

Healing Hearts

Healing, Consciousness & Wellbeing News

January 2024



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HEALING HEARTS

Edited by Suzanne King, *Reiki Energy for Life*

"Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine into trees." This John Muir quote epitomises the deep sense of calm you feel when you relinquish your everyday, and retreat.

This edition provides vastly different insights on the beauty of retreating, from the awe-inspiring refuge of Macquarie Island in the Southern Ocean, to Naitauba, a remote holy island in Fiji to an artist's paradise retreat in Céret, Pyrénées-Orientales, France. We also learn about retreating from a shamanic perspective and find ways to heal and retreat at *The Healing Space* Cygnet.

This holiday season is a perfect time to contemplate the health benefits of retreating. Perhaps you are already there, or the articles in this edition will prompt your thinking. Near or far, nature is waiting for you to take time to retreat.

To subscribe - email :
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Editor's Letter

And into the woods I go, to lose my mind and find my soul

Quote by John Muir

It occurred to me recently that humans have an innate need to retreat for various reasons. Some retreat to reflect, to remember (or forget), to regain a sense of peace away from the chaos of 'normal' life, to write or promote creative pursuits or to further their spiritual journey. As Vivienne Cole so eloquently states in her article (refer pages 4-6), the act of retreating provides opportunities to return to nature and ourselves. Retreating allows for a time to reflect, recall, recharge, promote resilience or release, a letting go, and a way to revive and reinvigorate. Yet to do this, it depends on our own capacity to reset, and our receptivity and relationship with our environment. How deep do you want to immerse yourself in the flow of life, letting go, relinquishing responsibilities, to step away and recharge?

The idea of retreating of course isn't new. Ancient sages and great meditation masters over the centuries have sought enlightenment in caves across the Himalayas. To me the more recent story of Buddhist nun Tenzin Palmo is a stand-out. Her biography *'Cave in the Snow'* (Vicki Mackenzie) is one of my favourite books, which describes how she retreated to a cave high in the Indian Himalayas where she meditated alone for twelve years.

That was of course a superhuman feat of endurance, but retreats don't have to be about solitude, way above the snowline. For some a yoga/meditation retreat is a perfect way to reconnect with feeling centred, grounded and free, while for others, just an escape to a beach shack or garden is a blissful way to retreat from the stressors of daily life.

This edition therefore focuses on the health and wellbeing benefits of retreating, especially where there are plants, trees, gardens and wild, natural spaces. As Dr Ben Arthur, Co-Founder of the Macquarie Island Conservation Foundation states in his article (pages 7-9), it's good for people to know that wild, pure and pristine places like Macquarie Island exist in the world.

I hope this edition prompts your imagination and you feel the call of nature, where you can find solace, peace and reconnect with the earth and yourself.

Best wishes,

Suzanne King
Reiki VII Practitioner
Reiki Energy for Life



Photograph: Vivienne Cole's garden
in Céret, Pyrénées-Orientales, France.

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Suzanne King, Reiki VII Practitioner,
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Using Reiki to Retreat

About Reiki: If you like sleeping, feeling calmer and deeply rested, then reiki natural energy healing is for you! Reiki is a natural healing modality which is used as a complementary therapy to ease anxiety, pain and discomfort. The therapy is extremely gentle and non-invasive which means that it is suitable for everyone. As a complementary therapy, this means that reiki works alongside all other treatments.

Reiki as a 'mini' retreat: Receiving a reiki treatment is like placing yourself in a sanctuary away from the chaos of the everyday. A *Reiki Energy for Life* session is indeed centred around the concept of 'retreating' into a sanctuary. The view from the window might show kunanyi (Mt Wellington) sprinkled with snow, or its a cold, rainy day, but inside clients can snuggle under toasty towels. While the discrete water feature sounds like a mountain stream, clients feel they can just 'drift away' within a nurturing sanctuary space. Then after the 90 minute treatment session, there is time to discuss energy blockages and ways to promote the flow of energy (known as qi or ki) around the body. Within a short space of time therefore the client feels more refreshed and leaves feeling more positive and buoyant.

From my Reiki Practitioner perspective, I often greet clients who arrive looking tense, distressed or in pain. Others may display a 'happy demeanour' but beyond their facade of happiness, lies their buried anxiety or grief, or general feelings of emotional imbalance. Nearly two hours later however, clients find that they have reached a place of feeling more at peace, more emotionally balanced, in less pain and more rested and relaxed. This is because reiki natural energy healing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, and as reiki places the body into a deep respite position, the client feels peace and an uplift in their general wellbeing.

