

# Culminating Project

## Masters of Arts in Conscious Evolution

Gwen Croft  
The Graduate Institute  
August 14, 2004

*“When you are inspired by some great purpose,  
some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds;  
your mind transcends limitations,  
your consciousness expands in every direction,  
and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world.  
Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive  
and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you  
ever dreamed yourself to be.”*

*Patanjali*

## Introduction

*“You must be awake to participate.”*

Personal Journal Entry

The Graduate Institute, April 12, 2004

Earlier this year I made a choice that I didn't want to “do” a culminating project for my Master's Degree in Conscious Evolution. My intention was to “be” the culminating project. I wanted to write a narrative of my own personal growth since entering this program. When I made that choice in February, I had no idea what that meant, or what that might look like in my everyday, physical life. But, even though it was often a struggle to stay with the uncertainty and feel time slipping away, I stayed with it. In the Seven Life Lessons of Chaos, David Peat suggests that instead of resisting life's uncertainties, we should embrace them. That is where creativity steps in. It is the small and seemingly insignificant things that often end up playing a major role in our lives. I stayed open and flexible to the possibilities, whatever that might be.

At the same time I was grappling with what to do with my life. It had changed drastically since 9/11. Although I had traveled some, I really wanted to have a larger worldview, to be a citizen of the earth, not just my own country. Through much reading and reflection, I determined that to heal we must stop thinking of people in other countries and cultures as “the other” and that we all need to become citizens of the planet, rather than just our country of birth. Moreover, I began questioning all my previous beliefs and the meaning of my life. I felt disconnected to nature, which had been an important part of my early life.

In 2002 I enrolled in The Graduate Institute in search of the knowledge and the language of others who have found meaning in their lives. Through my studies of Ervin Laszlo, Sally Goerner, David Peat as well as other recommended readings, combined with teachings at the Chakrasambara Buddhist Center in Manhattan, I soon decided the path to meaning is living a conscious, awakened life. I learned that when we seek to become more awakened for ourselves, we benefit all sentient and

insentient beings and our planet. This belief gave me strength and confidence as I navigated through the amorphousness of my final project.

In [You Can Change The World](#) Ervin Laszlo warns that we are now facing the earth's limit in energy, raw material resources, and resilience. The earth is reaching its potential to feed the ever-growing human population, and its atmosphere is facing intolerable levels of pollution. As a solution to the crisis, he advises us to live with each other – among other cultures and within – and not against each other. It is clear that rational thinking alone will not serve us any more. He calls for a “new spirit: a more evolved consciousness” that will create the empathy and solidarity with our fellow humans and with nature. That became my intention even though I had no idea how to make this happen.

I decided that going abroad was a good first step. A short time ago, I had an opportunity to sell my apartment in Manhattan and leave quickly, realizing a substantial profit. As I made the decision to sell and move out of the country for at least a short period, I became frightened. I was jumping into something totally new and was leaving my place of residency, my career, my friends and family, and my country. As unfulfilled as I was at that time, I was at least in an emotionally safe and familiar place.

But I didn't want to settle for that. I realized I was stuck in the “blue meme” value system, according to [Spiral Dynamics](#) by Don Beck. I spent approximately the first 24 years of my life in this mindset. My family and social class taught me to work hard and save my money for my old age so that I would not become a burden to my family or the government. Violating this code could have severe repercussions – I could be shamed for not being self-sufficient. At the same time, it was hard letting go of what I viewed as solid and reliable aspects of life. I discovered it is extremely difficult to break out of our conditioned belief systems, even as we become aware of them.

I wanted to change the way I have been working for many years. Sedentary work, indoors, staring at a computer all day, was taking its toll on me physically. I felt cut off from the source of life. I wanted my culminating project to be as far removed from my daily life in Manhattan as possible. I needed to get back in touch with the

sacredness of nature. I missed what the universe has to tell us through its sunrises and sunsets, through its rising and waning tides of its water, through its changes of seasons and the sounds of its beings. I needed a place to quiet my mind, and I knew that nature was the place for that.

