



==SOUTH COASTING==

Spirited Women come out to play

I spent a recent Saturday hanging out with some new gal pals. The "Spirited Woman of Enoughness" was there. So was the "Yes-I-Will, Yes-I-Will Matadora," the "Self-Trusting Guruess," and the "Diva of Humanitarians." We played dress up, we danced, we laughed, we cried and we ate chocolate.

No, it wasn't a 10-year-old girl's birthday party. And no, it wasn't an acid trip.



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This was a different kind of journey entirely. One that involved immersing myself into a circle of spirited women, an inspirational group that has grown like gangbusters since founder Nancy Mills put up her first flyer in a downtown Santa Barbara restaurant five years ago.

Let me back up a minute and say that I have a love-hate relationship with the whole notion of self-improvement. I'm addicted to browsing the tables of contents of self-help books—it's physically hard for me to walk by a self-help book without taking a dip inside. If a book is really good, I'll spend an entire afternoon nursing a latte at Borders so I can actually read the entire thing from cover to cover without forking over \$24.99 plus tax for titles like "How to Pee Standing Up: Tips for Hip Chicks," "I'm with Stupid: One Man, One Woman, 10,000 Years of Misunderstanding Between the Sexes Cleared Right Up," and "How to Be Happy, Dammit: A Cynic's Guide to Spiritual Happiness," any of which would be greeted by pure mockery if they were to find a place on my bedside table.

Given my tendency toward skepticism, I have to admit, I was a little apprehensive as I made my way to the Spirited Woman Workshop. But Nancy advertised it as being a "fantastic combination of creative playfulness, empowerment, and fun that reinforces that you are enough as you are." Plus, I heard there might be chocolate, so I figured it was worth a shot.

And I knew I could get a column out of it.

I had Nancy pegged from the moment she greeted me at the door of a private home on the Mesa. She's one of those people who is so genuinely herself, so obviously comfortable in her own skin, and so ready and willing to make an absolute fool of herself in front of complete strangers that the gamer in me won out over the cynic almost immediately.

I was completely charmed and about 87% ready to be enveloped in whatever the day might bring.

First, it brought dancing. A little "Celebration" on the CD player to loosen us up. Once I got over my self-consciousness—I don't often dance these days unaided by alcohol or instructions from my 8-year-old son—I started tapping in time with the music and getting in touch with the "Dancin', Shakin', Rockin' Woman" that Nancy says we all have inside of us.

I have to admit, I was having fun. And the other women were fascinating. When else would I ever have the opportunity to be in a room with three psychics? By the way, none of them wore turbans and there wasn't a crystal ball in sight.

What there was instead was a lot of heartfelt sharing and conversation, with the whole focus on looking inside to find the strengths we already have inside ourselves rather than looking outside, or to the future, to find ways we can improve.

As Nancy says, "I am a Dancin', Shakin', Rockin' Woman. I am alive with my spirit, I am the birthday girl of the uni-

See **LESLIE**, page 11

LESLIE

FROM PAGE 3

verse, I wear a party hat, and most importantly, I am enough as I am, I am enough as I am, I am enough as I am."

Did I mention she wears a pink feather boa when she says this?

Then she laughs, along with the "Spirited Woman of Enoughness," the "Yes-I-Will, Yes-I-Will Matadora," the "Self-Trusting Guruess," the "Diva of Humanitarians," and

me, the "Formerly Cynical Columnist." I laugh too—and I'm pretty sure it wasn't just the chocolate talking.

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The next Spirited Woman Workshop in Santa Barbara will be held on Saturday, February 23. For more information visit www.thespiritedwoman.com or call 888.428.1234 or email NancyMills@thespiritedwoman.com. For more of Leslie's columns visit www.LeslieDinaberg.com.