Over the past couple of decades, there has been a significant increase in interest about the health benefits of this gentle complementary modality. Alongside general population interest, and the increasing use of reiki within clinical settings (especially across America and England), there has also been an increase in academic studies. At present for example, Dr Sheldon M. Feldman is conducting a clinical trial 'Reiki's Effects as a Therapeutic Intervention in Breast Surgery'.



In one study '*A Large-Scale Effectiveness Trial of Reiki for Physical and Psychological Health*' published In the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine (2019),* a total of 1411 reiki sessions were analysed. The outcome was: *"statistically significant improvements were observed for all outcome measures, including positive affect, negative affect, pain, drowsiness, tiredness, nausea, appetite, shortness of breath, anxiety, depression, and overall well-being."*

Suzanne is one of the few Reiki VII Practitioners in Australia. For more information about *Reiki Energy for Life*, Suzanne's natural energy healing work and writing (including her eco-fiction novel), refer to:

Website: <https://reikienergyforlife.com>

Website: <https://www.naturaltherapypages.com.au/connect/reikienergyforlife/energetic-medicine/pain-alignment-tension-blockages>

Website: <https://suzykwriterhealer.com>

Email: reikienergyforlife@outlook.com

*Reference: <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/acm.2019.0022>

Retreating from a Shamanic Perspective



Kelly Smyth, *The Healing Space Cygnet*

Interview with: Kelly Smyth (Kilandrill) Earth Shaman

About: Kelly (Kilandrill) is Co-Director of *The Healing Space Cygnet* and also works there as a Shamanic practitioner, providing an opportunity for people to experience personalised spirit journeys. Previously, her clients would need to travel into the forest for shamanic sessions, but now *The Healing Space Cygnet* has made her work more accessible. She has a background in floristry and horticulture, and hopes to create more Healing Spaces and Retreat Centres in other locations, to promote healing and wellbeing.

Where do you retreat?: I retreat to be with the plants because it makes me feel grounded. I take two days a week to be in the garden in between face-to-face client sessions and running a busy healing practice. My home is a sanctuary where I live on the land with another energy medicine practitioner; no-one comes there, so it's just us and my cats and plants. The views from this Cygnet property are amazing. We look out towards the water, and we're up high, overlooking native forest and flowers. I can look out the windows from the daybed to the water and the mountain ranges (Hartz Mountain) in the distance. The view is always changing like an oil painting. I used to own the Mongolian Ger (now owned by Helen Rowley – refer *Healing Hearts* October 2023 edition) and this is where I used to host group spirit journeys, but now I like to keep work and home separate.

Why do you like to retreat: I mostly retreat so that I can maintain my work, and as plants make me feel balanced and provide a way for me to reset, I like to get my hands in the earth – so I retreat from the world that way. There's 50 acres of forest behind me where I live, so I have trees all around me and I grow flowers and medicinal herbs and plants that I make tinctures from to heal myself and balance my energies. I need to retreat to ground and centre myself in my garden and forest, and that way, I can help other people and serve at a higher level.



Apart from your home sanctuary, do you like to retreat anywhere else in Tasmania?: There's a place called Kelly's Basin on the West Coast which calls to me. Apart from the name, it is known for being one of the sites where you can find a rare tektite called Darwin Glass. (There are conservation areas that need to be respected and fossicking zones where you can collect specimens from). These shards of natural glass are composed of part melting rock and part extraterrestrial material from the meteor which hit that part of the earth over 800,000 years ago. I collected a beautiful piece which I had capped in gold and I wear it when I do energy work with clients.

Does your shamanic work and connection to the earth help you to retreat?: I started my shamanic training to overcome the traumatic event of losing my newborn son, Phoenix. I learned a great deal from Robert Moss, who teaches shamanic practices regarding death, dying and the afterlife and he helped me understand better that we are a soul visiting the earth, each with a purpose. I also learned from the world renowned Sandra Ingerman, and her teachings on Earth healing resonated with me a lot.

When I'm in the garden, I watch life unfold and see how nature works. You can learn so much about yourself in the garden. You can see seeds sprouting, plants growing, flourishing, blooming, then wilting and dying. It's a lifecycle that is so completely part of nature. It's just us humans that make dying something to be afraid of. So when I retreat to the garden I think of Phoenix – he came to visit me and he was perfect. He was a guide and is with me now and always. We were lucky to be together for a while, two souls sharing one body.

