

# Outdoor exercise can be a meditation

By Susan Dawson-Cook

I've always loved to exercise. I have thrived on physical exertion for so long, it has become like breathing — if even a day passes without me moving my muscles, I feel like I have traveled to a faraway destination and left part of myself behind. And then a hike or a swim will bring me back to a place where I'm in harmony with God, with myself, with the world around me.

I'm not the fierce competitor I once was, yet I occasionally make an appearance at triathlon, swimming, biking and running events. Today I compete more for enjoyment than to push myself to the limit. Each race I enter is like a planned celebration. I pamper my body the week before the occasion and on race day, feeling fresh and invigorated, I exert myself until the endorphins make me so giddy I want to dance and sing (and yes, upon occasion, I really do this).

I have competed in dozens of races over the years, yet the one that stands out in my mind is the 2006 Tucson Half Marathon. The start of the half marathon that year began in Oracle Junction, a place notoriously cold on December mornings. But once the 13.1 mile race to the Hilton El Conquistador began, my extremities thawed, and I stopped shivering, I found my rhythm. I passed people and others passed me, but I barely noticed. I was on my own meditative journey as free-floating thoughts drifted through my brain. I thought of a funny line to add to a chapter in my book. Conjured up a plot for a new romance novel.

As the sun approached the horizon, I watched the sky transform from pitch black to pastel blues and violets, then ignite into a brilliant orange. The rising sun cast shadows across the Santa Catalina Mountains, outlining rocky crevices and shapes, illuminating

slopes where rocks rich in shiny mica made them appear slick with ice.

I felt so harmonious with the outside world, listening to the rhythm of my breathing and my feet striking the earth and watching the sun's slow procession. At that moment, I felt the intensity of so many emotions — there was no enlightening sentiment I didn't feel. The passion of my middle aged years ran like an electrical current through my body, my mind overflowed with creative thoughts and I felt grateful to be healthy, to be alive, to be running beside others who cared for their bodies. And the rushing thoughts of what I would do next and when dissipated. There was just me and my body, content to experience the ecstasy of living and moving in the here and now.

I crossed the finish line eight minutes faster than in previous years. Unencumbered by my usual knee and hip problems, I felt more like I was flying than running; the earth seemed to flow through me and I felt more like an appendage of the earth than a lone being with aging joints and muscles.

And my mind? On that day, as on many others, it created. Outside I have written the most beautiful lines, made the most important decisions. And often what has drifted into my mind wasn't all about me, it was about me receiving messages from the earth and God and those who are still here and who came before me and since departed whose thoughts live on in the breeze and the branches.

Outside, in the solace of my exercise, I can come to terms with all that I am feeling and thinking. The rhythm of my movement beneath open skies becomes a meditation, a focus, for my day and for my life.

**About the author:** Susan Dawson Cook is a freelance writer living in Tucson.

## Top Ten Things To Do To Make Tucson Sustainable

- 1. Harvest and conserve water.** Remove non-native species from your yard (like grass and oleanders) and replace with native plants watered as much as possible by rainwater only. **At full sustainability,** Tucsonans will have cisterns, composting toilets, neighborhood water harvesting and comprehensive water education.
- 2. Use the sun's energy.** Hang your laundry to dry in the sun. Note: Some communities have restrictions against hanging out laundry. **At full sustainability,** Tucson will derive all its electricity and transportation from solar energy.
- 3. Eat local and native foods.** Visit a farmers market. **At full sustainability,** Tucson will have a Food Security Council to ensure access to healthy food for all Tucsonans. Large daily farmers markets with bioregional products will supplement neighborhood food production and neighborhood desert food harvesting.
- 4. Work outdoors with neighbors.** Organize neighborhood walk/door-knocking outings to discover neighborhood assets and what projects interest your neighbors. Note: For tips on organizing neighborhood door knockings, contact Pro-Neighborhoods, 882-5885. **At full sustainability** every neighborhood will be safe for pedestrians and bicyclists, have a workable plan for emergencies which cares for all dependents, and engage in sustainable urban food production.
- 5. Ride bicycle or walk to your eco-village hub.** Identify your local commercial hub and do errands there without using fossil fuel; take public transit if your destination is further away or you are physically challenged. Note: As you walk and bike your neighborhood you may notice places which need shade trees. These locations can become urban agriforestry projects. **At full sustainability,** Tucson will be organized into 60 to 80 complete eco-villages in which people walk or bike. These eco-villages will be connected by a comprehensive system of bike paths, which do not mingle with auto traffic.
- 6. Plant A Food-Bearing Tree.** Dig a hole and bust through the caliche. Note: This is more fun if you dig with friends and throw a party when the tree is planted. Get hold of a caliche bar. Contact Tucson Botanical Gardens or Tucson Organic Gardeners for

best species of trees to plant in your location. **At full sustainability** Tucson will be an edible urban forest.

