



Life long health

From cancer carer to MS diagnosis:
Jenny Fox embracing life through retreats.

Jenny Fox

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My husband, Murray was diagnosed with melanoma in 2004. From the outset, we knew it was an aggressive melanoma and within weeks it was found in my husband's lymph nodes. Mainstream medicine had no treatment to offer, but we were determined to do everything possible to give my husband the best chance of surviving.

We attended The Gawler Foundation's Life and Living retreat, where we met other people who were also confronted with the reality of living with cancer. To be honest, I was not really looking forward it – no television, no newspapers, no contact with the outside world, no chores, no meals to prepare and nothing to do but focus on the reality of our situation. It was actually quite scary to slow down and focus on the present moment, as it was so different from our busy world. I need not have been worried at all.

After the first day, I was so relaxed. The environment was so peaceful and I found comfort in knowing that we could have some impact on the course of this illness. My outlook on life completely changed completely. By the end of the retreat, we both felt much stronger, knowing we could cope with whatever came our way.

Murray stayed fit and healthy for the following six months, even though his melanoma had spread to his liver and lungs. Adopting a healthy lifestyle through good diet, exercise and a realistic attitude to our situation enabled us to have more quality time as a family. Sadly, Murray's condition deteriorated but it was only in the final weeks that his quality of life diminished. My husband passed away nine months after we attended the retreat.

I have often thought that attending the retreat was so helpful for me as a carer. Even though we did not have the outcome we so desperately wanted, the retreat gave me the confidence to know that we could work our way through the most difficult period of our lives. It opened conversations about death that had been almost impossible to engage in prior to attending the retreat - so different from our 'death denying' society, where death is often seen by the medical profession as a failure.

After Murray's passing, I needed a career change and after 24 years went from accountant to nurse. I am now studying a PhD in palliative care, where my research is centered on the transition to palliative care for melanoma patients. It's a world

away from my previous life as an accountant!

In June 2011, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and immediately knew what course of action to take – I attended TGF's Overcoming Multiple Sclerosis retreat to fine tune my lifestyle and learn about new options for health.

The multiple sclerosis retreat fulfilled these needs and many more. The educational aspect of the retreat was so valuable, Professor Jelinek provided an evidence-based approach to living with MS. I came away from the retreat knowing I could control or even halt the progression of my illness. In addition, I got to meet other people who had been living with MS; hearing their stories helped me make sense of my own diagnosis.

Today I am healthy, well and able to do everything I did prior to my diagnosis. I haven't had any symptoms and in fact I am doing even more than I did before. I believe The Gawler Foundation's lifestyle principles that I have adopted give me not only physical benefits of wellbeing, but more importantly they provide holistic benefits that have enabled me to pursue a path in life so different from what I had imagined.



The Gawler Foundation

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