Interview: Kelly Smyth (Kilandril Earth Shaman) continued

How do you help your client's retreat to promote their wellbeing?: Our nervous system is not built for this amount of interaction. So we have to take care to reset and retreat, otherwise we get overwhelmed. That is why people get closed off because they get overwhelmed. The personalised spirit journey sessions that I do, assist people on many levels, like drawing their energy back into their physical form and energy clearing.

I thought I would serve people on a spiritual path but I am finding I work with a lot of busy, overworked under-appreciated, mainstream people who are looking for other support mechanisms. So I work with doctors, nurses and other professionals who are working really hard to help people but don't get the support or space to reset. The way I work, I am given information by helping spirits, which helps people unlock or understand the whole picture. It is about making this type of practice available to all types of people. I think shamans traditionally worked in the whole community and they were the advisers. So I can do the best work helping the leaders, people who are at the frontline of defence or service, like paramedics, politicians, teachers, police; people whose lives are stressful and overwhelming. I teach that we are part of the earth, and we need to align ourselves with our true purpose.

How would you like to help people retreat to promote healing and wellbeing in the future?: *The Healing Space* Cygnet is the first of this type of healing centre that I have been blessed to be part of and I have ideas to create retreat centres working with plants in other parts of the world. I want to run retreat centres where plants help the people to heal, as plants have all the wisdom. I am not just talking about psychedelic plants, but many plants have the capacity to open our hearts and teach us how to heal ourselves and be whole again.



The forests were always known for their healing properties, I would like to bring a part of the forest to the people. All plants have medicine, even if they are just beautiful to look at, because their beauty is medicine for the soul. Plants can communicate with you, and there's magic, watching seeds sprout, grow and flower. So through my other business *The Shaman's Apothecary* I hope to help people reconnect with the plants. During Winter 2024, we aim to run some weekend retreats for people to have a mind, body, spirit experience. We will use *Woodlands Retreat* in Cygnet which is overlooking the water. The retreat will offer spirit journeys, infra-red heat therapy and dream work.

Where are your future retreat destinations?: I have a Norwegian bloodline, my family has a cabin in the land of the 'Midnight Sun' in a National Park in Norway. So I need to go to Norway to meet up with my relatives and find connections with the Naoidi, Norwegian shamans. If I was living in Norway, I dream that I would have grown up being a member of the community of the reindeer people; that is the type of shaman that I would have learned from. Also my son Phoenix is of aboriginal Wirradjuri ancestry (from Forbes/Parks country in New South Wales). I have been in touch with some of the elders there and his grandmother. So I need to find my way backwards, in order to move forwards. Those doors are closed for now but they will open in time.



For more information on shamanic journeying and the work of *The Healing Space*, refer to:

Website: thehealingspacecygnet.com.au

Website: kilandril.com



Vivienne Cole

Where Dragonflies Alight. Retreat, in the Pyrénées-Orientales

Article by Vivienne Cole: Creative Visionary

About Vivienne Cole: Guided by the flame of her curiosity while delving into the profound mysteries of life, artist Vivienne Cole lives and writes from her home in the historic centre of Céret, France.

Nestled in a valley in the Pyrénées-Orientales, surrounded by forests, her inspiration follows the inherent rhythm of the seasons and her reverence for the myriad wonders of creation. In the height of the summer months, as visitors flock to her town and the beaches of her region, Vivienne retreats, finding sanctuary further inland.

She was already a renowned professional photographer, working and exhibiting internationally, but it is here in Céret, where she has truly synthesised her skills as a print-maker, artist and writer. Vivienne now exhibits her oil paintings and mosaics (made of ceramics, porcelain and glass) and also creates cabinet de curiosité (collections using objects found in nature). She is also a Reiki and Seichim Master, and Reconnection Healer.

Reverence

*Where dragonflies alight... my sanctuary in the Pyrénées-Orientales.
A natural basin in a river canyon, easily accessible from home (uphill).
As heatwave conditions become more frequent, the relief the forest
provides is essential to our wellbeing.*

All I hear (echoing in my thoughts) begins with *RE. Remembering.*
Reverence, returning, as my focus is drawn inwards.



The first sensation of calm ascended as I walked carefully along the forest path, observing the reflections where water stills to a pool and an otherworldly scene is mirrored — tall trunks plunging into the depths of the shallows — a marvellous illusion. A trick of light, like much of what our senses perceive, shapeshifting.

Leading to the realisation that everything we observe is relative, determined by our relationship to it, spatially, and our *receptivity*. For now, I am wide awake, alert to the minutest sounds and sensations. Entering another realm, where vitality permeates — it is palpable.

