

The ultimate journey

WELLNESS IS A STATE OF MIND AND A WAY OF BEING THAT SHOULDN'T TAKE A HOLIDAY WHEN YOU DO. KNOWING THIS, ANNE BIGING CREATED THE HEALING HOTELS OF THE WORLD WEBSITE SO THE JOURNEY WITHIN CAN CONTINUE, NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE IN THE WORLD.

BY KATE MCKEE



Anne Biging, co-founder and CEO of the Healing Hotels of the World website, has travelled over great distances throughout her career in international marketing, PR and tourism but her most rewarding passage seems to be the ongoing spiritual journey and her quest to find more than can be seen, felt or touched.

"I have always had an interest in things that I couldn't see and things that were beyond my thinking," says Biging. "I always knew there had to be something more. I was not satisfied with what was there and I started on own spiritual path,

my own holistic path and I turned my life around completely."

What is distinctive about Anne's own spiritual journey and passion for holistic health is that she has been able to fuse it with her professional experience in the international tourism market through the Healing Hotels website in a way that reaches out to others. Through gaining a deeper awareness about herself through holistic health, Anne is now able to share her experiences and encourage others to look after themselves by providing them with the spiritual refuge of an ashram or the luxury of a five-star spa and resort.

The Healing Hotels of the World (HHOW) website provides a guide to the ultimate getaway experience by listing lavish venues for refuge and retreat but, more importantly a getaway that allows guests to focus inward and reintroduce themselves to their inner, outer and higher selves in an organic and thoughtful way.

CONNECTION

A full circle of health and wellbeing is key to the philosophy behind Anne's business and how she chooses to live her own life. However, to learn, grow and evolve there must be a sense of openness present before

a deeper understanding and reconnection can take place.

"When you discover health, you discover your self," says Anne simply. "It also works the other way around, too, as when you are open you can heal but, when you are closed, nothing can happen because we heal through our hearts; we heal through our connections. Our connections are everything — body, mind and soul. If one is not connected with the other, then nothing can happen. It's like something is clogged. If your body is not connected with your mind and your soul and the other way around, then no healing is possible."

It's essential to encompass more than just the body and mind when it comes to health. We must establish an open, holistic approach that embraces more than saying no to that second slice of cake or forcing ourselves to spend an hour a day on the treadmill. Torturing ourselves to be "more" of anything is not healthy. Taught and tight muscle tone doesn't guarantee you are healthy inside. Health, like beauty, is much more than skin deep. Wellness is about looking deeper into all the elements that make us who we are. "When I am open and I am connected deep inside, I project my happiness into the world," Anne says.

DISCOVERY

While travelling the world for her work, Anne sought out the intangible and gained knowledge about her inner self through learning about health and wellbeing via meditation, yoga and healing techniques. She had a self-described longing for something more than the status quo, which led her on her own path to self-love, openness and awareness. Throughout her discoveries she found the way she treated her mind, body and spirit changing.

"I stopped doing the 'bad' things and started doing the 'good' things," she says. "I started eating well, exercising and taking much better care of myself. I now meditate regularly and I do a lot of yoga; at least three times a week I go to a one-and-a-half-hour class. I'm a bit of a yoga freak, I have to say. I practise a little bit of yoga every morning and I also study a lot about the Indian scriptures."

Gaining knowledge and learning about the importance of holistic health fired up Anne's deep-seated longing to find something more to her existence, which she had been carrying with her throughout her personal and professional travels, like an internal rucksack.

"I was working as a journalist, travelling the world for many years, doing travel journalism and a bit of political journalism, and I just got so tired of it. I thought it was such a big ego play and I just couldn't do it any more, so I stopped doing that. I remember thinking then that if I am

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unhappy with what I'm doing, what is it I *should* be doing?"

While travelling for her international marketing organisation, Anne would always seek out places to stay where she could not only enjoy some downtime but that would also nourish and heal, which is the basis on which the philosophy behind HHOW was built.

The first seed for Anne's new venture was planted when she and her business partner, Dr Elisabeth Ixmeierback, were undertaking marketing representations for countries such as the US, India and Australia for their own company. During one visit, they found themselves staying in a remarkable hotel.

"It was pure heaven. They had a beautiful spa as well as yoga and meditation classes scheduled every day," Anne says. "We realised that this was a place that could be like a modern ashram where people could come and have something like an ashram schedule but at the same time the benefit of modern-day luxuries. We knew it was possible. We decided we could not do the old stuff any more; it was stale. We realised we had to become serious and do what we really believed in."

VISION

Anne classifies herself as a "developer", something she has done throughout her life, as can be seen with the HHOW. "I've always developed things and it has always been our vision that guests of a Healing Hotel become whole again in body, mind and soul, freeing them to enjoy the sacredness and abundance of life," says Anne.

The vision that Anne and Elisabeth had for the website was to provide locations that would allow guests to have time from their usual mindsets and day-to-day stresses and enjoy a nurturing and calming energy around them as well as to learn how to take care of themselves in the future. "What still inspires me is when I see people visit a Healing Hotel and come back having really understood something. Their hearts are open and I think that is so rewarding and beautiful," says Anne.

HHOW has overseen the induction of more than 50 carefully selected venues into the luxury health resort partnership since founding the business in 2006. Anne and Elisabeth's venture into providing more than just a "skin-deep" spa option for guests has been very successful — in more ways than one.

