

NEWS  
VIEWS  
TRAVEL  
TRENDSOM  
PAGE

weave all these elements together. They enlisted yoga teacher Eliza Kerr and writer Nancy Aronie as instructors and won a grant to offer the retreat at a minimal cost.

The first retreat was a huge success. Participants rose at the crack of dawn for meditation and yoga in a sun-spattered barn. Kerr taught dynamic vinyasa classes, and Aronie led the group in free-form writing exercises followed by small-group sharing. One day participants wrote a letter to Joie, which brought their collective grief to the surface. After this four-day intensive, the group headed to the woods. They donned '70s polyester clothes and danced and sang their way to Red Peak Pass, at 11,180 feet. But the pinnacle of excitement—and fear—arrived when the women dispersed for a 24-hour solo. “It was scary,” says participant Marya Carr. “The images were still with me.” But upon their return, “we all felt so much lighter,” Carr says.

## A Trek on the Wild Side

A group of women honor their friend's memory by taking yoga from the studio to the wilderness.

**A greeting to the sun at the base of Yosemite's El Capitan.**

JOIE ARMSTRONG was an artist and yoga student who taught outdoor education to children at Yosemite Institute (YI), a teaching program at Yosemite National Park. “Her students loved her,” recalls friend and coworker Heather Sullivan. “She was silly and fun with the kids and would spend every night making up creative games for the next day.” In 1999 at age 26, Armstrong was brutally killed. She was the last of four “Yosemite murders” that sent the Yosemite community into shock and fear. Survivalist women, used to spending days alone in the backcountry, were suddenly afraid to sleep alone or even to walk alone during the day. Recounts Sullivan, “I remember looking out at this place that was magical and beautiful to me and not being able to see or feel the beauty.”

Sullivan hoped that three passions she shared with Armstrong—yoga, writing, and escape into the wilderness—could help the community heal. With friend Tana Leach, Sullivan organized an 11-day retreat to

Encouraged by their early success, the organizers formed Wild Women Workshops, a nonprofit group that runs weekend workshops for co-ed groups and 11- to 28-day trips for women. Favorite destinations include remote areas of Yosemite and Alaska, where participants are known to practice yoga on glaciers wearing hiking boots. “It’s not about the final products or perfect poses; it’s about the process,” says Sullivan. “People take greater risks by the end of the week, whether it’s sharing their writing or doing a new pose. “Or hiking topless,” Kerr adds. See [www.wildwomenworkshops.org](http://www.wildwomenworkshops.org).

—Kristin Barendson

COURTESY OF WILD WOMEN