My ears are attuned to the nuances of branching cascades, the two unlike, relaying information. Theirs is a constant tempo, a pouring motion, intent on journeying. *Release*. If I let go, I can travel downstream, all the while dozing in the warmth of the sun, resting at the base of a tree. Held, yet flowing, my body silent, yet engaged in constant motion... streaming in, through, beside me... there is no difference.

Light behaves in a similar way: ripples; spheres; sparks in suspension, or rushing. The air is opaque with winged insects, with webs like the strings of instruments, all orchestrated, as chanting begins... the bird above in the canopy exchanging audibly now. It takes a while to settle, to attune; to be wholly receptive. Once a stranger and now an integral part of the space, fully present, the magic begins. Heightened perception ... interactions ... for I have become invisible, blending in.

Retreat - a Reflection: Article by Vivienne Cole continued

A bird arrives, landing on the rock next to me. Wild bees drink from the moss beneath my toes. And as I write, dragonflies alight, on my page, or outstretched arm. Drying their wings, resting, paused for an eternal second, before circling and coming back to me.

If I enter the forest feeling weary, seeking solace or respite from the intense heat emanating, I leave revitalised. It is a sensation, a vibration in my heart, akin to a quickening. If lying on the beach 'lulls' and leaves a type of languid contentment, forays into the forest are more dynamic — my life-force vivified. A sense of clarity emerges, and where there is water, I can acknowledge receiving a profound cleansing... a reunion with the parts of myself that had been forgotten, now revived, reinvigorated.



Resilience

I have always sought the company of trees... this 300 year (plus) being presides, alone, like an island, below a rocky bank of 'cork oaks', chênes-lièges. His/Her (monoecious) lower bark has been harvested and is still regenerating. A flurry of activity is underway, as insects flow up and down the trunk (on me, adapting to my presence). Acorns bounce as they hit the dry earth (avoiding me) dispersing.

As a child, I was 'at home' in the wilderness. Growing up at the edge of a New Zealand native forest that escaped development, I was free to explore the places I had discovered and named, spending hours alone with my imagination. Entering the kingdom of 'Triple Springs', silver ferns (*Ponga*) and silver beech (*Tawhai*) were among my early companions.

When our family moved to a more densely populated residential area, I relocated to the branch of a tortured willow (*Salix matsudana tortuosa*, Corkscrew willow). I could remain hidden, perched above the stream that ran through the bottom of the garden — an adolescent with my nose in a book, suspended in an improvised state of contentment.

Later, if the pressures of adulthood and my chosen profession proved a challenge, city parks provided a haven — at lunchtime. The Moreton Bay figs (*Ficus macrophylla*), on Sydney's Observatory Hill, enveloped me in their roots when I lay exhausted by demands and deadlines.

The need to recharge during my busy working day remained a constant; a necessary coping mechanism. When a tree wasn't available, I'd stretch out fully on the nearest piece of grass, trying to be discreet yet feeling comical, drawing strength from the earth, releasing any tension.

This connection with an 'available' part of nature allowed me to continue on my trajectory, to retain equilibrium. Payed to perform, I could pull solutions from thin air, as a 'creative and strategic thinker' at the pinnacle of my career. Days were fast-paced, requiring instant results, the lines between work and play blurred. I acted as a transformer, absorbing information and converting it to tailored marketing solutions, gracefully executed, with attention to detail. Life became a series of highs — of passions joyfully pursued and sleepless nights — as I intuitively, received 'answers' in the form of 'big ideas'.



Retreat - a Reflection: Article by Vivienne Cole continued



Recall

*I was born on a full moon... my daughter, on a blue moon.
How natural it feels to share a camp under the stars, to both
bear witness to the ephemeral light that dances across these
landscapes.*

When I randomly chose 'Lavalldieu' (The Valley of God) as the site for our midsummer retreat, I wasn't aware that the grand oak in the centre of a circle, was used in Native American ceremony. Mount Bugarach rises in the distance, the highest peak of the Corbières, Aude (our neighbouring department, within the Pyrénées-Orientales).

Reaching into the recesses where I've painted a rosy picture of the past, I can revisit these Sydney years with fondness. Yet I must also acknowledge that when I permanently relinquished this lifestyle, operating solely through 'instinct', this voice was clear and persistent. I chose to listen; to leave my city-based existence. In a rural setting, in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales I began the lengthy process of unravelling myself — revealing another calling.

