I started asking myself," Marty said, "Who am I? What am I here to do? Am I living my purpose?"

Originally from East Aurora, New York, Marty first moved to Park City during the '80s, following her graduation with a degree from Boston University in communications/marketing. She and her husband, Jim, decided to move back to the Wasatch Back in 2003 after a decade in the corporate world of Chicago. The couple's realtor showed them land in Heber, and they were immediately sold. "After city living, we were ready for the open spaces of the mountains again," Marty said. "The Heber Valley was ideal for us."

During those first few years living in Heber, Marty worked in Salt Lake as a regional sales manager for R.R. Donnelley & Sons and FedEx Kinkos. Still, she started to experience some of the same stressors that convinced her to pursue massage therapy initially.



"I was doing massage therapy on the side of my sales position and was using essential oils personally and with my massage clients," Marty said. "It started as a 'wouldn't it be cool' idea. What if I could build a business doing what I love?"

Marty left the corporate world in 2006 and opened Balance Therapeutic Massage and Wellness Center in Heber, gathering an integrative wellness community of practitioners, therapists, and other natural health professionals, that offered services and classes and acted as a gathering place for the community's like-minded individuals and those seeking new approaches. "My vision with Balance was to offer this valley a place to turn for ideas, knowledge, and services to improve their wellbeing," Marty said. "But the creative part of building the wellness community was my true joy. Finding connection and community and helping others is when I am happiest."

As I listen to Marty, I am reminded of a Chinese proverb: "If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody."

If happiness is found in helping others, Marty continues in her pursuit by continuing to build a wellness group she co-founded in 2009 during recessionary times with another Heber local, Pasha Hughes, called the Wasatch Women's Wellness Network (WWWN). WWWN meets monthly and is open to anyone involved in the wellness community (traditional medicine, holistic medicine, therapeutic practitioners, fitness professionals, etc.).

Strong communities are critical because they're often an essential source of social connection and a sense of belonging. Participating in a community bonded by attitudes, values, and goals is critical to enjoying a fulfilling life. "During the pandemic, I felt the effect



of social isolation acutely. I missed the community we had built. Community is critical to our overall wellbeing, and the decline of our connectedness is coming at the same time mental health issues are on the rise," Marty said. "I encourage everyone to look for ways to connect with others in our community. We appreciate a small circle of people but need larger circles as well. Our health and happiness are truly linked with our connections."

By 2010, the Great Recession had hit full force and spending money for wellness services became a huge stretch for many in the valley. Not wanting to close Balance, Marty looked for supplemental income to keep it afloat until the economy turned around. At that point, she was introduced to the doTERRA essential oils and business that would ultimately provide yet another endeavor that aligned with her passion for natural health approaches. For the next ten years, she began traveling the U.S. and abroad, teaching others about the value and uses of these aromatic, liquid plant essences. She also co-authored a book about using essential oils with yoga workshops. Ultimately, her essential oil business grew to a level of commitment that forced her to make the tough decision to close her wellness center after nine years in business.

Her teaching expeditions catered well to another passion of Marty's: travel. "I've been the president of an international travel company, a tour leader, a Certified Travel Agent, and a happy wanderer since I got out of college," Marty said. In 2015, she launched her travel company, Essential Earth Explorations, offering fellow travelers unique travel and learning experiences. "I've personally explored many dimensions in the wellness world over the years. I'm a wellness center owner, a massage therapist, yoga instructor, book co-author, and community organizer for issues relating to women and their wellbeing," Marty said. "Through my experiences and studies, I've come to deeply value the impact of personal development and self-discovery that pair so beautifully with the

destinations I've featured in my programs." Marty has just re-launched her travel company, post-Covid, with two exciting trips in 2023 to Egypt and India.

In 2016, Marty, who had been practicing yoga for her own physical and mental health, decided to attend yoga teacher training to deepen her practice and knowledge. She put her yoga teacher training to good use post-pandemic by offering a weekly, free community yoga class for those 55+ who seek new friends and a gentle yoga practice.

Marty is optimistic about how highly our community views health and wellness now. "Before the pandemic, many people around the Heber Valley were beginning to dabble in proactive and preventative health and wellness practices," she said. "This pandemic has revealed that taking care and control of your health — individual, family, home, etc. — is even more critical than before."

Like many of us, Marty learned an important lesson during the months of the shutdown: "We need to take mental health more seriously." During the pandemic, there was a rise in reported mental health problems that have been described as "a second pandemic," highlighting mental health as an issue that needs to be addressed. "During COVID, I got to know the inside of my house more than I had ever gotten to know it," Marty said. "Connection is such a big thing for me. I got really sad, and I am not that person typically."

People have practiced self-care in a multitude of ways during the pandemic as they were forced to adjust to new work schedules, change their gym routines, and cut back on socializing. Many started seeking out new strategies to counter the stress. Marty's new approach involved walking meditation and building a labyrinth in her yard.

Marty's labyrinth is an intricate structure of seven interconnecting circuits or cycles. The design and building of her labyrinth is a project she took on herself, her "big project." The seven circuits hold deep symbolism for her. She points out that seven is an energetically powerful number, "There are seven chakras and seven days of the week," Marty said. "Lucky number seven is even the basis for many myths and folklore."

Because the labyrinth-building work was so physically challenging, she ended up having to set aside just 20 minutes a day, which became a self-care practice in itself. "Building the labyrinth was so grounding for me. I was walking and connecting with the land while I built it stone by stone," Marty said. "I would think, 'what has taken place on this land?' This project has



connected me to this land for my time on this earth, and it is one of the best things I have ever done for myself. Walking meditation in the labyrinth has especially connected with me; it is the way I process my emotions. The energy and healing it has provided me have been amazing. Walking it truly brings me to a place of calm and joy."

Marty has developed a love for the Heber Valley that has reminded me just how lucky we are to live where we live. "I want to live in the valley for the rest of my life. I consider everyone I come in contact with to be part of my larger circle; someone I want to leave better than before I came into contact with them," Marty said. "People of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds are making their way to the Heber Valley. Utah is calling to people. It opened my eyes and heart to really embrace this valley."



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