Cautiously, I attempted to set in motion “safe” ways to accomplish my goal of experiencing different cultures. I wondered if I should learn how to teach English as a foreign language – a skill that would make me employable anywhere on earth. So I sat in on a training class to learn the basics. I signed up for e-letters from several expatriate resources, scanning regularly for jobs and information that might inspire ideas for a culminating project, and possibly a new direction in life. Finally, after much investigation, I decided to join the Volunteers for Peace, an organization that sends people to organic farms overseas to live for two weeks and work – clearing and cleaning pathways, fencing and such – among an international community of workers. It seemed the most rewarding of my options.

The March weekend that Dr. Laszlo came to The Institute for lectures and dialogue with the Conscious Evolution cohort, I stayed with a friend. She was interested in the program, my experience and the particular lessons of that weekend about the interconnectedness and communication of the universe. She observed that I was in a similar place in my personal growth as a dear friend of hers was about 20 years ago. She felt strongly that I should meet her someday and gave me her email address. Her friend, Elaine Seiler, was living part time in Australia. She was blessed with a family inheritance, but had struggled with her own personal and spiritual growth. Being involved in philanthropic activities, she had come to believe that in order to achieve the greatest results for positive change in the world, commercial ventures should feature a transformative quality with the capacity to turn the business bottom line into a triple bottom line of *ecological, economic and ethical sustainability*. With that philosophy in mind, she bought land in Australia and began two different ventures. They are the ReGenesis Farm and the Main Arm Eco-Village. I was intrigued with her ability to combine the spiritual aspects of human evolution with conscious intentions of creating a community and profitable business that thrive

on the principles of holism. She seemed to be putting into action all that I had learned in the past couple of years.

One morning soon after, instead of signing up for the Volunteers For Peace, I wrote Elaine an email I told her about my conversation with our mutual friend and told her about my program in Conscious Evolution. As I wrote, I spontaneously offered to volunteer for two weeks on the ReGenesis Farm, rather than doing two weeks with VFP. I also asked if she would be my mentor. She told me that two weeks would not be enough time, that to really understand what was happening and to be useful to them, I would need to stay much longer. We tentatively agreed on two months, but I had a lot of responsibilities and obligations, financial and otherwise, that needed to be taken care of; I wasn't ready to commit. I was still engaged in an inner struggle to change my mindset – to give up what was familiar and safe for the elusive promise of uncertainty. At the end of our conversation, I thought I heard her say to me -- although she does not remember saying it -- that I could “join the Volunteers for Peace program and have a wonderful experience that would stay with me for the rest of my life, or I could come to Australia, and *change* my life.”

That touched me at a very deep level. I knew, in that moment, that uncertainty allowed something surprising and unique to enter into my life. I knew that this was the time to embrace my role as a creative participator of my own life. In the following few weeks, I experienced synchronicity in everything I did to make the commitment to Elaine and ReGenesis Farm possible. As I started thinking through what I would need to do to make this happen, I realized the enormity of what two months out of the country required. What would I do with my car? I couldn't afford to pay city parking if I wasn't earning income. What would I do with my cat; who would care for her? How would I pay my mortgage, maintenance and other bills? Shortly after my conversation with Elaine, I called a friend to tell her about what happened. She immediately offered her own garage at her home in Connecticut since she wasn't there full time. The next phone call was to my mother. She quickly offered to care for my cat, even though she had spoken many times about what a burden it was for her, in her present state of health, to have pets anymore. The following day, I sent an email to a few friends asking if they knew of anyone who wanted to sublet in

Manhattan for two months. Almost immediately my neighbor, who had been living in Germany for the past two years, wrote back. His trip was ending two months early, and he had subletters in his apartment for that time. It was perfect for him to come back to New York and take my apartment, as he really wanted to be in our building and our neighborhood. There were just so many more marvelous moments of coincidences. As everything fell smoothly into place, I knew that I had made the right decision for myself, and my culminating project. My mindset began to shift and flow into what Jenny Wade calls the “authentic consciousness” in her book “The Holonic Consciousness.” I became more trusting with my ability to tolerate the ambiguity and uncertainty as each problem I encountered continued to have a synchronistic solution available.

