



How on Earth did you manage that?

It's been quite a journey from that baby brought home in the depths of a dark and severe Yorkshire winter, to my penultimate twig on the neem tree of life, under equatorial African skies; perhaps not that remarkable by some standards, but one which I look back on and wonder at times: *"How on Earth did you manage that?"*

I remember my latter-day friend and mentor, *John*, turning an ashen head to me on his deathbed and murmuring, *"George, I don't know how you do it."* This surprised me at the time, as I knew John in earlier days had risen to far greater heights than I had ever managed to achieve. But as I grow older, I begin to understand that some of life's tasks do appear more daunting when viewed from the far end, in contrast to the moment of doing. At a younger age we are not fazed by such things.

Some personal challenges of course, seem more intractable than others at the time they are being met: encounters that put abilities to the test. In fact, most trials we confront are like that, made smaller or larger by our inner capabilities. In my case there were a few that stood out from the crowd, certainly! And now looking back, with some degree of awe, I wonder just how I coped, for I was never a particularly outgoing being, ready to meet aggression head on; beating back assaults on my earthly soul.

I am, and always have been, a long way from extrovert, though over the years I've been known to co-habit with people of that ilk. The *Talkative Lady* from an earlier chapter - my

travelling companion in Australia - was in many ways similar to the younger woman, who decades later became my long-term partner in Africa. Both very effusive souls, up for the challenge of participating in anything and everything that crossed their path. I seem to have gone there, on both occasions, to prove the much-vaunted thought that opposites do indeed attract ... though God knows why!

Perhaps as an introvert, I like the idea of flamboyance in others (up to a point) but tend to shy away from anything like the same for myself. In early days - behind a necessary male camouflage - I was a reserved, unsure character: a bit of a *wallflower*, prone to sitting in the shadows outside dance clubs, scared to enter the fray; feeling ill-equipped to participate in the banter and repartee I knew was required; scared to confront the chaotic atmosphere that was on show inside. At times I travelled home alone, utterly dismayed with my performance.

In the longer term, that fear became dissipated. With age, wisdom comes to the fore. And for me it needed to, because there was a constant challenge - often self-generated - which left me open to more raids on my bubble of moderately introverted character, from an alien world. My natural instincts lay somewhere behind the scenes - writing the text, drawing the graphics - but instead my life came to revolve around presenting to groups; even large crowds of people; out there in full view on centre stage! I could say it was a self-motivated mission, to help overcome inner fears, but in truth it all seemed to happen by chance, with little planning. Overall, it had limited effect; and like the reticent actor, each time the role ended I returned to my somewhat reclusive self.

Some of the inborn fear was drawn out of me during early years in Australia. Then, it seemed I was destined to sink or swim. Out of necessity, I quickly developed an ability to blend in at varying levels: able to mirror the person or persons I happened to be mixing with. This was a big asset in terms of adaptation to new cultures and unfamiliar customs; at the same time masking the inner-felt lack of confidence. Thus at college, surrounded by a posse of nasal-voiced Aussies under the hot southern sun, I steered myself to look and sound as if born and bred on a massive, sun-parched sheep station.

A decade or so after leaving college - then in the corporate world - I acquired another invaluable introvert-busting skill: how to mastermind meetings, especially big ones with hundreds of people in attendance. The complexities of planning a venue, coordinating the agenda and organizing the publicity, plus a plethora of related facets all came into my brief. This became an important part of job remits in the future: an art I was able to accommodate and master from those corporate days going forward; particularly useful when I transferred to the NGO world (where meetings of all shapes and sizes were as common as the ACRONYMS they represented). My final major management role in Kenya, required coordination of a process that cascaded environmental education, from trainers, to teachers, to students, and on to the kid's parents, with appropriate meetings at each and every juncture. At first sight, it presented as a rather daunting undertaking, but with 30 year's training, I viewed it as a comparatively straightforward assignment, confident I was equipped to meet the challenge with relative ease.

