

## A Season for Natural Connection



Connecting to animals and nature has always been a significant part of my Native American heritage, and the emergence of spring brings me back to this powerful relationship every year. I love watching the birds build and tend to their nests as the bees visit fresh flowers. The sense of renewal and hope that fills the air reminds me to appreciate the beauty and take a moment to breathe.



From a very young age, I've felt a powerful draw to horses, and ever since I can remember, I've had a special connection to a wild mustang named Sparrow. She has a long soft white mane, a golden coat, and a tiny black spot on

her muzzle. Sparrow is not a horse others can see or touch – she is my beautiful spirit animal. For decades I've envisioned myself riding on her bareback. This vision is beneficial whenever I am struggling spiritually or emotionally. She has always been a part of my self-soothing ritual.

Whenever I need her, I imagine the feel of the wind in my hair while I ride on her back, the smell of honeysuckle in the air, and the sound of her hooves pounding as we run through meadows and streams. We eat apples together, laugh at the rabbits and lizards running by, and I rest my head on her back and close my eyes. There is no need for words when I meditate with Sparrow, just absolute acceptance and love. Anytime I have the opportunity to ride (either my Sparrow or a horse we all can see), you'll find my inner child and me basking in the sunlight with a huge smile and feeling absolute joy and freedom.



The human-animal bond is deep and based on mutual respect and connection with the nature around us. When immersed in nature (both in our imagination and physically),



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an animal’s close presence triggers a healing response in our brain and heart that can be instantly felt.

Although spirit animals or totems are strongly associated with Native American culture, I believe the draw to nature and certain animals is a much broader human instinct that we all share. This spring, I invite you to turn inward and consider for a moment if there is a spirit animal in your life. Meditating is an excellent way to allow this connection to happen.

We offer weekly classes at Thermal Horizons with group mediation that can provide space and peace to reveal a special animal connection you may have. Special events and the monthly Sound Healing Ceremony are also excellent times to explore your spirit animal connection. I would love for everyone to experience the instant calm and love I feel with Sparrow, and I would be honored to hear about your magical harmony with nature this season. Please join us in our Shala and share!

So much love and gratitude,

Jaime Annett,

Studio Owner - Sound Healing Practitioner



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## Teacher Spotlight



### Gabriel Cortes

It surprised Gabriel to feel so lost at such a young age. He was a successful personal trainer in great physical shape, but adversity left him feeling overwhelmed and like something was missing. “I mentally and emotionally crashed,” Gabriel admitted.

A mentor suggested he examine the studies of the indigenous people in South America, so he took a pause from his regular practice - A leap of faith, if you will - And went to South America to study.

“The experience helped me remember who I was,” said Gabriel, who means this both physically and spiritually. What he remembered in South America is that much of what we do now as humans – how we move or not move, eat, coexist, and work – is simply not functional. “The race we have created as a measure of success is not sustainable, and people are getting sick or crashing, like I did, because of it.”

He spent a month with spiritual leaders in South America, eager, open, and willing to learn. There was movement, breathwork, and an element of the divine that resonated with

him. He returned to the spiritual leaders twice more to immerse himself in this new and emerging quality of life. He felt he was living a bit closer to his truth and had a calling to share his practice (and message) with others.



Because of his training, Gabriel's classes feel a bit different. Although his practice is rooted in the fundamentals of Yoga (he received traditional Yoga Teachers Training in Costa Rica), his practice also incorporates what he refers to as intuitive movements or a physical sense of what comes next when you move. “It may come as a surprise, but in the beginning, when Yoga came about thousands of years ago in India, it was created and practiced exclusively by men. Much has changed. Bodies have changed, but more importantly, the intention has changed,” said Gabriel.

“Our lifestyle and types of jobs are keeping us stuck in one plane of motion. We must relearn how to instinctively move to utilize and balance the human anatomy through all changes to stay healthy mentally and physically.” In Gabriel's class, he encourages you to get out of your head and listen to what your body needs. “Not knowing what comes next is part of the practice in my class. It's an opportunity to surrender to the present moment and trust the experience, which is no different than our life experience.”

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As a result, he has created a unique experience of safe and traditional Yoga poses with an element of functional creativity. The practice invites you to rely on your intuitive movements. Put another way, it asks you to remember who you are.

He pours an incredible amount of time into preparing for his classes. “I try to get on my mat first thing in the morning to see what my body needs, and I start jotting ideas down and developing them throughout the day,” he says of the sequences he pairs with personalized playlists (inspired by indigenous sounds) that resonate perfectly with the movements.

You will find students of all ages and abilities in Gabriel’s classes. He often starts with a welcome to the class that brings a sense of calm and comfort to the room, followed by an emphasis on the breath. The movement steadily climbs to build heat and then relaxes to return to the breath.

“In our moving meditation, there may be some challenging but also gentle moments, much like in life, but the breath guides us during such times. Real practice begins when the mind starts to wander or even judge ourselves. How we react to these changes in our practice shows what is coming up for you. When you let go of expectations, the practice will always show you what you need the most. All you have to do is observe and breathe through it all to find inner peace.”



Gabriel welcomes you to step into the medicine of Yoga with him and see what you can learn in his class to take with you when you leave the studio. “We already live in a society with a push mentality, but you don’t need to bring that into your practice,” he said. “Come in with an open mind, and you’ll leave with an open heart.”

All are welcome to join Gabriel for Hot Morning Flow on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. In addition, he teaches Warriors Path on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and a Vinyasa Flow on Sundays at noon. All classes are in the Sun Studio, which is heated by Infrared lighting. We recommend bringing a towel!