## The Experience

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

*Margaret Mead*

After arriving in Mullumbimby, Australia, and settling in to my new home, I met the dedicated staff at ReGenesis and started my path toward learning about sustainable agriculture. Danielle Leonard, the Managing Director of ReGenesis, offered a few books that would help me understand what was happening on the farm. Primarily, she suggested Natural Capitalism by Paul Hawkins and Living Energies by Callum Coats. While Hawkins provides a very broad view of our world's ecological crisis along with some solutions, Coats offers a deep philosophical and spiritual foundation for the work that ReGenesis is doing. It is the story of Viktor Schamberger, who was born in 1885 and lived until 1958. He was an ardent student of nature through the Divine. He, like David Bohm, David Henry Thoreau, Ervin Laszlo, David Peat, our Native American tribes, and so many others, was also aware of another dimension of reality. He called it the "Dimension of Comprehension" which makes sense of the whole – just as the third dimension clarifies a two-dimensional world. He disagreed with the mainstream sciences' assumption that everything hard to comprehend must be profound. In contrast, he believed "that everything hard to understand is immature, unclear and often false. The highest wisdom is simple and passes through the brain and directly into the heart" (Living Energies, page 31).

The biological sciences were preoccupied with physical form and believed that the magnificent fecundity of Nature just happened. Schamberger's vision was that this "happening" is the result of a complex interaction of subtle energies, a process that is initiated and sustained from what he called the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> dimensions of Being. He believed that by losing our connection with Nature we were losing our creativity, individuality and our ability to see things as they really are, and thereby unable to make connections, as we are fully capable.

I discovered at ReGenesis how true this is. Whether it was Dean, the farm foreman, predicting the weather through his ingenious use of rainbows and computer radar screens, or a spontaneous dialogue on how best to extend the rich compost soil made at ReGenesis, the staff joined together to solve problems and accomplish tasks. Energy and creative solutions flowed freely in both their formal and informal meetings. Perhaps this innovative spirit is best demonstrated in Elaine Seiler's own story of how ReGenesis was born.

She had been visiting Australia for about five years and was becoming more and more involved with a community in Byron Bay (on the Northeast coast between Sydney and Brisbane). In their last election, Byron Bay voted in a Green council or governmental body, committed to sustainable development and to a true ecological concern for the Earth. About that same time, Elaine and Thomas Mack, a close friend, formed a partnership. He was trained and experienced in permaculture and reforestation. She bought a 130-acre tract of depleted farmland in Byron Bay, and he put together a land reclamation and regeneration plan for the property.

Having studied with Bill Mollison, who is considered the father of permaculture, Thomas worked since the late 1980's in designing systems for sustainable land use. At ReGenesis, he used traditional types of agriculture and pieced them together with modern technology and science. He drew upon his experience in third world countries and in the US. "The patterns are the same the world over," he told me, "the land is clear-cut and overgrazed. It's been the same pattern around the world for the past hundred years."

Together, Elaine and Thomas created ReGenesis to research, design, and develop innovative systems of sustainable land use and local community enterprise, which brings bioregional solutions to social and environmental challenges. ReGenesis's core purpose is "transformation through creating holistic – ecologically sustainable and profitable – agricultural products." The business driver stems from a strong need and demand for high quality products which improve the health and well being for people and the planet. In practical terms, this means transforming the land back from a depleted, overgrazed, monoculture and restoring it to its rich, diverse and resilient natural systems. Their goal is to research and create "best practice" farm

forestry and land use systems integrated with rural human settlements all developed using environmentally conscious design. The overall aim of its land-use designs is to reflect the efficiency, diversity and the elegance of nature. I learned during my two-month experience at ReGenesis that it is about transformation, not only at the physical level but also at the psychological, spiritual and energetic levels.

Thomas developed and managed the site, as well as hired and supervised the staff while Elaine upheld the energetic framework and spiritual principles which would be manifested on the ground. They were committed to organic farming practices, alternative energy usage and long-term regeneration of the land. According to Elaine, their commitment to a triple bottom line of ecological, economic and ethical sustainability was a large and challenging goal. Their vision encompassed plantings for short-term return, such as market gardens, medium term return of fruit orchards and bamboo plantings that mature in 5 to 6 years and long-term cabinet timbers that are harvested in 25 to 30 years.

