

SINGLE

and Alone

I've been happily single and living alone for over a decade. I thoroughly enjoyed my solo life. Active with hobbies, art and cultural activities, extensive travel, competitive and non competitive sports, ongoing education, work and business.

There were so many great things about being single. Going wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted made my freedom loving soul sing. Being spontaneous when my friends called for dinner or a game night or a movie was easy with no one else's plans to consider.

I was fortunate enough to have a large friendship group of colleagues, students, friends and family. A big support network of friends that I made through yoga, climbing, meditation, coaching, volunteering, my neighbourhood and work.

At home being single meant never negotiating about what to eat, what to watch and what to do. Never sharing the doona. Never cleaning up anyone else's mess. Dancing to midnight in my lounge room, eating breakfast for dinner at 10pm, hiking for hours, and reading in bed all weekend if I wanted.

That all began to change during the pandemic when I became seriously ill at the outset and didn't see anyone in person except medical staff for a five month period. That felt tough but I'd had a similar experience once before. For the most part I embraced it and used the time and space for reflection and healing.

But my health recovery plateaued and took up a lot of my mental, physical and emotional bandwidth, and a lot of my time.

Things really changed when I moved to Melbourne.

LONELY & ISOLATED



For the first time I began to feel lonely and isolated.

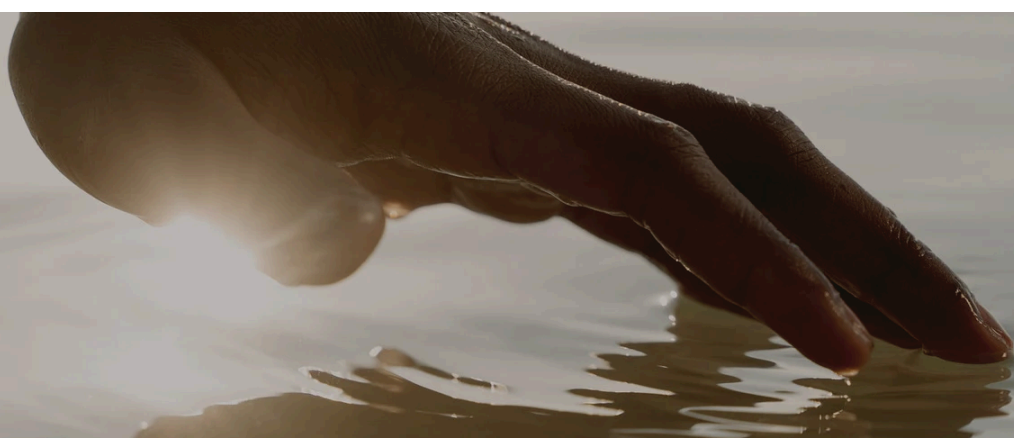
Being solo in a city where you only know a few people and you're not at your best is very different.

I had thought I would make a mix of close and casual friends fairly easily. I'd never had an issue making friends before. I didn't think it would be particularly difficult to find movie/gallery friends, yoga/circus/gym friends, climbing/hiking/footy friends and shopping/dining friends. I thought I would be treated as a regular at my local cafes, restaurants and bars. Have the nicknames and easy familiarity that I had in so many places back home.

Not much of that has happened.

Partly because for the first two years I wasn't well enough to do much more than work, walk my dog, attend medical appointments, and rest. Partly because Melbourne is a much more internal and less welcoming city than my hometown. Partly because I lost a lot of my spark during the pandemic. Partly because my illness was a constant one step forward, two steps back. No walking tours or exploring my neighbourhood, let alone the city.

I became a much more introverted person than I'd ever been before.





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A friend told me about plant ecosystems and the level of variety required for a healthy system. Apparently they need diversity to flourish. I wonder what the optimum number is for us. I know that my ecosystem here is not wide or deep and that is something I must change.

Yes, I have made some friends. Really good friends. Three kind hearted, generous people have created space for me in their lives. A couple of people working in my favourite restaurant reliably lift my spirits when I see them. A few of the staff in my grocery store recognise that I'm local and treat me as such. I joined a bookclub. I attend community events. But it's not enough. Not nearly enough. A handful of people when I had a hundred.

Of course I still have my old friends and I keep in contact with them. We talk on the phone and I visit when I can. But their lives are busy and full of demands, so calls aren't as frequent and trips to see them aren't guaranteed. Only few have made it here.

The five thoughts I noticed that have impacted my switch from feeling alone to feeling lonely are:

- The lack of spontaneity, fun and laughter. Not everyone likes spontaneity so when you have less friends in your physical orbit it's that bit harder to find people that want to do something on a whim at the same time you're available. With larger networks that's not an issue. There's always someone to go on an adventure and have a laugh with.

- The lack of physical affection. I had underestimated the impact of limited physical contact with people. Affection and incidental touch is virtually absent. No regular kiss on the cheek from family, a friend to hug hello, or a colleague's hand to shake. No more warmth from BabaG heavy on my lap wanting a snuggle and a pat. After she died I lost my most loyal and loving companion. Now I can go weeks without seeing someone in my circle with whom I have touch privileges.
- The lack of reflection. When your contact with known others is infrequent you miss seeing anyone's eyes light up to see you. You take that sparkle for granted when you see it multiple times a day. It's odd when it's gone. At first you can't quite put your finger on it. You don't know what is missing, what is out of place. It hit me like a tidal wave the first time I opened my door to a friend and saw her whole being light up. It had become so rare. A mix of happy tears at someone delighted to see me, and shock realising how long it had been since I had experienced that kind of warmth. Since I had been truly seen by another.
- The lack of care and concern. When you don't see people very often they don't notice when you're gone. When you become seriously ill and need help with medicines, or appointments, or groceries, or even putting the garbage out, it's your close friends, the ones you have deep history with, that you call on. When they are a ten hour drive away it's not an option. You can feel particularly miserable and vulnerable when you're trying to manage on your own.
- The lack of importance. It hadn't occurred to me until I moved here that I was no one's important person. Not once in my single life had I thought about this before. That I didn't come first to anyone. When you're fully engaged in life you don't notice this at all. You fill your own cup up.

I am building out my network now that my health has improved. Devoting more of my time and bandwidth to creating joy, receiving physical affection, meeting up with friends and acquaintances, volunteering, exploring my neighbourhood and city, and becoming my own VIP. Single and alone doesn't have to mean lonely and isolated.

