

## Look to the Right and Look to the Left

By Jenny Kena

Her job was to sell the idea of a community technology centre to small regional communities. She had been given a toolbox for this which included colourful presentations with lots of circles and arrows. What she liked best was when she put these aside and had conversations, and a chance to look below the surface of newly discovered places.

It was her dream job. She really believed in the program. It was important and could make a difference. Also, it was a chance to shake up her life and head in a new direction.

So on a cold misty evening she found herself arriving at a rustic house in Robertson. A group had decided to start a community technology centre and she was there to help. “Have a seat by the fire”, offered her woolly clothed hosts. “Would you like a glass of red? There will be soup in a minute.” Looking around the room she noticed she was surrounded by beautiful things – paintings, exotic textiles and vessels in a riot of colours. Others arrived and soon the room was buzzing. Everyone welcomed her there. The atmosphere felt free of the competitive bullying vibe she had experienced elsewhere. As the conversation developed with this diverse collection of gentle and passionate individuals, it felt like real connections were being made. She felt so at home with these people, kindred spirits – perhaps there was more to this place than rain and mist...

“You know they call it Robbo don’t you?” one of her colleagues said when she started talking about moving to Robertson. “And be careful of the tradies utes speeding through town heading for the Pass”. A slightly uncouth kind of place, not to be spoken about in the same breath as Bowral or Burradoo – places whose names were never shortened.

To her it felt authentic – a working village, not a tourist town, not a commuter town, not a weekend country retreat for city dwellers – but a place that had all the essentials for living, an actual functioning community.

At that point in the life of Robertson there was no pharmacy or fruit shop. The medical

services were limited and there were no serious baristas. The creative side of Robertson was there, but only quietly celebrated. However, there was still plenty going on. You could find all the local businesses and community groups on the Robertson Calendar and Robertson Commons was the railway precinct, not a Facebook page.

It took a couple of years, but she made the move.

She discovered that the newsagency and supermarket were key businesses in town - not only providing essentials but run by proprietors who could be relied upon for advice and knowledge on everything that needed to be known. “What are you doing this evening?” asked the Supermarket owner. “Having dinner with A and A” she revealed. “Well then you had better buy a bottle of red to take” she advised. “They have just been in and they will be serving you beef.”

And that rain and mist? It gave the air a sweetness and gentleness. There was nothing like the wonder of the mist rolling down the street and in the door on a sweltering summer day. It was like a giant blanket of spritzer spray. Not for those in Robertson that oppressive city humidity. And that high rainfall made everything greener – it really lived up to its title as the Green Heart of the Highlands.

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