“Agriculture is always a challenging venture,” she told me. “I had no idea how challenging. The expression, 'Acts of God,' has a whole new meaning to me. We planted 1800 citrus trees and 13,000 cabinet timbers, only to lose 10% of our young saplings to hail and drought. We underestimated the budget for maintenance and upkeep as a foreign grass took over our fields and required a massive labor-intensive effort to keep this weed from strangling our young trees. We were fully committed to using only organic and natural methods of weed control, but, after lengthy deliberation and endless hours of hand weeding, we made the difficult decision to use a chemical to control this intruder or it was going to strangle us. We will now return to organic methods and will achieve our goal of organic certification, a few years later than we had hoped. We learned that supporting such a venture is far more expensive than we envisioned; this knowledge, in a sense, spurred us to be more creative in our approach, to invent new ways to circumvent the endless outflow of capital, with very little income, and to seek out government subsidies and grants.”

Elaine's experience with nature is in alignment with Viktor Schamberger's perspective. It demanded that she dip into a deep well of creativity and problem

solving ability of which, she says, “I did not know I was capable.” She returns to Australia every three to four months to “oversee the project, to reinvigorate the systems and the staff, to gather and rebalance any imbalanced energy, and to re-infuse the land, the systems we were using and the staff with the goals to which we were all committed.”

In July 2003, ReGenesis totally revamped the project. Where Elaine had been the sole proprietor of a rather expensive Farm, she became the landowner of a valuable piece of land on which several ventures are to be housed. All the projects that she was once funding became their own enterprises. In keeping with the triple bottom line, employees were empowered, assisted and supported to become entrepreneurs. ReGenesis helped them find start up funding if they needed and wanted it; it assisted them to write grants for government support; it walked them through the incredibly empowering process of shifting from employees to employers. Some chose to make the shift; others did not. The paid employees on the farm went from eight to two; the budget was cut by two-thirds. Elaine now receives an income from a licensing fee and a percentage of gross sales from a fledgling Organic Vegetable Seedling business, a Bush Food and Seed Business, and a Bamboo business. At this moment, the return from these licensing and sales fees is small, but those involved have been empowered and the potential for growth and a good return is present. ReGenesis is now involved in a campaign of outreach into the community in search for others who might want to run an agricultural business, but do not have the land or the infrastructure in place to support such a venture. The possibilities are endless - from cut flowers, worm farms, beehives and value added ventures where packaged products like sauces and jams can be made from the products grown on the land.

In return for licensing fees, ReGenesis offers each of these ventures a range of services that encompass access to water, a processing facility for the produce, bookkeeping and accounting support, well-researched and protective legal contracts, and close proximity to good markets. One of the first businesses to take advantage of this opportunity was the “Early Risers.” Owners Andy & Nelli, a young couple starting out, are growing organic vegetable seedlings that will be available for sale in

local markets and retailers. The Early Risers purchase and use the rich compost material created by ReGenesis to raise their seedlings, and then sell a portion of their production back to the farm to use in their market gardens.

It was David Stratton who picked me up at the airport and with whom I spent much of my indoor time at ReGenesis. As the office manager and bookkeeper, he has been a wealth of background information, as well as a source of lighthearted Australian jokes and humor. He occupies a unique place on the farm because he not only handles much of the day-to-day business requirements; he also lends a hand regularly outside. He's been working in permaculture since he and his wife left Sydney years ago to attend courses at the Permaculture Research Institute nearby. They bought their own land and have created a microcosm of what ReGenesis is doing. He has an acre of land planted with fruit trees and vegetable gardens; along with an "integrated poultry system" that provides his family and many of his neighbors with a steady supply of eggs. He explained to me that the area around Byron Bay is considered one of the food bowls of Australia. Because of its subtropical temperatures and rich, volcanic soils from Mt. Warning's eruption a millions years ago; farms here can produce high yields on a small scale. Much of Australia's citrus, ginger, sugar, banana, and nuts come from this area. Cattle still heavily graze it, too.