I have since journeyed beyond anything I might have once planned, or imagined. Now, a hemisphere away, living as an artist, the order of priorities has been reshuffled. As I quietly piece together intricate creations in my atelier, time dissolves — yet it is infinite. Inspiration wells up from within, effortlessly guiding my hand. The hand proffered for winged creatures, while immersed in wellbeing.

About Céret: Blessed with a sunny Mediterranean climate, the Pyrénées-Orientales is part of Languedoc Roussillon – encompassing the Midi, the ancient strongholds of the Cathars and the fertile plains of Roussillon. Céret is best known for its farmers market, cherry festival and Museum of Modern Art. The mountain massif Canigou (sacred to Catalan people) is the most recognisable landmark, strikingly visible from both sides of the border.



The majestic silhouettes of the eastern most range of the Pyrénées evoke a tumultuous history, as the remains of fortresses and watchtowers join the lines of bornes marking the frontière. The racines of this land are both Occitan, and Catalan; for although designated the South of France, Roussillon was ruled by the Kings of Mallorca, and by proud definition is 'Catalunya'. The Côte Vermeille stretches into Spain, terraced with the vines of Côte de Banyuls and Collioure – a haven for artists who found their inspiration, Picasso and the Fauvists among them. The dragonfly has recently been adopted as the symbol of the region Pays Pyrénées-Méditerranée.

To view Vivienne Cole's exquisite botanical-inspired art works and read her blog bursting with insights about her creations, her flourishing permaculture garden in Céret, and much more, refer to:

Website: atelierviviennefrance.wordpress.com/

Email: atelierviviennefrance@gmail.com

To view Vivienne's intuitive awareness 'Living Philosophy' themed blog, where everyday issues are contemplated, refer to:

Website:

<https://livingphilosophyhome.wordpress.com/>

Awe-inspiring refuge in the Southern Ocean

Interview with Dr Ben Arthur: Macquarie Island Conservation Foundation



About Dr Ben Arthur: Ben is a Hobart local, and one of the four Co-Founders and Directors of the Macquarie Island Conservation Foundation (MICF). After completing his Degree at the University of Tasmania and working on Macquarie Island, he fell in love with research work and the flora and fauna of the Southern Ocean and the subantarctic. His work in the region has encompassed tracking seal colonies to look at where they were foraging in winter. That work led to identification of foraging hotspots to enable modelling to show areas which would be affected by climate change.

Ben completed his PhD in 2016 and is now perfectly positioned at the CSIRO Marine Sciences and CSIRO Marine National Facility, where he is the Engagement Programs Coordinator. His work allows him to enthuse people on the importance of conservation of these wild environments.

The plan to launch a Foundation was hatched back in 2020, over a few beers at the Cascade Hotel. At the time, Ben and his fellow Co-Founders agreed that they had all guided passengers from visiting cruise ships around the nature reserve and UNESCO World Heritage site and had all experienced the same thing, with passengers asking “how can we help?” So now, through the creation of the MICF, people have a direct avenue to contribute to conservation and research. Their vision helps preserve one of the few remaining proper pristine wilderness areas in the world and provides a way to undertake vital conservation work for subantarctic eco-systems now, while also providing a legacy for the future.

Can you describe how you feel when you leave Hobart, and ‘civilisation’ behind:?

Preparing to leave on a voyage is always the same; I’m excited and nervous – but good nerves. Each trip is different and nothing is guaranteed because you are heading off into the Southern Ocean and you are at the mercy of the elements. As research vessels are expensive and you know you will need to complete the work you set out to undertake, you leave knowing that there’s a lot riding on the voyage. It takes two to three days to settle in, as you have to get into the mindset of leaving your family behind and loading the ship and leaving is often hectic and stressful.

After three to four days you can feel yourself slowly taking in the sounds and adjusting to a different society, because these are the people you are going to be with for maybe six months. On the ship you are stepping away from society, you are out of mobile phone range, disconnected from the modern world.



I don’t know whether it’s a conscious relief, but you only realise that you have been living with noise and the modern day rushes of life, after a few days on the vessel. Coming back of course, after living apart from modern life for six months - that really hits you.

How do you feel when you anchor, having journeyed through the infamous ‘Roaring Forties’ and the ‘Furious Fifties’ of the Southern Ocean?:

Arrival at the Station is exciting as you know there’s so few people who get to see Macquarie Island. Often you wake up and realise that the ship isn’t rolling around, and there is the island! Disembarking is very hectic – there’s all the unloading of the cargo, helicopters landing to pick you up and there’s the Lighter, Amphibious, Resupply, Craft (known as LARCs), coming and going.

