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# Healthy forecast for change

This affable 'big guy' has channelled his passion for life into creating a retreat for mind and body, writes **Michael Corkill**

**W**AYNE Parrott is a roly-poly man who looks more like a pastry chef than a health guru. But the former Sydney restaurateur informs us he is actually wasting away, having dropped 30kg since opening the Fountainhead Health Retreat at Maleny about 13 months ago.

Finding a "big guy" in the world of health spas is an anomaly, let alone a larger-than-life character who teaches people how to beat depression and develop self-esteem.

But Parrott's world is filled with twists. His health spa, which by nature exists to help others, is named after Ayn "the mother of capitalism" Rand's famous book on individualism. Parrott claims to be a "capitalist" but admits to letting cancer victims stay for free provided they work a bit in the garden — a throwback to his mother's illness.

He rides a quad bike around the 16ha property. And although he has a plasma TV screen he refuses to watch commercial TV because it is "s---". Parrott prefers movies that tell stories of people beating the odds.

He laughs at the suggestion that the people paying \$2400 a week for health tips at Fountainhead might be the same people to whom he used to serve rich food 20 years ago at the Views on Rose Bay restaurant.

But he cannot deny they might be. After all, Fountainhead's philosophy is that everyone can change if they have the right attitude.

"In life, there are no winners and losers — just winners and learners," says Parrott, holding court on a throne-like lounge in Fountainhead's modest main room.

It has been an interesting transformation for Parrott from restaurateur to industrial engineer to health food guru, and a confronting one. For years he prided himself on being "famous for dismissing faith healers and reducing them to tears" — people he refers to as "woo-woo" with a roll of the eyes.

Then one day he found himself embracing the woo-woo world. His mother was diagnosed with cancer and given three years to live.

Parrott refused to accept the diagnosis and became consumed in a quest for knowledge to prolong her life. In the process he turned his own life around. He read books and telephoned experts — a practice he continues today, having recently bombarded American doctor Patch Adams with a fax an hour for 40 hours until he took his call.

After seeing the Robin Williams movie, Parrott wanted Adams to visit Fountainhead. In the end he considered the \$US25,000 (\$32,200) appearance fee to be not value for money.

"Everyone takes your calls," says



Parrott. "I remember ringing Ross Horne, the Australian author. He was a fruitarian for eight years. I met (Dr Nathan) Pritikin, of the Pritikin diet fame. Top bloke, lovely, charming, passionate but isn't a (GP) at all. He is a research scientist who gets diagnosed with heart disease and goes looking for answers. He works out there are three (indigenous) groups in the world with less than 5 per cent fat in their diet and nobody died of heart disease.

"I find Norman Cousins who wrote *Anatomy of an Illness*. He is fantastic. He is given three years to live and writes his first book 13 years later. He dies at 92."

The end of *Anatomy of an Illness* formed the inspiration for Fountainhead. Parrott has also watched the movie, starring Ed Asner of Mary Tyler Moore fame, many times.

"(Cousins) bumps into the doctor who has given him three years to live," he says. "He says, 'Norman, you are alive. This is fantastic, how did you do it?' Norman says: 'By not listening to you.'"

Parrott's mother lived another 13 years after embracing the Pritikin diet, although he would have treated her differently if she was alive today. That is because after her death he met John Fielder, now a 72-year-old regular visitor to Fountainhead who had not eaten cooked food for 35 years.

"Fielder says healthy food is live food, unprocessed food," Parrott says. "It is the processing that kills the vitamins. So we started experimenting with live food and, as they say, the rest is history."

Fountainhead now serves live food as 80 per cent of its menu.

Guests there are not taught about five food groups, but two — processed and unprocessed. Anything unprocessed is good and can be eaten in abundance. Anything processed is bad and must be avoided.

They also learn about health and fitness and new life values, while staying in one of six cabins, each with a theme such as Cuban and

Casablanca — his tribute to Bogey and Bacall.

Parrott himself holds the talks on beating depression. He makes light of his lack of professional qualifications in the area by putting QBE after his name, for Qualified By Experience. But he also puts his money where his mouth is, offering callers who inquire about his lack of professional counselling experience their money back if he does not fix their problem.

"Why would I want to take someone's money?" he asks indignantly over a delicious, natural, fruit pie. "I don't need their money."

It is the attitude of a man who has spent a lifetime backing himself after growing up in Redfern, about 200m from the police station, as the son of prominent former South Sydney Juniors Leagues Club manager Rocca Parrott Jr.

Parrott established his first restaurant, Views on Rose Bay, while working as a trainee manager at Pizza Hut. He says he knocked on the door of prominent Sydney Restaurant School founder Fabio Baroni and asked to learn to cook.

When Baroni realised he did not have a business plan he replied: "Go away and make your pizzas little boy" and closed the door.

Parrott came back with a 40-page plan that Baroni reportedly did not even bother to read and he got his cooking lesson. Baroni stayed on as a consultant to Views for seven years.

"He taught me not to be intimidated by tradition," Parrott says.

"He said just walk into any job you want and say, 'Don't pay me if I don't (perform). Because every entrepreneur will pay you'."

**P**ARROTT walked into a job in the telecommunications industry with the same ideals, eventually snaring a job at National Telecoms as an industrial engineer, or someone who identifies growth opportunities. Now he is living his dream of running a health retreat, complete with day spa and organic garden with nearby rainforest walks and waterfalls.

He says nearly everyone needs help on some issue but not everyone is prepared to ask for guidance to improve their life.

"Everyone's depressed. Everyone's got a hang-up of some description. Everyone's got something wrong with them," Parrott says.

"To improve self-esteem you have to start building your character. Find things that you like in people, favourite relatives, heroes in sport, a hero in a movie. Think of the qualities those people have that you aspire to and then become those qualities. Eventually, if you keep doing it for long enough, you become it."



LARGER than life . . . Wayne Parrott at Fountainhead near Maleny and, left, the accommodation.  
Picture: Graeme Parkes

Parrott speaks with the passion of someone who knows the value of life, someone who has had it all and lost it and found it again. He admits being broke twice "but not bankrupt" and knows the pain of having to drag yourself up again.

There was a time last year when he thought his dreams might come crashing down again. It was when Fountainhead opened and the guests were not coming.

Parrott admits being worried enough to phone some people who made inquiries to see why they did not come. As usual they took his calls. And they told him they thought his prices were so cheap that they would not learn anything.

Now the prices at Fountainhead are suitably expensive. And the imported cars are filling the driveway, many of them with NSW numberplates.