David explained to me that of the problems they encounter on the farm, a proportion of them seem to repeat the majority of the time. ReGenesis is developing a manual from their considerable archive of innovative and design solutions, which they intend to share and promote. The systems they have developed will be made available so that others elsewhere on the planet can attain.

Danielle Leonard bridges the energetic and spiritual aspects of Elaine with the pragmatic voice of David. She is an Australian who had been living in the US for many years. She spent that time as a partner in a film and television company when she met and married Thomas Mack. Together, they started a business called the "Living System Design Group." They spent ten years working with ecological designs and development in Santa Fe, NM. She realized, while raising their two children and working full time that her life was out of control. "How could I run a

sustainable business when my own life wasn't sustainable as I was living it?" she told me. That's when she enrolled in the Center for Sustainable Development. There, she learned the value of setting intentions and the "closed loop system" principle. She explained to me that setting intentions "brings a certain magic just in the doing." It has become an excellent tool in her life. "It's pragmatic, yet has a spiritual dimension. Mainstream doesn't understand this principle. Mainstream thinking pressures us to reduce and streamline, whereas sustainability requires diversification and longer term systems. It is based on nature. "

"Nothing is wasted in a rain forest. Everything is connected to the nutrient cycle. We need only change our perception to see waste as a resource. Rather than send organic waste to a landfill, we're using it to feed our soil in closed loop systems," she explained.

One of my duties on the farm was to help Andrew Johanson, who is in charge of growing the Market Garden, and marketing it to the local restaurants and retail outlets. He collects the putrescibles (food scraps) from the participating local restaurants in Byron Bay and works with Thomas to convert it to compost. The waste is then transformed into soil through a large-scale worm farm. This highly nutritious product is then applied into the commercial scale vegetable beds. The vegetables are then sold to the local restaurants and stores.

Andrew is an optimistic, jovial and kind man. My experience with Andrew over the two months truly demonstrated how our own perceptions create our world around us. He exemplifies their slogan "Waste Not, Want Not." Whenever there was a particular need for some material or resource, he seemed to manifest it somehow. My first day at the farm was spent with him. We drove into Byron Bay and picked up the brown bins with ReGenesis stenciled on the side of them. He introduced me to everyone we came in contact as his American mate, an Aussie word for friend. He seemed to know everyone in town. After we completed our duties, he then gave me my first tour of the famous Byron Bay Lighthouse. It was a breathtaking experience. It is situated on Australia's most easterly point. The views are spectacular with Mount Warning looming above the coastal range to the northwest, the long stretch of beach and the hinterlands to the south and the Pacific Ocean expanding endlessly in the east.

Unable to stay long since he had a photo shoot with the local paper, “The Echo,” we drove back down into Byron Bay. There, we went to a beachfront restaurant called “Fins.” The paper was doing a story on the ReGenesis Organic Resource Recovery project. Andrew explained to the reporter that support from the community is pivotal. The ReGenesis system “literally allows us to make it, take it and make it again, zero waste. Rather than sending organic waste to a landfill, we’re using it to feed our soil in a closed loop system, demonstrating that good environmental sense can make good economic sense.” And, he added, “It just doesn’t get healthier than this.”

For several days, I helped set up one the market gardens in the lower paddock. Andrew explained that the site was chosen because it offered protection from the wind, offered lots of sun and had good drainage. The soil underneath was “crappy” but that didn’t matter. My first task was to break open and spread cardboard on the ground. After that, we laid out hay bales, two side by side, in rows. The hay had been cut from the fields of ReGenesis only days before. In the space between the rows of hay bales, we shoveled in sawdust to create the walkways.

Andrew then set up an irrigation system with a very small hose called “tea tape” and laid it carefully over the rows of bales. Holes were cut in it to create a drip style of running water which he could turn on and off as necessary. The water was pumped from small dam that was created to collect water from a stream and from the rains. After soaking the bales thoroughly, we then put on the soil that had been made from the ReGenesis own worm farms. After a thick layer was spread over the rows of hay, it is then inoculated with microorganism that activates it, causing it to break down the hay. The seedlings are planted. Since this process is carried out in sections over a period of time, there will be a steady stream of vegetable for harvesting. Since ReGenesis is in a subtropical temperature, the growing season is not limited to one season. Gardens can be grown almost year round. They have already harvested and sent to market Japanese Pumpkins.

