

LISTEN TO YOUR LONGING

Following your sense of purpose can change your life.

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Have you ever felt the “winds of change” blowing through your being? ...That’s not a technical term. When I was old enough to put a label to certain infrequent but distinct feelings, that’s what I called them. The winds of change are a stirring, a recurring sensation, somewhere in your being that “something” is changing. This is quite distinct from feeling frustrated, or fed up, or disliking something that you actively want to change. It's not that something *needs* to change, it's that something *is* changing.

For me, these feelings are subtle and yet unable to be ignored. They precede any active wanting of things to change. They alert and open me up to the possibility of big changes in my life. When the winds blow, a subtle dissatisfaction emerges despite having otherwise been perfectly happy and content with life. My older (and hopefully wiser) self now recognises these feelings and has made peace with the possibility that life is wanting something different for me and from me.

When the winds blow, I don’t get a clear picture of *what* I want, I get a sense of *how* I want to *feel*. In 2021 I noticed this subtle arrival of new feelings. I wanted to feel a greater sense of purpose, connected to community, helping others. I was less interested in “making money” and more interested in “making a difference.” I wanted life to feel more like a village, intimate, connected and immersed in nature. I wanted to feel a sense of freedom and wonder. I wanted to have a greater sense of awe in my lived experience. I wanted my children to have a chance at the same. With nothing more than this clutch of feelings, I raised the idea of changing it all up with my husband. His longing for spontaneity, adventure, and an equal yearning to live more purposefully saw us agree to take a leap of faith into the unknown.

With nothing more than our feelings to guide us, we set about looking for a school that would give our boys “an experience they could never have in Sydney”. We found the Living School in Lismore and knew we were onto something special. We designed our new life around the school. In January 2022 we arrived in the Northern Rivers of NSW, ready to begin life with a new community at the Living School, and set about looking for a new home. Four weeks later Lismore was flooded, the school’s infrastructure and resources lost and the community devastated.

Within days we were absorbed in a community wide effort of sharing and support. There was no limit to how much the community was willing to share. Yes, food, accommodation, funds and varying resources - boats, helicopters, materials, clothing, communications and vehicles, but intangibles too such as time, networks, problem solving skills and psychological support. We found that our particular skills could be put to good use. My husband's big picture thinking, problem solving capacity and extensive network of contacts were of immediate value in finding solutions, sourcing materials and securing donations. My skills and psychological training have helped support people mentally and emotionally during a time of extreme stress and across the varied stages of the expression of that stress. We have volunteered our time and intellectual resources, and in this giving have received untold richness in return. We have made new relationships, gained an intimate sense of community, and through a deep connection to the human spirit we have reconnected to a sense of purpose.

A disaster certainly distils life to its essence. There is just no room for the superfluous. Needs are at the extreme and in extraordinary ways we humans self-organise to meet those needs. I witnessed the awesome and immediate self-organisation of a community based upon its strengths and available resources. There was no comparison of what was better to offer, it was all needed and all valuable. For those of us using our strengths, much joy, fulfilment, and purpose arose to make the impossible and difficult manageable and addressable.

As coaches we know how important it is to utilise strengths in daily life. I am a testament to the deep sense of purpose that arises and how deeply motivating it is to use your strengths: that you would act without thought of reward or compensation, but solely for the love of offering them. To witness a community acting in this way, using strengths like a fabric of many woven colours and tones, is magical and truly a thing of beauty.

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