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Comeback Kids: Dawn Hyde loves you

The Callicoon native came back to fulfill her dream of bringing harmony to the community.



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Dawn Hyde, on Main Street in Callicoon. | TRR photos by Elizabeth Lepro

Posted Wednesday, February 27, 2019 12:43 pm

“That’s the core of yoga, for me. It tore my heart wide open. And I just love more.”

Elizabeth Lepro

I’m late to Dawn Hyde’s restorative yoga class.

I’m haphazardly tossing honey barbecue Frito twists into my mouth in the car, wearing the kind of pants people who do not do yoga think are the Kind of Pants worn by people who do. I am losing my voice and my

willpower to a seasonal cold, stressed about the internal state of my car, the news, the emails I’ve ignored. My socks do not match. Should I have painted my toenails for this?

Then Dawn Hyde puts oil in my hands that smells like trees.

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The River Reporter
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The shot we hoped for

Dr. Susan Bailey, an allergist/immunologist...

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The lights dim and Dawn Hyde opens the jaw of a vibrational box instrument (later she tells me that it's called a harmonium) and it lets out a slow, tenor sigh. Four of us hum in unison, as we move between a variation of lying-down poses, propped up by soft blocks, with a blanket across our hips.



"I think it's just

about joy and love."

Afterward, Hyde and I are sitting on the couch in the lobby of River Family Wellness drinking tea. We're surrounded by natural supplements, dream catchers, beaded jewelry for sale and a few large canvases of art. She asks me if I was at all uncomfortable during the class. You know, being alone with my thoughts. I want to tell Hyde that I am 100% uncomfortable being alone with my thoughts at all times, but it was nice to do it while wearing an eye pillow that smelled like lavender.

"It used to be so funny, when I was first doing yoga, these gentle and restorative and calming classes would freak me out," Hyde says. "It was hard for me to meditate and to be with my breath... I would even like, get up and leave those classes."

This is comforting, I tell her. Serious yogis always seem untouchable, somehow, like they've been back-bending and meditating all morning in an empty sunroom off their kitchen drinking oolong tea, while the rest of us roll out of bed 20 minutes before we have to be at work and stumble over a number of assorted items on the way to the coffee maker. "No," she laughs. "I wake up to my toddler, like, standing on my back."

Hyde has a relatability factor as a teacher—and no doubt a likability factor—that reminds you inner peace, or some semblance of it, is a journey.

The 34-year-old grew up 10 minutes from Callicoon, where she spent a lot of time in nature and at the river. "I definitely was connected to nature, exercising a lot and getting a lot of fresh air," Hyde says, sitting cross legged and shoeless on a chair in the lobby. She was surrounded and raised by her River Family—a la the name of her wellness center—which consists of an intergenerational group of family and friends who share a connection to each other and to the river that raised them.

"There's like this wonderful tribe and group of people that helped and loved and supported me as I grew up," Hyde says. "And then, as a teenager, it was more difficult to be in this area, and then I convinced myself that I had to leave as soon as I could. And that's kind of what I did."

After college, where she got a communications degree, Hyde moved to New York City. She had an internship in Lower Manhattan in a documentary-production house called DCTV, where she was

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eventually hired. “That was really awesome. I thought I was set up. But then the city just started to get to me.” Along with a bit too much partying was the imposition of the city itself: its constant expenses, movement, stress. “It was kind of eating away at my soul,” Hyde says. “Deep down, I’m a country girl.”

Hyde left the city and went to Peru sometime in 2008. She volunteered with a street children’s program and went to Spanish school, then came back to the states, left again, tried to give Brooklyn another chance; was like, “No way,” flipped a coin, hopped on board with a caravan of friends en route to Portland and stayed for several years. By this point, she was fully involved with her high school friend, Jason Barnes, who is now the co-owner of the wellness center. The two of them were together in Oregon. She got a job bartending and started taking yoga classes.

Eventually, Hyde incurred a lower back injury at the bar, and turned fully to yoga, acupuncture and massage as a way to heal.

Hyde interjects her timeline to say, “I wasn’t fully connected with my spiritual path then,” which is something only a few people can get away with saying, and Dawn Hyde is one of them. Moments later, through a genuine smile, she also says, “the philosophy of yoga is just so freakin’ rad.”

Many people come to yoga for an escape from the barbecue-honey-Frito-coated chaos of their lives, she explains. “I come from a place of suffering,” she says, meaning, other than the literal injury she was nursing, she was also treating her body poorly. “Wild-child days,” she calls it. “Oh my God, saying the most horrible things to myself. Being so negative to myself,” she says. “It [yoga] has taught me to love myself, for sure. It’s taught me to love the crap out of myself. That’s the core of yoga, for me. It tore my heart wide open. And I just love more... I love everyone and everything so much more because of yoga.”



Hyde wants that for you, too. She’d been manifesting a vision for a wellness center with Barnes for years, and after working at a wellness center in Portland—moving quickly from a front desk to management position—she traveled to Nepal, Thailand and Guatemala for trainings and retreats. “I became inspired by all of those practitioners and those wellness centers and all the yoga studios, and I was like, you know, this is what I want: I want to create a space like this,” she says. “And I wanted to make sure it was accessible to the community.”

Still in Portland, and right before she was booked to go to India, Hyde found out she was pregnant with her now two-year-old daughter Kylah (middle name: River). She moved back to Callicoon and heard that the building on Main Street was available for rent—the vision realized.

“I’m just following what my soul purpose is... I do believe this is definitely it. Owning this place,” she says. “Creating this space and just being able to offer all these modalities to the community is such a dream of mine that I’ve been manifesting for a long time with Jason. So it’s just—it’s a dream come true to be here doing that.”

The classes at River Family Wellness are on a sliding scale, meaning you can pay as little as \$9 for a yoga class, or \$15 for community acupuncture led by Barnes. Her business is geared toward locals. “I’ve been turned away by these modalities because I didn’t have any money,” she says. “I think that’s silly.”

Throughout our conversation, Hyde jumps between different fundamentals of yoga and meditation—circling around whatever the “core philosophy” of the practice might be. Her enthusiasm for the subject bubbles over, occasionally, then she reels herself back to tranquility.

“I think it’s just about joy and love,” she eventually says.

“Deep inside there’s this beautiful pure love and light, and it’s just layered on top by a bunch of bulls**t,” she says. “Like fear, and stress and anxiety and garbage.” She moves a register above her normal speaking voice to exercise an “I love it!”

“Devotion,” she continues, settling back. “So, it’s just cool.”

To contact Dawn and her team at River Family Wellness, visit riverfamilywellness.com/; email info@riverfamilywellness.com or call 845/887-9004.

Know someone you think would be a good fit for our series? Email elizabeth@riverreporter.com

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