In addition to working in the market gardens, I also used my design skills to help create signs and labels for the packaging of the produce. A great deal of energy is spent in considering types of packaging that is compatible with ReGenesis

philosophy. Every effort is made to find the most appropriate materials, such as recycled cardboard or paper. I spent much of this time working with Elaine. She brings her creative insights to the tasks and continuously considers how everything that is done at the farm is in alignment with their goals. Although I learned much while at ReGenesis, my greatest personal lesson came through working with Elaine.

## Personal Lessons

*“Every person, all the events of your life are there because you have drawn them there. What you choose to do with them is up to you.”*

*Richard Bach*

Working in a new environment with new people in new ways was not always easy. I was often outside my comfort zone and trying to be aware of my old conditioned responses to new situations. Although my personal desire was to work outdoors as much as possible, it became apparent to me that they needed my talents as a designer. In my usual good girl fashion – needing to please and make everyone happy -- I took on more requests than I could reasonably handle at one time. Unlike the companies I worked for in the past, there was no internal structures set up to handle these requests since ReGenesis is a start up company. Many people were coming to me individually, not knowing what others were asking. I was also getting closer to the end of my time there and growing more concerned that I would fail to meet my deadlines for my own papers. Plus, I had been asked to speak at my Commencement Ceremony. I had, *in the past*, a fear of public speaking.

One morning I was suddenly gripped with a deep fear, one that felt like a cold icy hand had reached into my chest and paralyzed me. I had set aside an entire Saturday to accomplish some of my own writing and client work back in the States. Instead, I spent the entire day frozen. I tried to release it, but the fear was so great that I couldn't find a way to let go of it. In the past, I've found that working with the mundane often helps; I cleaned the floor, I did the laundry. I looked outside my door at the vastness of the land and ocean in front of me. Nature was indifferent. It had its own agenda. I was definitely not in the flow.

Finally, I couldn't tolerate being by myself any longer and drove into Mullumbimby. As I was walking around, deep in my own thought and wishing for someone to talk to, John and Anne materialized, as they so often did when I just “thought” of them. They are friends of Elaine, and both employed by her to help with the upkeep of her home when she is out of the country. I became quite close to them

both. We sat and talked for a while. Later I had a hypno-regression session with Ann, in an attempt to discover why I was experiencing this fear.

The following day, I spent time with Elaine and told her about my fear. She suggested I might be anxious about returning to my “other” life back in Manhattan, along with the all the obligations I seemed to have created for myself. She assured me that Spirit wouldn’t have given me more than I can handle. The issues I raised with her, she advised, had come up so that I could clearly see that my old patterns weren’t working any more. The place and the people here were an opportunity to use to look at my patterns. Later that night, I turned to a little book called “Illusions,” by Richard Bach, which John and Ann had given to me. It fell to the page that said “Every person, all the events of your life are there because you have drawn them there. What you choose to do with them is up to you.” With the assurance of Elaine’s insights, I chose to let go of the fear and the icy hand was released in my chest. The next day and the days that followed, I was able to get back on track with my writing. Each time I felt overwhelmed with projects and fears related to public speaking, I reminded myself that I had the choice: I could be paralyzed by it or be in each moment. When I chose to be in the moment and stayed with it, I could feel the anxieties melt away.

## Cultural Experience

*“Relax, mate! You’re on Byron Bay time now.” -Everyone*

On the days I worked in the office, I was included in conversations and meetings on various issues that came up during the day. I also got a feel for the camaraderie among the staff. The farm house/office is the hub of the activities. The day workers would all come from whatever part of the farm, in which they were working, sit on the porch and eat their lunches together. The talk usually included the latest “footy” game (football). Plans were made for getting their families together for their children’s birthday parties. Good-natured ribbing was always going on amongst everyone. I was always included in the talk and not exempt from the ribbing. One of the things I really enjoyed about the Australians is their game of “nicknames.”

