

CROSSING THE (STATE) LINE

**A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT
ON HOW IT FEELS TO BE
THE NEW GIRL IN TOWN**

By Stephanie Williams

“Where are you from?” I yelled. “Sydney, I’m just down here for the weekend,” he replied. “Oh great!” He was so hot. And funny. I liked him. Yet he was probably the only interstater in this noisy bar, and I had my heart set on a future here in my hometown, Melbourne. But it turned out James was everything my past boyfriends hadn’t been: outdoorsy, overtly masculine and more interested in a beer than art stuff. So when he called me to ask if he could come back to visit me in Melbourne, I answered “yes!” without hesitation.

We never went more than two weeks without a visit. But the constant parting, flights and long-distance phone calls became too much. And with my portable career as a writer, it was evident that I should be the one upping sticks and moving interstate if we wanted to be together. So, nine





months after meeting James, I left my single life behind and moved to Sydney's harbourside suburb of Rose Bay. There is some truth to the stereotypes: my Melbourne was a woman of substance, full of black-clothes-wearing, restaurant-going culture hounds, and Sydney – to me at least – was brash and busty, packed with beautiful beaches, bikinis and beers. My southern friends thought I was mad to break up with Melbourne, knowing how much I loved her, but understood my need to go. I was 32, and love was calling.

Trials and tribulations

The upheaval of a relocation, even one as starry-eyed as mine, made me realise we all have psychological needs that are served through our routines: my daily coffee from The Final Step, a chirashi sushi bowl from Sushi Monger for lunch, a pinot noir with Sarah at City Wine Shop after work. I learnt that even when such basic routines are broken, it can mess with your head. *WH* stress less expert Dr Suzy Green agrees: "When your routine's disrupted, you're out of your comfort zone and the familiar faces and places that bring you a sense of security are gone, it can cause stress and anxiety."

Poor James – my stress manifested as insecurity in our relationship. After moving all this way, I was questioning whether he actually wanted me to be in his world. Had I made the right decision? Had I done it too early? Was moving for one person really worth it when I was leaving so many great people behind? James never said or did anything to set off these feelings – it was the stress talking. My mum copped teary phone calls when I wanted to shield James from my neurosis – it's so much harder to cope with emotional stuff when your family's not by your side. Though for a while there I think James did feel the pressure of my neediness.

But in the words of peroxidised pop mistress Yazzy, the only way is up – so after a dive into PityMe-ville, I got involved in Sydney with gusto. After all, I wasn't the first Aussie to cross a border – about 340,000 people moved interstate from 2010 to 2011, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

I gave it all a go: I joined a tennis comp, a boot camp, a rowing team, even got involved in dragon-boat racing. I volunteered in a homeless shelter and went out with anyone

who asked. Every activity forced outside myself and occasionally I connect with someone and pursue a friendship.

Not everyone was in the market for a new friend, but with practice, my radar for like-minded people became well-tuned, and I found with a little effort, invites for wine-dates with great people started "pouring" in. My openness to new friendships led me to become mates with people in unusual ways – for example, I now regularly catch up for dinner with my waxer! But that doesn't mean I don't miss my old Melbourne mates. I keep in touch with them through daily emails and loong phone calls with a glass of wine (bless those Estonian geniuses for creating Skype).

Ch-ch-changes in me

In the first weeks after moving, I was often heard saying annoying things like, "The coffee here is terrible!" (not actually true, on further investigation) and, "Trams are better than these old buses" (possibly true). But James gave me reality checks by being increasingly offended by my comments. And rightly so, no one was holding a gun to my head – I had to let go of the past and start embracing things this new state offered.

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The percentage of women who feel guilty when they holiday without their pets, according to a lastminute.com.au survey. But with the increase of hound-friendly hotels (like the Langham in Sydney) 25 per cent of furry-friend owners are now carting their canines with them on holidays. Tally-ho, Rover – to the motherland we go!

THREE TO TRY

By *WH* stress-less expert Dr Suzy Green



How to get back to Dreamland after being shocked awake by a dog/baby/siren

Turn 180°

Moving your pillow to the end of the bed and your toes to the top may seem crazy, but it can break the pattern of non-sleep by halting the "tossing and turning" mindset.

Drink milk

Yep, it's an oldie but a goodie. Milk contains tryptophan, an amino acid that your body converts to the hormones serotonin and melatonin – both these hormones help relax you and improve your sleep quality.

Get up

Seriously – try to forget all about falling asleep. Engage in activities that make you drowsy, like reading, so sleepiness can emerge naturally without the interference of effort and frustration.

Want three-pronged advice from Dr Suzy Green on a particular topic? Ask away at womenshealthmag.com.au

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCKPHOTO

I went from riding my cute Italian bike to work on Melbourne's flat roads to being too hesitant to ride hills in the traffic, but Sydney's natural beauty brought out a sense of adventure in me – I learnt about my new surrounds by bushwalking, sailing, soft-sand running and beach swimming. The way I dress now is completely different. Before my clothes were artsy, black, billowing – now they're colourful, body-hugging and accessorised. For months I felt my clothes were never right – I'd turn up to a product launch wearing chunky low heels in a sea of Gary Castles, or at the beach in my '50s bathing suit among hundreds of girls in Brazilian bikini bottoms. I resisted at first, wanting to keep my "own look", but quickly realised fashion choices are usually based on practicality – OK, maybe not the heels. But light-coloured, body-skimming fabrics that leave my skin exposed actually make me feel cooler.

Now that I have a solid set of friends, I've changed the way I socialise. Down south a night out would be relatively unplanned – let's just wander around and see what looks fun. Geographically, Sydney is much bigger, so socialising needs to be more planned – meet at a restaurant or pub and stay there, preferably not too far from a train station or home. I love that I have a diary full of planned excursions, but every now and then I love exploring my new home like a tourist – by following my nose.

When you move hundreds of kays, you win in some areas and lose in others – work is flowing here in Sydney, I'm more active, positive and nourished than before. And my new friends are awesome. But that doesn't mean I don't miss the people who knew me before I knew myself. My feelings of longing for them crop up on a Friday night when I have nothing to do. But moving for James was more than worth it, and now I know I'm made of strong stuff. *wh*

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Percentage of Aussies who'd happily move interstate if it'd mean they'd earn more bucks and improve their work/life balance, according to the 2012 ING Direct Financial Wellbeing Index. Queensland is the most popular relocation destination, with 46 per cent of respondents willing to move there, followed by New South Wales and Victoria, which are both potentially good moves for 40 per cent of people.



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