

because there is now this huge supply of workers, the farm owners get to simply hire and fire as they please. The background to this change in working holiday visas is that there had apparently been some dodgy employers and middle men who had forced the workers to work for an unfairly low wages. But I think it's a real shame that woofers can no longer get the two-year visa as a result. The reason why I'm really glad I began to work as a woofers is that I can relax and not have to worry about work quotas or whether I might get fired at the drop of a hat. I can't earn a wage, but on the other hand I can eat lots of fresh vegetables and delicious food, and I have a bed I can sleep in peacefully. The farm owners who take on woofers have to fulfill certain requirements to be able to join the organisation, and take out insurance, so we can place quite a lot of trust in both the woofers system and the people we stay with. In fact, both the farm owners and the people in the town are really kind, and unlike busy city life, you get the opportunity to take part in the kind of real Australian situations and events typical of the local area. Also, it depends on the size of the farm, but if you choose a place that doesn't take in many woofers you get the chance to

speaking lots of English with the owners, their families and their friends. In my own case, in the big city where lots of other Asians gather looking for work I find I tend to let myself speak my native language, so I feel this is a great opportunity to make a break from that kind of environment.

I'd certainly recommend people who come to Australia on a working holiday visas try woofing.

What I'd really love to see is the return of the old two-year visa system. People who want to earn money by slaving hard on a farm can go to some farm that will pay them a wage, while those who want to enjoy Australia's natural environment and farming life in a more leisurely way can take up woofing. After all, people have different characters and want to do different things, so there should be a bit of leeway in the choices of work available for obtaining a visa it seems to me.

Mind you, it's bad for the heart to have your precious savings steadily being whittled away on transport and social expenses. This is why, after about a month of working as a woofers, I'm



planning to go to the city and return to paid work for a while. But if I've managed to make enough money to travel round Australia at the end of my stay here, and have some time off with a friend who plans to visit from Japan, I hope to look for work as a woofers again. I haven't managed to get an opportunity to shear a sheep this time round, but I'm trusting that next spring or autumn there I'll be as a woofers, fulfilling my dream and shearing a sheep at last.

Tom's leg

Tom Richardson hops on the band wagon to tell us his story

In 1976, when I first contracted cancer and was operated on they basically gave me a year to live. But after serious investigations each quarter by my surgeon, he decided after 12 months that in fact I was probably going to survive and it probably wasn't going to come back. It was deemed that I had gotten past it.

That was fine until ten years later in 1986, when the same cancer reappeared in the same spot in my right thigh and I had to undergo another eight-hour round at the butcher's table. After this second surgical removal I then underwent radiation oncology at Woden Valley Hospital (now Canberra Hospital). I was given radiation treatment every day for twelve weeks.

That was deemed to be very successful except that in 1986 when they gave you radiation treatment it wasn't like it is today. It was not targeted with anywhere near as much finesse and the capacity of the technology was nowhere near what it is today. As a result of that, about four years after that, I ended up with what's called lymphoedema (which is basically elephantiasis). That was my right leg, in 1990 — and I lived with that right through until February 2007.

It was painful to move my knee joints and it was painful to walk in a lot of ways, and it meant that I had difficulty driving. I had to have my trousers specially made with my right leg twice the size of my left, so the jeans and my trousers were designed to fit the fact that my right leg was huge. And all my trousers had zips on the right side so I could get them on and off. It was something I got used to but the discomfort was huge.

In February 2007 I lost all circulation to my toes and they started to go gangrenous, and my leg was amputated. I had known for some years that it was going to come off. I didn't know



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