What makes the business so special and unique is the philosophy behind it that runs through every part of it like a calming breeze. HHOW is not just about providing



organic foods and spa treatments. The principles of holism are wholeheartedly embraced from the top down and are incorporated into the business model, which was born out of a concentrated focus on holistic wellbeing. "The owners or the creators of each HHOW hotel and the people who run it have to understand what people are seeking and why. They have to *want* to deliver health and wellbeing. If they don't, it won't work," says Anne.

To even become a listed HHOW, a hotel must submit a short essay in order for Anne and the HHOW team to know where the business is coming from and what the true intentions are. Anne believes that a pure business model focused only on the bottom line doesn't work in many ways for the hospitality industry.

"There has to be business, of course, but there has to be the soul behind it," explains Anne. "The general manager or the owner has to understand what 'holistic' means and what the longing in human beings is. That's the most important ingredient and the rest of it builds around it. It's the soul of it," she says.

All the staff at HHOW undertake a Training of Excellence, which is an



introduction into holistic health and wellbeing. Throughout the training the staff are taken on a journey into their own hearts and are shown how it feels to be well compared with being overworked and stressed. Anne is also brave enough to flip the old idea of the customer being king/more important than the staff on its head by openly telling HHOW employees they are "kings", too. If staff are happy and healthy, this creates an atmosphere of comfort and serenity that guests visit the hotels for. As Anne says, "There has to be a complete circle of wellbeing."

A STUDENT AND A TEACHER

"A friend of mine said to me once, 'In life we have only friends or teachers.' No enemies, but friends and teachers," remarks Anne when discussing the importance of being open to learning and receiving. The importance of gaining a deeper knowledge about ourselves, our health and our wellbeing is a vital element in holistic health. Anne is a firm believer in the beauty of learning, in passing on that knowledge and the importance of really *knowing* what you are teaching through your own personal experience.

"I remember thinking then that if I am unhappy with what I'm doing, what is it I *should* be doing?"

"If I talk to people about holistic health and I don't know what it is, then I can't really talk about it," reasons Anne. "I can only talk about it if I have understood myself what I am talking about. I talk about self-love, but if I don't know how to love myself or if I have never tried it, then I feel I can't talk about it. I like to test everything on myself first."

Learning is something Anne gives and receives. As individuals we never stop learning, particularly about ourselves as we grow and change over time. We are all human, of course, and therefore susceptible to stresses and struggles, but it is often the struggles in our lives that teach us more about ourselves in the long run rather than if everything went our way.

"It's often a good thing that we don't get what we want," says Anne. "We think we want something and if we get this thing, then we are totally happy, but if we don't get it, we get angry like a child. I think the child is still in us. If I want something really badly and if I don't get it, I get depressed or I'm sad or I get angry. That's a normal reaction. What I am trying to find out is, why do I want this and why is it so important that I want this? And why do I think it makes me so happy? When I look deeper into what's



Anne, right and her business partner, Dr Elisabeth Immeierback.

behind it, I don't really have to be angry if I don't get it."

LOVING YOURSELF

Loving one's self is a big component of wellbeing. By loving ourselves, we treat ourselves better; we treat our bodies and our minds as friends, not foes. Loving yourself can often have negative connotations, particularly in Australia where the well-known tall-poppy syndrome is entrenched in the culture.

To love yourself is not vain or narcissistic; it is not selfish or unrealistic. Through love comes kindness and care, so how can we be kind and care for ourselves if we do not love ourselves? We give love to others but what is it that stops us from giving that love to ourselves?

"I think it's about delusion," comments Anne. "When you fall in love with somebody else you project all the love you have onto the other person because you don't have to deal with their deeply personal issues; but if you love yourself you have to deal with your own deeper issues. I think this is why it's so much easier to love others. It's beautiful to find love but then, in the end, what is it? Self-love is much more than romantic love — it's about unconditional love, almost."

When we love ourselves, we have to do it warts and all. We know our faults or shortcomings better than anyone else, so loving ourselves despite or even because of these things is important, as is loving ourselves for our talents and gifts. "Today, we all have these big egos and then underneath that we have these little uncertain voices saying 'Oh, I don't really know,'" says Anne. "We have to stand up to our greatness and it's even more difficult to stand up to our greatness at times than it is

to say, 'Yes, I'm a little weak here and there.'"

We live in an age where being self-deprecating and self-critical is the norm and taking time for ourselves is deemed "selfish". Being called "selfish" is, for many, an insult, but what if we redefine this word? What if placing importance and giving time to ourselves is a purely positive thing? As illustrated by Anne, allowing more time for ourselves on a deeper level can inspire others to do the same. Leading the way by example encourages others to look into themselves. Being self-centred in a positive way can have a transformative effect on yourself and the world around you. Perhaps being "selfish" is a way to actually give to others by giving to yourself.

It seems as though all the roads Anne Biging has travelled throughout her professional life have led her to where she was meant to be. Anne's passion for health and wellbeing and the creation of HHOW has inspired and educated many people to take time for themselves, to be healthy and to live well. People today tend to spend so much time focusing on the outside world and perhaps we are all guilty of letting life live us as opposed to us living our lives.

The idea that we all need to love and respect ourselves a little more and overwork and burn out a little less is vital to our wellbeing, as is looking deeper into our existence and keeping an open mind and an open heart. Anne's own ongoing spiritual journey has inspired many to take their own journeys and to truly take care of themselves from the inside out. ☺

Freelance writer Kate McKee is passionate about natural health and lifestyle and loves to share these interests and discoveries with thoughtful minds.