

YIN & YANG

Hilary Lee & Jane Verity

When Hilary, an occupational therapist, went to see Jane, an international pioneer in dementia care, give a presentation, little did she know she was about to find her life purpose. Now Hilary and Jane are committed to improving the lives of dementia sufferers the world over.

HILARY

JANE HAD ARRIVED from Melbourne to give a presentation on her program Spark of Life in 2000. I was working in a dementia facility here in Perth. She was outside the hall greeting everyone and we had an instant connection.

I had brought along a couple of therapy dolls just to share with the other attendees. The idea of using dolls as therapeutic tools was quite controversial at the time as not everyone thought they were appropriate in therapy but we had very positive results.

Jane invited me up on the stage to tell my story about the dolls. It was quite spontaneous. Here we were presenting together, unaware that 10 years later this would be exactly what we were doing after an incredible journey of research and hard work.

I remember being struck by her gift of expressing herself from the heart. Everyone was captivated by her clarity, and her special gift of stepping into the shoes of people with dementia. She knew what they went through, what their feelings and thoughts would be and why they responded in particular ways in certain situations. Jane expressed all this without notes.

It inspired me to go back to work and implement her strategies straight away. Almost immediately I began to notice remarkable changes. The residents at my care facility had alcohol-related dementia and many were also depressed. A number of them were on medications to keep them calm but they were able to come off these medications because of the impact of the Spark of Life program. The spectacular changes I witnessed led me to think seriously about Spark of Life needing to be researched. I couldn't understand why it wasn't more widely used.

I've learnt and grown so much personally through knowing Jane. I feel she has enabled me to achieve more of my own potential through her belief in me. She is like a rock to leap off to achieve the impossible, because it feels so safe just to have a go, and if it doesn't work it is still OK. She lives by her motto: everything is right, nothing is wrong.

Even though we live on different sides of the continent, we work very closely together fine-tuning ideas, developing new programs, writing articles and presenting to people all over the world.

Our work and our friendship are one and the same. We complement each other in so many ways — I am big picture, Jane has the minute details; I am a starter and Jane is a finisher. Jane extracts profound insights and truths from her heart and soul and I explore and expand them and bring them to the world.

This is our life path and we are going on this journey together. It's exhilarating, challenging, joyful and life giving.



Real connection Hilary (left) and Jane may live on opposite sides of the country but it hasn't stopped them working together to change lives. PICTURE ROB DUNCAN

JANE

I COULD STILL BE THERE in my own little world creating Spark of Life and no one would know about it. But then Hilary entered the picture and she put her life behind it. I so admire her passion and determination.

Hilary became inspired by Spark of Life, tested it in practice and was excited about the results. She knew the approach had to be researched, and if this was to happen it was up to her, despite the fact that she had two young boys as well as a part-time job.

Hilary actually took on the epic journey from first learning and studying the prerequisites of health research methods to then complete a masters in science — a total of seven years study. This proved to have many challenges as Spark of Life did not fit into the usual approach to dementia care, and Hilary managed to overcome all of these obstacles.

My focus has always been on going deeper into the approach itself and further evolving it. I don't have the time or the headspace for research myself. Then there is Hilary adding the balance, saying "this is just so important — it won't go anywhere in the world without research". Then she gets on and does it.

We are definitely kindred spirits. There are no

fears, no disbelief in each other or feeling challenged or judged. We work together at an energetic level; it is constructive, higher purpose energy.

Hilary is a statesman; she has amazing integrity. People may say undermining things and she simply listens to them in the most beautiful way and then moves on. I may get stunned or upset by these comments because Spark of Life is so close to my heart, and Hilary is then a rock for me.

Hilary is a master in creating reality. She identifies a need and next thing I know she has created a solution and made it happen. For example, Spark of Life needed to be benchmarked as best practice. Hilary did some research and set up an international best practice evaluation. The amazing thing is that only a short time before this did not exist.

The magic of our combined energy expands the possibilities of our work with Spark of Life. We are working on creating a new reality of hope and empowerment for dementia care, with a ripple effect to people everywhere in society. **W**

For more information on the Spark of Life approach, visit www.dementiacareaustralia.com.

Interviews: Heather Zubek