Everyone had one. David dubbed me “Paltrow” right away, obviously because of the currently famous Gwyneth. He is very up-to-date on American celebrities and does a fair imitation of Elvis. He has given Elaine the nickname of “Lainy Pops,” Dean, the farm foreman, is “Deano”, and Peter Gould, a senior advisor to the group, is “Papa Smurf” because of his long white beard. Occasionally, the conversation turned to American politics and culture. Michael Moore is revered here. One of the first questions I was asked was, “Does everyone own a gun in the US?”

I was often sent on errands in nearby towns. The nearest to ReGenesis is Mullumbimby, which has dubbed itself the “Biggest Little Town in Australia.” It is set against the backdrop of Mt. Chincogan. It is Byron Shire’s seat of local government and is about 15 miles inland from the coast. Mullumbimby has the most “hometown” feeling about it over the other nearby towns and villages. My favorite place was “Poinciana Garden Restaurant and Café.” Tucked away in a little garden at the edge of town, it is constructed with a glass roof, open walls and a thick old tree growing in the middle. There was often a woman singing with a guitar, or some other live background music. On Sundays, people go there for brunch and have a leisurely day reading the paper, eating, drinking wine, champagne and coffees. I often took my computer and did my writing there.

Most people who pass through the town are tourists. Being seen by the locals regularly gave me an opportunity to chat and learn about the interesting things about their lives – and it gave them a chance to learn about mine. Most of my errands were to the local post office, hardware and office store, and farmer’s co-op. I feel like I’ve made friends with almost everyone I’ve come into contact with. My guess is that my accent and the regularity of my visits told them I was more than a passing tourist. When I first arrived in Australia, I drove a relatively new, small Honda, borrowed from Elaine. After about two weeks, I was then given a rental car that was a little larger and a little less new. Then, after another two weeks, I drove a much larger, old 1975 Mercedes. Not really knowing anything about me, the Aussie who fills the tank at the co-op ribbed me that I was obviously doing something wrong in life, that my wheels had taken a turn for the worse. Our banter about the Mercedes continued until the beat up old car became an alive “being” about whom we shared our jokes. On my last fill-up, he shook my hand and said, “I’ll miss you and the old Merc, mate.”

Driving along the Pacific Highway one day, I saw something in the air above me. It was a guy hanging from a parachute, gliding along above the hill. I was fascinated. Fortunately, there was a pull over. When I drove into it, in front of me was the most beautiful vista. I was on a grassy overlook above the ocean in a curved part of the coast. I could see the Byron Bay Lighthouse off to the left and cliffs to my right. The vast ocean and open sky stretched in front of me. Above me, this person was hanging out in the air. It was so beautiful I cried. The gentle, peaceful movements overwhelmed me as he floated in the air. He eventually touched down a few hundred yards from me and I walked towards him and told him how it affected me. He explained that para sailing was his “life”, that he was a teacher. I noticed then a sign that the area was for hang gliding. But he wasn’t using the lightweight contraptions.

It was just the chute, the harness and the human. He collected his chute and went up a slope above me, strolled toward the ocean and then simply walked into the sky. Up he went again, riding on the winds. It was magnificent to watch him so gracefully hanging in the air.

Beyond Mullumbimby is Byron Bay. It is the more cosmopolitan of the local towns. Because it is situated on the coast and near the famous Byron Bay Lighthouse on the most easterly point of Australia, it attracts a diverse stream of people from all over the world. It has first class restaurants, interesting and exotic shops, energetic pubs, and several coffee shops and Internet cafes. There are almost always “buskers” on the street, singing, entertaining or reading tarot cards. Byron has a rich history, which can be told from many perspectives. It has its own long history of the Indigenous people and its European history, which started with Captain Cook in 1770. He noted it on the early maps primarily for two of its main features: the Cape and Mount Warning. Its history includes the early days of clearing land and surviving in the bush. Later, it included the dark side of harvesting the natural bounty of whales that passed through on their migration routes. In the 60’s it drew crowds of hippies looking for an easy lifestyle living on the beach.