Interview with Dr Ben Arthur continued

Can you describe the field huts on the island?: The first time I left the Station was to go to Brothers Point, which is only two hours walk away, so it's pretty close. I didn't sleep, I was too excited. I had grown up with David Attenborough videos, so now I was one of those people staying in what is affectionately known as the 'Googie' Hut.



Brothers Point 'Googie' Hut

Then there's the log-cabin style Green Gorge Hut (about one day's walk from the Station) and from there it's easy to watch the elephant seal colony on the beach. Then Waterfall Bay which is the other 'Googie' Hut on the island. Next is Hurd Point which faces directly due South from Macquarie Island, so when you are there, there's no-one else between you and Antarctica! And lastly there's Bauer Bay on the West Coast, so you get all the weather on that side. It overlooks the elephant seal colony located on a big black sand beach which is a couple of hundred metres wide. I've been lucky through my research in counting elephant seals, so I've been able to go to places that not many people have able to visit.



Waterfall Bay 'Googie' Hut

What would you say was one of your most memorable retreats on the island?: I was on a round island trip by myself for a week. I was in the hut at Waterfall Bay and the weather just blew up. The hut was wobbling in the wind. Inside the cups on the shelf were clinking together. The next morning the wind was horrendous and I was due to walk to Hurd Point.

I had breakfast and left (as it turned out optimistically), as the wind and the vertical climb ahead made it extremely difficult. Between the hut and the plateau I got physically knocked off my feet many times. So I went back to the hut only to find the Station was calling me, ordering me to stay inside! The wind back at the Station was 185 kmh and they were worried I was going to be physically blown away! So there I was back in the cabin, in near 200 kmh wind, baking bread, drinking tea and reading books – all the while, with an elephant seal huddled at the door.

Another time I was in the hut at Bauer Bay, and it must have been January as it was a rare, calm day, and two elephant seal pups just came through the door to join me for dinner!

Also once I was at Hurd Point, and I was the only person out in the field while everyone else was back at the Station (two days walk away). So there I was by myself, and you know, you're the only person in the southern most point in Australia! From the corner window of that hut you can see the Royal Penguin colony about 20-30 metres away. It's amazing – you can look from the colony to the waves crashing. You are just immersed in all the noises of the environment, far from the modern world. All you can hear is the waves, the penguins and the elephant seals snoring (and farting!) under the window.



Hurd Point Hut

You're pretty much on your own when you stay in the huts. When you wake up and it's howling outside, you know you are properly isolated. There's a hut logbook and there's been entries since the 1950s, so that's a great treasure-trove of history right there!

Interview with Dr Ben Arthur continued

What environmental impacts do you see occurring on Macquarie Island and how can the MICF help?: There are many environmental changes occurring right now. There are still some animal populations that are recovering from the stress of the rabbit population (which was eradicated in 2014) and the old sealing days. Some of the animal populations are starting to decline or slow down in their recovery due to food availability at sea as well as the impacts of climate change. We also know there are changes to rainfall patterns. You expect to have rainfall every day but now we are getting it in clumps, instead of 1-2mm per day, so the vegetation is drying out.

The Macquarie Island Cushion Plant (*Azorella macquariensis*) is the only place in the world that it exists, but it is undergoing fairly widespread die-back due to changes in weather patterns. The Gentoo penguin population has also decreased over the last decade. However, we had a recent 'win' with an announced increase to the Macquarie Island Marine Park by nearly 500,000 square kilometres. That will be really beneficial as it will help animals to forage and breed; particularly penguins, albatross and seals will be able to forage in waters that are now protected.



Gentoo penguin family

The MICF Board are working to build connections to the island, like building relationships with schools and inspiring people to participate in joining us, to protect this precious and fragile landscape. We aim to deliver a sustainable funding stream, through grants for example, to facilitate conservation and research initiatives.



How would you summarise your time retreating and working on Macquarie Island?: Macquarie Island is special. Even in Tasmania, in a lot of our places you've got boardwalks and infrastructure and its relatively safe. Macquarie Island though - you are down there with a maximum of 25 people on the island and you know - nature is definitely in charge. You have to give way to the elephant seals, penguins will breed

under your window and you know you are definitely second place and I think it's good for us to know that these wild, natural places still exist in our world. It's a full sensory experience when you are there!

I've done one big summer research trip down there and I'm already looking forward to hopefully going back there next summer with the Foundation. It's a fascinating place - it stays with you, long after you return. It gets to you. Six or seven years later, it gets to people. I've also spent time in Antarctica at the French Station and during my PhD I went to the South African equivalent of Macquarie Island, Marion Island, but that is much more volcanic. For me, Macquarie Island holds a special place in my heart as it was my first subantarctic island that I went to, and then I was able to continue my research for my PhD there.

