

My life so far - Milly Dabrowski

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Milly Dabrowski is an acupuncturist and birth attendant who specialises in natural medicine. Many of her clients have fertility issues.

What led you into the field of traditional Chinese medicine?

My first degree was journalism and public relations, so I went on to have roles in publicity and PR. But I'd find myself on the train thinking, "Oh God, I might as well be dead." I look back on that and feel that life was grey; that it was completely not me. I'd go home and hand-sort my compost bin, eat organic food and read about what vitamins were in beetroot - I loved that stuff. There was this total dichotomy in my life. I went overseas and I knew that I was going to make some decisions. When I got home I found Chinese medicine and I thought, "Wow, I understand that language." It was that fork-in-the-road experience. So I completed a four-year bachelor of health science in traditional Chinese medicine.

How do you find the ideology differs from that of Western medicine?

Traditional Chinese medicine is all about energy and Western medicine can't see energy so it doesn't consider it. Western medicine doesn't consider the emotions, for example, but in Chinese medicine we consider that the emotions are just another expression of your physiological map. Chinese medicine looks at the whole person, whereas Western medicine generally looks at a problem and isolates it to a part of the body. Its assessment is all about things that are in the environment - hot, cold, damp - the language actually relates to nature.

Do you see women who are having children later?

Absolutely. We have women up to the age of 45 - sometimes 48 - who are looking to conceive. I'd say the average is probably late 30s but we also see women who are in their late 20s who have fertility issues. There are a lot of different reasons why someone might seek our help. I often see young women who say to me, "We haven't started trying yet because I haven't got a full-time job," or, "We haven't bought a house." I don't encourage them to wait. I don't want them sitting in my office in five years saying, "I got the house and I got the job but now I can't conceive." Natural medicine isn't about taking a pill and fixing it. It takes time for changes to occur in the body. Having said that, you just never really know what's possible.

What do you say about the debate surrounding elective caesareans?

As a feminist I fully support a woman's right to choose but I think the problem with the current debate is that it is very clouded, emotional, full of hype and women aren't getting all the information they need to make a truly informed decision. If you go by what is in the media - which is a limited perspective - then birth is just a terrible event and you might as well bypass it. But I have seen otherwise many times. Part of my job is to help a woman find the information she needs to make an informed choice.

What have been your defining moments so far?

Deciding to change my direction in life. I stood at the Nobbies at Phillip Island and asked God, or the Universe, or whatever you want to call it: "Do I take this promotion at work or do I leave my job, go overseas and decide what I really want to do with my life?" The first day I stood in my practice (opposite Fitzroy Gardens and with views of the city), after years of study and months of work with my business partner, I thought, "This is it. It has all been worth it. I've done it." It was so rewarding.

What challenges have you faced?

Changing career and life direction at a time when all my friends were hitting their professional stride in their careers, settling down, buying houses etc, I was living the life of a student, with \$12 left over after expenses and looking forward to rescue packages from my sister with casks of wine and expensive items such as laundry powder. Also, finding life balance as a small-business owner when the demands of work are easily seven days.

What other ambitions do you have?

I hope one day to be able to let go of ambitions, to let go of busyness and feeling defined by my work. I hope for long silences, to develop creative talents, to spend long hours in the garden, to live by the sea, to see more of my extended family.

Do you have children?

I have two miniature schnauzers, Finn and Lola, who are just like my kids. They sleep in my bed. I came to my career late, so I've got other priorities right now. -- LIZ CINCOTTA

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