



# Ordinary Mind Zen

## THE PLATYPUS AND THE BILLABONG

When my wife Annie and I leased a house in the Promised Land near Bellingen, we knew it was set on a beautiful 5 acres with magnificent views of the ranges and valleys. We also knew it was surrounded by native vegetation, which attracted a wide variety of native birds. The views were so magnificent we renamed the verandas “viewing platforms” after the Japanese practice of sitting on “moon viewing platforms” and drinking sake. Viewing sunsets became a practice we regularly participated in. Our western viewing platform looked out across to a huge Figtree, prominent on my web site that I fondly referred to as the “tree of life”. The property also contained a beautiful billabong, fed by a distributary of the Never Never River, that meanders gently through the Promised Land. The billabong was often still and quiet, except for the sounds of frogs and cicadas and its water would reflect the surrounding trees, including some beautiful pale gums, like a mirror.



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However, it was only after we had been living at the house for a couple of weeks, that the owner informed us that there was a platypus who lived in the Billabong. So this began Annie's daily routine where she would walk down the steep hill to the billabong every day in the hope that she would be able to catch a glimpse of the platypus. Well, as some of you may know, the platypus is a very shy creature and is often hard to glimpse in the wild. And it didn't surprise me that, although Annie had been going down to the billabong on a daily basis, and sitting still and quiet for half an hour at a time, she did not glimpse the platypus. In fact, Annie began to doubt the story of the platypus, coming from Scotland as a child, she was very familiar with the myth of the Loch Ness monster, and she began to wonder if the supposed sightings of the platypus were not in fact a myth of the same kind. However, she persisted in her regular daily sits, and after a time, even though she did not see the platypus, she began to enjoy the stillness of the billabong and the sounds of the frogs, the beauty of the water lilies, and the kingfisher as it darted across the water. Sometimes she would hear a loud plop when she walked down to the



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billabong, and she thought it was the platypus, but then she saw the old water dragon as it swam and then disappeared under the water. So the days went by, and although Annie did not see the platypus, she began to appreciate just sitting by the water, looking at the reflections in the watery mirror and listening to the sounds of the varied creatures.

Then one day, much to her amazement, she glimpsed the platypus! At first she thought it may have been the water dragon, but sure enough, the sighting was so close to where she was sitting, she saw the unmistakable duck-bill and the tail as it plunged beneath the water leaving a ring of ripples behind it. She breathed very softly and waited for about a minute and then, sure enough, it surfaced like a submarine, stayed for about 5 seconds and then submerged again under the water. Later that day when I returned home from work, Annie's face was beaming with joy as she told me about her first sighting of the platypus. The next day she went down to the billabong, full of excited expectation of seeing the platypus again but even though she sat longer than





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usual and even did three sits on that day, she did not see the platypus. But that memory of the first sighting meant that now she did have faith and trust that the platypus did in fact exist, and was not a myth. So she maintained her motivation and sat on the edge of the billabong every day. But her disappointment grew as she failed to see the platypus again, and although at times she felt like giving up, because the path to the billabong was steep, she persevered. Eventually, at times she would forget all about the platypus and would completely lose herself in the sights and the sounds of the billabong, and gradually, over time, she no longer sat with the expectation of seeing the platypus, but sat for the sake of sitting. Then one day, as she was sitting without expectation, there it was again! Right up close and personal. Very intimate! And it stayed for quite a while, diving and submerging, exploring the banks of the billabong for at least an hour.

The next day, Annie went down again to the billabong, but this time, she sat without any expectation of seeing the platypus. And so it continued, right to this very day when I wrote this story. If the platypus surfaced it was awesome,



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but gradually Annie began to appreciate the awesome wonder of the billabong,  
just as it was, even without the platypus!