For more information about the Macquarie Island Conservation Foundation, refer to:

Website: <https://macquarieisland.org/>





Naomi Lawrence pictured with Ollie

Retreating to the remote holy island of Naitauba, Fiji

About Naomi: Naomi has a botanical background and is now happily retired after working in the area of conservation biology for nearly 30 years. Her lifetime search to find a way to overcome anxiety collided with her father's death in 2022 and her breast cancer diagnosis just two months later. Thankfully Naomi is now cancer free and along the way, has learned much on the subjects of life, releasing anger and grief and finding peace – both here in Tasmania and on a remote Fijian island.

Where did you retreat?: Avatar Adi Da Samraj's ashram on the hermitage island of Naitauba, located in the north part of the Lau Group, Fiji. The island can be equated to being a separate planet - a jewel on the surface of the ocean. It is spectacular, pristine and remote, with forested areas, a coconut plantation, coves, beautiful beaches and a surrounding reef. It is a holy place, where you live a holy life.

What started your spiritual journey and quest for knowledge?: When I was about four years of age I suddenly had the realisation that life as I knew it wasn't permanent. Ever since then I have carried a fear about our mortality. When I was in my 20-30's I went into buddhism and then I became a botanist, which suited me perfectly, as I have always been a 'nature child.' Nature calms me down, and that's where I find silence and happiness. Even so, I still had questions, and I grappled with the spiritual claim that "all is one".



Remote Naitauba Island, Lau Group, Fiji

I turned to science for answers and found quantum physics says the same thing - that below atoms everything is light all pulsating at different vibrations. That enquiry was around the time I remembered a story about an Indian boy who had had been overwhelmed by an intense fear of death but who had become enlightened. This was the story of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi who created an ashram at the holy mountain of Arunachala, India. I found him very interesting, but then I thought "I still don't understand life".

What was the turning point for you?: I came across Avatar Adi Da Samraj's autobiography. It resonated with me so much, I read it in a day. His basic message to humanity is that everyone is always enlightened and not separate from the one reality we all exist in, and as that is the source of everything, by nature, that equals love bliss consciousness. However we are not aware of the truth of our relationship to reality because we are energetically contracted in upon ourselves. When you hold tight, you know yourself as a "something", but when you release and open your heart, your feelings of separation from reality disappear.

Also, I had another awakening in 2022, after my father died. Two months later I found I had an aggressive form of breast cancer. I decided to have chemotherapy, and am now totally healthy again, but during that time I read a lot; people like Dr Joe Dispenza and Dr Ian Gawler who have survived their own health crises.

Interview with Naomi Lawrence continued

Both Dr Dispenza and Dr Gawler had the absolute conviction that they could be cured, by being connected to the source of everything and clearing emotional blockages (such as anger) which can manifest as various diseases in the body. I also realised cultivating gratitude was, for me, a key to healing. Dr Dispenza says gratitude is the ultimate means to connect to source or reality. So this realisation set me on a path of releasing anger and grief, and learning how to connect to, source or God or reality self, through the feeling of gratitude and love. Meditation and yogic breathing techniques were also very helpful.



Why did you seek to retreat to the ashram in Fiji?:

I'd had a few spiritual experiences, like seeing 'smoke or mist' in the air above a grieving crowd which then disappeared into brilliant white light at a funeral on Mt Wellington/kunanyi, and another time, spontaneously dropping into a state of absolute bliss. Adi Da's teachings resonated with me, and I became a formal student of his which gave me the opportunity to go on retreats to his Fijian holy island, Naitauba.

I have been to Naitauba four times including one time when my Guru was physically present. That's when I was blessed to sit in his presence (in darshan) and receive his silent transmission teachings. I was also privileged to go on retreat in 2008, when he passed from the body, and participated in the sacred ceremonies related to the transition of a truly great spiritual teacher. Even though he has now died, I still feel his all pervading presence.

What was the beauty in retreating for you?: You let go of ego and all superficiality that are part of conversations and life as we know it in our modern world. Adi Da taught that if you continue to persist in reactivity and thought patterns, then that is what will persist. However, when you take attention away from your reactivity and focus on reality using the physical form of the Guru as a point of focus, you realize that you are not separate from reality, and that you are light, love and consciousness. Consequently, the complex patterns of the self-contraction simply fall away. Naitauba is also a very happy, beautiful place with rainforest and tropical trees, plus there's a temple and other holy areas and it's extremely peaceful. When I went there my days would be filled with temple pujas and meditations. In fact, I find it quite crushing coming back to the western world.