Now, it’s primarily about the beauty of the area and the attraction of the young people coming here to catch the longest wave with their surfboards. Taken altogether, Byron Bay attracts the “cultural creatives” that Paul Ray describes in his book by the same name. The people who settled in this area are mostly out of the Australian mainstream. As noted before, they recently elected a Green Council and make conscious choices on how they want to live their lives and the businesses that are allowed to come here. There aren’t any big corporations and national franchises here. There are no MacDonalld’s or Club Meds. All the businesses are locally owned. The energy of the land and its natural beauty draws in free, open, caring original spirits. They have created their communities in their likeness for more than thirty years. They proudly oppose war and constantly remind themselves, through rallies, bumper stickers and their local papers, that they are working to create peace, stability and democracy with vigilance. It is this philosophy that guided them to create a place that simply pulses with creativity.

After all, this is the place that hosted the “BushOff” Anti-War Protest at Belongil Beach. Here, protesters took their clothes off, created a large circle of people around the words “BushOff” painted in the sand, and photographed themselves with their “bums” (Australian slang for buttocks) in the air – basically “mooning” the US

president and his war on Iraq. This protest was published widely in Australia and around the world, but barely noticed in the US.

## Conclusions

*Consciousness is not a noun, but rather a verb.*  
*Allan Combs*

Did I meet my lofty goal of “being” the project rather than “doing” the project? My answer is a resounding, ‘Yes.’ From the moment that I actually made my choice and set the intention that I wanted to “be” my culminating project, I was on the path of change and transformation. I visualized what I wanted my experience to be and it happened. It didn’t come overnight, and it didn’t come without a certain amount of work and eventual surrender to a power much greater than myself. But it happened, and it happened beyond my own imagination. My studies explained that out of the chaos of uncertainty comes creativity and that leads to changes and transformation ([The Radiance of Being](#), Allan Combs, Chapter 20). I allowed space for something unique to happen to me. My time in Australia, with my Aussie mates, and my American mentor, was truly an experience of personal growth, learning about another culture, and practical knowledge on sustainable living.

Once Anne and I stood outside my little home. We were surrounded by smells of fiddlewood and avocado trees. Rows of banana trees slopped down toward the valley overlaid with a light, foggy mist. She said, “Look what you have manifested.” Around me I heard the sounds of the exotic birds, the wallabies and even the shy koalas that live in the eucalyptus trees behind my small cottage. My choice and my intention led me exactly to a place that fed my soul and nurtured my body.

People who had made a conscious choice in their lives to spend their time on earth judiciously surrounded me. They refused to succumb to the meaningless work and mindless activities that we often rely on to deceive and distract us from our truths. I heard from more than one person that before I had arrived, they were all intrigued and anticipated meeting me, a student in pursuit of a degree in Conscious Evolution. Anne, Bridget, and the others I spent time with outside of the ReGenesis project had already seen what had been done by Elaine to help make this possible. I

was accepted as one of them. Indeed, I was one of them. As Anne said when I wondered out loud about all the support I had received during my time there, “I am you and you are me.” At that moment, I remembered my desire to live in other cultures to help me re-connect with my global brothers and sisters. I understood, being amongst my new friends, that true family isn’t one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other’s lives.

I spent my two months totally submerged in a new culture, during my working and my social hours, with people who genuinely love the earth and fear for her ability to continue to support and sustain life, as we know it. They make the conscious choice everyday of their lives to live in alignment with their values.

I met and spent time with people who understood and live in the subtle levels of energy, and know how it interacts and manifested the world in which we have chosen to live.

I have had the direct experience of *feeling* the connectedness of our global family, not just the intellectual knowledge that this is true. I felt it. As Antonio Damasio says in *The Feeling of What Happens* consciousness is the power of telling a story without words, the story of life ticking away in an organism – the apparent self emerging as the feeling of feeling – when the story is first told. I do not yet have the capacity in my words to tell the full story of my experience, but I know, *I know*, without any doubt, that I am changed.

I found the quiet space in nature where I learned more about hearing and listening to my inner voice and guides. And in working with Elaine and so many others, I have come closer to learning to trust my inner voice, that part of me that is divine and is one with all that Is.

***“Here is a test to find whether your mission on earth is finished.***

***If you’re alive, it isn’t.***

***Richard Bach***