**7. Save food scraps and compost with worms.** Build a simple home made "worm farm." Many websites teach how, e.g.: [www.earth911.org/](http://www.earth911.org/). Note: Worms create worm castings and worm juice which are rich plant food. **At full sustainability** Tucson's home kitchens, restaurants and cafeterias will be connected by a comprehensive composting program.

**8. Grow food in a home or community garden.** Contact Tucson's Community Food Bank or Tucson Organic Gardeners for information on how to grow food. Note: We can garden year round in Tucson. Water is our limiting factor; therefore, water harvesting for gardening is crucial. Sustainable Tucson highly recommends Brad Lancaster's book *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands*, available at Antigone Books, Silverbell Trading and through Sustainable Tucson in case quantities. **At full sustainability,** Tucson and the Sonoran bioregion will be largely food self-sufficient.

**9. Educate yourself and Tucson's representatives about sustainability.** Read the voter's guide when elections are coming up. Who takes sustainable positions on solar and wind energy, mass transit, bike paths and water conservation? Note: Sustainability education is enjoyable in a group. Potlucks are a wonderful way to share books, DVD's, videos and ideas with each other. Why not start a group in your neighborhood? Then invite a person running for office to join you for a get together. **At full sustainability,** any school child will be able to tell a visitor to Tucson how our sustainable city works.

**10. Become an entrepreneur in the growing sustainable economy.** Identify your own art/passion/potential product or service. Note: Many entrepreneurs market products and services. **At full sustainability,** Tucson (including its bioregion) will be mostly self-sufficient for water, food, energy and transportation. Tucson's sustainable infrastructure will need to be planned, installed and maintained by local businesses attuned to our city's terrain and culture. Tucson will have a local credit clearinghouse that keeps our region's financial resources circulating locally.

- *Written by Nicole Christine, Bob Cook, Tom Greco, Lindianne Sarno, and Joanie Sawyer. Reprinted with permission from [www.sustainabletucson.com](http://www.sustainabletucson.com). ©Sustainable Tucson 2006.*

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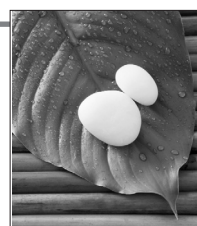
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## Zen of Green

By Patti Podgornick

### Natural Systems of Rhythm and Flow

I was recently reminded that we are all a tangible and authentically physical and emotional part of the Earth. I believe this is a fundamental life truth we so often forget about. Because of our forgetfulness we physically and emotionally transform our own selves from a state of being in alignment with the natural systems of rhythm and flow within the great web of life to a state of redirecting our life-sustaining connections into connections that are harmful. As we harm ourselves, we harm others and the Earth. When we are in healthy alignment, we bring goodness to ourselves, others and the Earth.

From the minute we are born, we are bombarded with well-intentioned people in our families and the culture around us, who strive to make us socially correct little beings and strip us of our natural ability to know what is really healthy for us and what is not. We become forced to disconnect from our own healthy knowing and connect to what others believe is best and right for us, mistaking someone else's way for our natural way. We may grow up believing that a toxic relationship is what we have to force into our lives in order to survive or make our lives better. Or, we may believe that we must have a certain job, even if that

means a little bit of our soul splinters away every day.

Through our calendars and our 24/7 internet information and shopping capabilities, we've created un-natural rhythms to live by that pull us further away from the natural rhythms of nature and healthy living we are a part of and that are our birthright.

As we do this to ourselves, there is a ripple effect back into nature, to others and back around to ourselves. We become disconnected from the very thing that keeps us healthy and whole in the first place — our connection with nature. We also disconnect the link of healthy energies that we provide to the Earth, especially through the good work we do to take care of the Earth. Our original purpose was and still is to take care of the Earth through the caretaking tools we are born with.

The truth is, humans and all of nature cannot live without one another. The good news is that with simple, kind choices, actions and belief changes we can turn things around and return to a state of natural, healthy connectedness to the Earth that supports and cares for everyone. One simple way I use to regain a sense of nature-connectedness is to step outside each night and take a deep look at the Moon. As I look deeply into the night sky I can feel myself

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