Is there anywhere in Tasmania where you retreat to find peace?: The wilderness! My husband and I once went kayaking for five days in Bathurst Harbour and the silence there left me ecstatic. That's what is missing in our society; being allowed to be silent. Immersing myself in deep silence in the wilderness, that is where I feel the real sense of me.



Naitauba Island, Fiji

Health Benefits of Retreating



The World Health Organisation (WHO) has alerted to what our bodies already know; that modern life is too noisy, which in turn, negatively impacts our health and wellbeing.

Noise pollution disrupts our sleep and undermines cognitive performance while long-term exposure to traffic noise has been linked to a greater risk of heart disease. In addition, frequent loud noise causes anxiety and stress, making people feel irritable and angry.

There are enormous emotional, physical and spiritual benefits therefore to be gained by simply detaching ourselves from our chaotic lives and finding the power of peace and quiet that nature provides. Through retreating, we can find a way to 'recalibrate' and re-energise ourselves and also promote a way to build emotional resiliency.

On an emotional level, the space you have given yourself will allow for reflection, the achievement of different perspectives, a reduction in anxiety and stress, and a feeling of renewed peace and calm. There is a feeling of 'returning home' to yourself, of bringing your energy back into your body as opposed to dispersing your energy through anger and frustration.

By walking along a quiet beach, we find ourselves 'winding down', filling our senses with beauty, tuning into just the sound of the surf.

This act in turn decreases cortisol and blood pressure, while the sea air promotes oxygen around the body, and an increase of the 'happy, focus and calmness' hormone serotonin.



While walking barefoot in the sand you are also connecting to the earth, and 'grounding' yourself (as opposed to continually being surrounded by electric and magnetic fields).

Upon feeling calmer and grounded, your breath-rate slows, and as gentle activities of walking and being in nature has activated your parasympathetic nervous system, you will sleep better as a result. According to one Biomedical Journal article* grounding (like walking barefoot on a beach) means that the body is able to gain direct connect with the natural electrical charge of the earth. *"Grounding contributes to a de-stressing and balanced effect on the autonomic nervous system with an improvement in heart-rate variability"* and grounding studies have shown results such as reduced inflammation, pain and improved blood-flow.

So by detaching, escaping the chaos of a 'normal life' and finding a place which feels right to enable contemplation, you can get back to 'being you'. That is the you that exists beyond all of your responsibilities and worries. One key aspect to retreating is being able to extract yourself from anthroponic sound (man-made sounds) and immerse yourself instead in an environment rich in geophonic sound (natural sounds like running water, waves lapping or crashing on the beach or the sound of leaves rustling in the breeze). These natural sounds are so soothing and provides a basis for feeling calmer, enabling a recalibration of our minds and bodies to begin.

Resources - Ideas for your next Retreat

Dorje Ling Retreat Centre is located in the beautiful and secluded Lorinna Valley in the heart of Tasmania, in mountains not far from the Cradle Mountain World Heritage Park. The Centre is situated on 48 acres of native forest and parklands, and includes a beautiful hexagonal log meditation building and several retreat huts.



Dorje Ling is an important retreat centre in Tasmania, where you can learn and develop your Buddhist meditation practice. The retreat is operated by the Hobart Buddhist Meditation Centre and Tashi Choling Dharma Foundation, for which the Venerable Zasep Tulku Rinpoche is the spiritual director.

For more information, refer to:

For information on Buddhist teaching and meditation sessions in the Golden Room, Kickstart Arts, 12 St Johns Avenue, New Town refer to:

Website: <https://www.tashicholing.net/about/contact/>

Website: <https://www.tashicholing.net/hobart/>

If you're after an affordable gentle retreat to just read a book or relax, there are plenty of beach shacks for rent. Or for something unique, try a teepee, tiny house or a glamping tent (camping with glamour and comfort). There are tent-style or even dome-style accommodation offerings around the State, from the Huon Valley to various coastal locations including on the Freycinet Peninsula. For more information visit:

Website: <https://www.tasmanianshacklife.com.au/stays>

Website: <https://glampinghub.com/australia/tasmania/>

Another affordable option is Pirates Retreat tiny house, just a short walk from Pirates Bay beach, Eaglehawk Neck. For more information visit:

Website: <https://tinyaway.com/listing/pirates-retreat>



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