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the music of recovery

A devastating diagnosis led Clare Greig to reconnect with her love of music and find healing in sound and nature. Words and photos by Kathy Mexted.

Lycra-clad locals have long discussed hiking, riding and running up the Camels Hump trail on Mt Macedon, Victoria. But few discuss the serenity of the place, set high on a 3000-foot volcanic peak covered with whispering bush and overlooking a deep ravine.

But for Clare Greig, a young mother of two, Mt Macedon’s rugged Camels Hump became her solace and her salvation; a space to gather her strength to face the unbearable.

“I always wanted our kids to have a country life like I’d had, and so we arrived out here from Melbourne in February 2014,” says Clare. “By September I faced an unexpected diagnosis and five months of

chemo, a bilateral mastectomy and radiotherapy. The chemo was dreadful, but the surgery was a very different kind of awful. I was super weak and the six week recovery was excruciating.”

Grappling for the positive in her experience, Clare felt a strong feeling of immense gratitude, presence, and of being in the moment. “I had a real spiritual sense of an inner warrior; something I’d never felt before. There was a presence of love and something greater guiding me through it,” she says.

For two years prior, Clare was a business coach, helping freelancers and creatives make business and marketing plans. Suddenly, she was

forced to slow down for treatment and, in doing so, rediscovered her love of music.

“I did music and psychology at uni, and my final year dissertation was in music therapy. I thought I’d love to work with music and healing. The careers lady talked me out of it though, thinking it was too heavy for a young woman to be immersed with sick children and hospitals and the like. The two years’ extra study was also not feasible at the time.”

Clare had run singing groups in London and St Kilda, which were all about performance, but then she began to see how she could incorporate singing into her business coaching practice.

“On my first hospital visit a woman played piano in the waiting area. This beautiful classical music reduced me to tears. I then took it as a sign when the hospital’s wellness centre had a brochure open at an article on research into the healing benefits of singing.

“When I took a break to manage the illness, I had to look after myself and the result was feeling more

connected with my creative self. Music – something I’d given up when I had kids – flooded back and nurtured me.”

A few days after the diagnosis, at the surgeon’s suggestion, Clare had a massage. The masseuse, Melissa Sweeney, is also a sound practitioner and yoga teacher, and Clare soon began to explore her own connection with sound healing, yoga and meditation as she navigated her treatment and recovery.

“In the short periods between chemo sessions, I’d often meditate with the bowl up on the Camels Hump. I tried many things, including kinesiology, chakra cleansing, journaling, studying and singing. I also assessed my relationship with food; something I’ve long resisted because I love rich, creamy, sweet food. I just made little changes each week and wanted to be open to everything. I made myself a priority. I had to give myself love.”

One of the most surprising acts of love came from Polly Christie, the leader of the local choir, Pollyphonics, that Clare belongs to. Polly created

a singing circle for Clare and another choir member who had tragically lost a baby. The small group of gorgeous women sang simple, traditional, indigenous and spiritual songs in a supportive circle.

“They finished the circle with an incredible Aboriginal song about connection. I was absolutely sobbing as they enclosed and cuddled me. That’s the place I was brought to my knees – not crying because I was ill, but because I felt like I should be creating more experiences like this.”

With cancer treatment 12 months behind her now, Clare has joined with Melissa to run workshops called SoundPlay, which help people discover singing, yoga and sound as tools for creativity, self-expression, connection and embodiment of their heart’s feelings. She also shares the Camels Hump with her business coaching clients.

“The fresh air, space and nature help bring perspective, big-picture thinking and purpose. We sit on those lovely rocks and meditate with a sound bowl, and I often sing if it feels right. We also sit in silence for a while,

communing with the open space above and around, and feeling the ancient rock beneath us,” she says.

“We all have our own cocktail of unique experiences, talents and skills to be developed. I love the line from *The Alchemist*, by Paulo Coelho: ‘Be aware of the place you are brought to tears. That’s where I am, and that’s where your treasure is.’”

Clare’s great capacity for love and motivation come from a place beyond the tears, informed by a health crisis and a greatly inspired recovery.

– claregreig.com/SoundPlay/