

Turned Around Down Under

by Janet Christensen

I have had the opportunity to travel to Sydney, Australia, a fascinating city that is a cross between England, Asia and the new world. Sydney is a coastal city and the water has a huge influence on lifestyles as well as the way the city has developed. The transit system includes buses, rail and ferries. Traffic funnels across bridges, through tunnels and around roundabouts. The roundabouts reflect the British influence in Australia. A roundabout is a place where 3 or more streets meet and, rather than having stop signs or traffic lights, the drivers navigate around the circle to the street that they want to take with cars to the right having the right-of-way. Add to this the paradigm shift of driving on the left side of the road and it becomes a great source of entertainment and confusion for Canadians.

I always thought that I have a very good sense of direction – at least until Sydney. I spent my 17 days there completely disoriented. Because Sydney has grown around an estuary, the streets are not built on a grid pattern. I could not grasp how it all fit together when I was on the ground. On the first day taking the bus, my colleague and I twice stood on the wrong side of the road for the bus we needed to take. We must have looked like deer caught in headlights the first time because the bus driver asked where we were going and politely told us “other side of the road”. After that, we learned to ask. Add to this the confusion of sometimes having to take a bus into town to connect with the bus to take me out of town to my destination. The only time I really got lost was when I took a taxi and the driver obviously did not understand Canadian, eh, because he dropped me at 12 Frenchman's Street instead of 12 Francis Street. I even tipped him generously, before realizing the situation. I stopped at a petrol (gas) station and the attendant gave me a map book to look at. I finally found my way – only a 15 minute walk in the rain.

My travels in and around Sydney reinforced a few things for me:

Ask for help – It is okay not to know all the answers and someone else likely knows. Not only that, they will be pleased to help.

It is good to stretch outside of my comfort zone. Since I was feeling intimidated by not knowing my way around, it would have been easy to take taxis everywhere. Not only would that have cost me a lot of money, I would have missed out on a lot of interesting things. Most of all, I would have missed out on a learning opportunity. By the end of my stay I had become much more proficient and comfortable taking transit and getting around. I felt a great sense of accomplishment.

I didn't have to know it all to get where I needed to go; I just needed to know the piece necessary to get me to my destination. I realize that sometimes I can be

stuck where I am because I don't have all of the answers or information, (the big picture), even when I know what I need to get me to the next stage of my journey. In this age of information overload, it is easy to keep preparing and think that we have to have all the answers, instead of just doing it. Take action.

Enjoy the ride along the way. If I had been driving, I would have been so preoccupied with navigating and driving on the other side of the road, I would have missed everything along the way. Whether I was a passenger on a bus, ferry or in a car, I could sit back and enjoy the sights, sounds and character of Sydney.

Be willing to laugh at myself. Standing on the wrong side of the road for the bus gave us many opportunities to share the story and laugh. Instead of judging myself as stupid, I saw the humour in the situation. In any new situation or circumstance, there is the opportunity for confusion, mistakes and humour. Lighten up instead of beating yourself up.

The irony in being turned around and disoriented in Sydney, is that I was there training to be a Passion Map facilitator. I successfully learned to guide people in connecting with their passions and creating a path forward with their Passion Map. I successfully got to where I needed to be in Sydney, even when I wasn't quite sure where I was all of the time. Wherever I find myself, life is a wonderful, interesting journey with many pleasures and opportunities along the way.

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