

# The Volunteer Interview

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I'm 56 and just finishing 5 months (January to June) volunteering as part of the Sheldon Housekeeping team. My home is in the far north of Queensland - 1000km from Cairns. It is remote by English standards but not by Australian ones. My mother lives in Weston super Mare and I have an uncle in Italy and cousins in Leeds and Prague. I worked for 20 years as a nursery school teacher with Aboriginal people and am having a year out after taking a career change package. I'm an Anglican, but don't mind where I go to church. If there's one thing I know about God, it's that he loves me.

I first came to Sheldon for my interview in December last year. I was told about Sheldon by a priest who had been a guest here and knew me well from when I worked at Hengrave Hall. He knew what I was looking for and when I arrived I fell in love with the place immediately. I just knew I belonged here. I thought, yes, this is it - Father John was right!

I wanted to offer some volunteer service because God has been very good to me and I wanted to give something back. Deep down I guess I also needed time to find out about my future direction and what God

wants me to do with the next stage of my life. As well as the peace and quiet and solitude here, I was deeply touched by the whole experience of the 12,000-mile Service weeks. As a volunteer I attended some of the workshops and they were really instrumental in helping me explore the future. I don't know exactly what it will hold yet, but certainly back in Australia and something to do with children or young adults in indigenous families.

My favourite task at Sheldon has been being a sheepdog for Hillary, as well as all the other outdoor and gardening work. I also really enjoyed being a support to retreat leaders, setting up the chapel etc. My pet hate is cleaning the inside of cars. There have been lots of happy experiences, and I guess the funniest ones have to be conversations involving Carl. I have been glad to be involved in putting meals together for guests because people are so appreciative, although I don't actually enjoy being stuck in the kitchen (but don't tell Jan that!)

I wouldn't say I have had any real crises in my life, although obviously there have been very sad times, including when my brother died suddenly. The hardest was leaving to go back to Australia when my father was ill. I said goodbye knowing that I wouldn't see him again, and he made me promise not to come back for his funeral. My mother was (and still is) hugely supportive - she told me I must go back because it was where I belonged and where God wanted me. My faith also helped me through. Just after Mum rang me to say Dad had died I had a dream

or vision of him walking across a bridge to the most beautiful garden and being welcomed by Jesus. To see where he was going was a great comfort. That same day at university we were asked to talk in a group about the most beautiful thing we had ever seen. It unexpectedly opened up so many conversations about faith.

I think my particular talent is for helping young children discover their potential; helping them to find out what they are good at and express it in the way they want, and helping them to discover and be proud of who they are. With the odds stacked against Aboriginal children in so many ways, this is a real privilege.

If I had a magic wand for reducing clergy stress I would make sure that everyone had at least one person they could regularly talk to and share with completely openly and with complete confidentiality. Everybody needs someone they can share with - I don't know how people manage on their own. And if I was a fairy Godmother with one wish for Sheldon I would definitely provide self-cleaning glass all round!

*Sarah Horsman was talking to Anne Watkins (aka Ozzie Anne)*

