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Quest for Life

Yoga, Meditation, Managing Thoughts and the Southern Highlands Retreat

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... shortly I would be breathing fresh county air.

Looking back, I can now see just how stuck I was in my world in late 2007. It was many things - problems with work, losing a close friend to a new life in the U.S., feeling isolated and depressed within myself and just longing for some peace and quiet, away from the constant hubbub of the inner-city.

Sometimes we can get too consumed with life and we need to step off and review our situation and realise why we are here and just who we are

I first learned about Petrea King's Quest for Life Centre from Gaye, the Gender Centre Counsellor, and later from Liz, my case manager. It sounded just like what I needed and I decided to pack my bags and exit Sydney for a few days for some much needed relaxation and healing. I had enrolled in the "Healing Your Life" program, a five-day residential intensive course consisting of yoga and meditation, managing thoughts and working at getting back in the driver's

seat of life. Oh, did I mention the mouth-watering, healthy meals (mostly meat-free), relaxed peace and idyllic location of Quest, at Bundanoon in the splendid New South Wales Southern Highlands?

I motored my way out of Sydney along the M5 Motorway in bumper-to-bumper traffic, packed with B doubles, semi-trailers and family sedans, groaning as they pulled caravans jammed with all the stuff needed for happy holidays during the Christmas break. It was like a mad race and I kept telling myself that it had to thin out soon and shortly I would be breathing fresh county air. It did thin out a bit, but I was always ready to take evasive action, should a rogue prime mover meander across my lane and add to the mayhem of Hume Highway traffic. My little Mazda was no match for the power and size of an gigantic eighteen-wheeler. I turned off after Berrima and hit the country roads at last! I passed the town of Exeter and drove on towards Bundanoon, confident that I would make the drive out in less than two hours, which I did. I was already feeling better, with lush green country all around and soon enough I was entering the village of Bundanoon - a few shops, a pub and a railway station. Quest is located on the edge of town and I found it easily with the help of my map, thoughtfully provided by Quest.

As I drove along the winding driveway I was astonished to see a sprawling country house set in spacious grounds, surrounded by stands of giant pine trees and accommodation quarters off to the side of the compound.

I was impressed and keenly anticipated some quality time spent in such a peaceful place. The abundant birdlife was delightful and I breathed in the sweet air that comes with being so high above sea level, away from smoggy cities.

Soon enough, the group of about thirty participants gathered in the large meeting room at Quest and we met Petrea King, founder and director of Quest for Life. Now Petrea knows what it is like to be faced with a crisis, having recovered from life-threatening cancer herself, and from her teens has worked in counselling, nursing and natural therapies.

Petrea has more than twenty years experience providing services for people living with the challenges of serious, chronic and life-threatening illness, grief, loss, anxiety, depression and trauma. She knows that happiness comes from within and that personal peace is a conscious choice to live in the present moment. Of course it is easy to hear such realisations, but the point of healing your life is to master the skills necessary to realise these truths for ourselves.

We also met Petrea's partner, Wendie Batho, a former high school principal and a person who knows the trials of feeling stuck or just being unable to continue living due to a personal crisis or illness. Wendie is serious, yet always ready with a deadpan one-liner and you can see how the differences between the two women serve to complement them. I came to know Wendie as a pillar of strength, wisdom and compassion (and too much laughter at times).

The program started after the introductions and, as the sole transsexual of the group, I felt intimidated by the other people and my hackles immediately went up. I was guarded about being stared at and judged. I was actually quite angry at the "straights" around me and I was ready to rip someone's head off, should they ask a stupid question about being a transsexual or gaze too long.

My fears were dispelled with the serious work beginning early the next morning with some yoga and stretching, which I love. We broke off into a meditation and assembled for the Stories from Participants workshop. Wow - what an eye-opener it was to learn of the others'

pain and suffering! I was among people who faced an early death or were recovering from a serious illness; others had lost loved ones in tragic circumstances and some were trapped in depression and years of isolation and sadness in their lives. I shed my armour and shared my story and I can say a lot of tears flowed in that room that session. It was a redeeming experience and a healing catharsis for all of us.

I got to know and befriend many people in that group and as the days passed we all became closer. Mornings started with meditation and sessions involving group exercises, lectures and my favourite a singing workshop.

Meal times were a great chance to share our stories and, although hesitant at the start, I came out of my shell and enjoyed the candour of our dinner-table confessionals. The food was delicious with lots of fresh juices, salads, some protein and a monster selection of herbal teas and coffee. I made it my mission to taste each and every tea over the five days, but still failed to try them all.

Accommodation was motel-style units and it was great to go to sleep without traffic noise and feeling exhausted from a full day of activities and eating! Oddly enough, the clackety-clack of the overnight goods trains travelling nearby was comforting and I enjoyed feeling a million miles away from the city as I lay in bed.

I walked to the nearby Moreton National Park on one of the lunch breaks and saw pristine forests, teeming with birdlife and local native vegetation I had not encountered before. I must make the trip back to Bundanoon to see the nearby escarpment and further explore this unspoiled wonderland.

Leaving Quest was hard for all of us. I cried as I hugged Wendie and I could feel the sobs welling up inside her as well. In the five days we had experienced some challenges and a lot of laughter and release. The stress melted away and we had renewed energy to move on. I recommend Quest for Life to anybody experiencing significant hurdles in their lives or for those hankering for tranquillity and the chance to learn more about themselves. Sometimes we can get too consumed with life and we need to step off and review our situation and realise why we are here and just who we are.

Visit the [Quest For Life website](#)  or telephone them on (02) 4883 6599 for more details.

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