When later I took a break from the NGO world, my career diverted fleetingly, towards teaching English to non-native speakers. My rationale at the time was that most young people, at some stage in their life did it, so why not me? Well, the short answer to that was: firstly, you were not young, and secondly it was not a vocation that matched your character. It was a career more suited to outgoing, extrovertish types, not bookworms.

I remember one soul-destroying training session, where a tall rather frightening Polish lady marched us around in a circle, barking out orders in Polish and brandishing an odd variety of photos. Of course, none of us had a clue what she was talking about, but some quicker ones caught on through the actions and images. As usual, I hid my light under a bushel and tagged on behind the leaders.

The overall training followed a rigid format, which we all followed obediently, then regurgitate during tests and exams. In practice, I found I used very little of the format we had been taught. Then at the end of it all I passed, but not with any great glory. In fact, I think you probably had to murder the trainer – as some of us often thought about – in

order to fail! Much to my surprise, after the pass grade, I won a job, teaching immigrants in another wing of the same training college. Perhaps I wasn't so bad, after all.

In parallel with learning to teach English, I stumbled on a very personal challenge to my well-being, which saw me doubling down to find the courage that could cope with an unprecedented threat from within. It all started with a fairly innocuous checkup, to find out why I was experiencing some tingling in my fingertips. After a number of nerve tests with coloured wires attached to fingers and toes, the doctor happened to ask: *“Do you realise you have a rather large lump near your collar bone?”*

A month or so further down the track I received the biopsy results which confirmed the swelling was caused by *Thyroid Cancer*. The news hit me like a bombshell:

“Me? ... Cancer? ... Not possible! There has never been anything seriously wrong with me during the 47 years negotiated so far. Why should anything change now?”

Then out of the onrushing gloom came an element of reprieve. In short, it turns out that *Thyroid Cancer* comes in three forms: very deadly, deadly, and slightly less than deadly! Fortunately I had the latter: not something to be trifled with, but never-the-less possible to negotiate. Much later, I deliberated on whether my escape from thyroid's jaws of death was simply fate ... or was it connected to the *Aura of Protection* theory, I had been introduced to, by an elderly Italian gentleman, in Kenya?

“Yes, I can see it surrounds your body,” the man had declared, *“To ward off deadly happenings like car crashes and drownings.”*

But those were external threats. How could this *Aura of Protection* work for a threat which formed within the protected layer?

Released from the Royal Adelaide Hospital, my first recollection is of walking the beautifully treed street outside, under cotton-wool clouds, watching leaves float down to the ground, almost in slow motion. For a moment in time, it felt as if - after visiting the

other side - I had returned to find the magnificence of a world which had seemed lost to me, for a few days at least. The episode had heightened my appreciation of life.

I can only presume we all come across these defining moments. Whether personal escape from premature demolition is enabled by mysterious forces, medical intervention, or just sheer luck, is for each of us to judge. Because I refuted religion half a century ago, I can hardly now claim to be saved by mystical powers, though I guess it is possible that such powers may not be connected to any religious belief, but could come from inner fortitude, or some alien source beyond human comprehension.

Returning to the start, and mentor John's half question, half statement from his deathbed, expressing a degree of awe related to my achievements, I knew only too well, that while I could claim a fair amount of credit for what I had done, there was still some elements of disguise, coupled with a lack of confidence, in how I had done it. This leads me to question (as many must do) what greater heights it might have been possible to achieve if I had shown more confidence in myself; lowered the mask and let go of those inhibitions, to become the full person that I am well aware of, buried down below.

Time to confront the holy grail

Continuing the faith-based connection, It is well known that people turn towards religion as they approach the end of the road. That for me and to date has been something towards the opposite; though I guess one can never be quite sure what might come to pass – as 007 would say - when the chips are down.

I have for long admired the late *Christopher Hitchens*: his accumulated knowledge, his profound literary skills, and in later years his scathing attacks on the holy creeds. A few years before death, he published a remarkable collection of thoughts under the title: *god is not Great* (using the small g to emphasise the fact). Then, nearing his final curtain, he toured the U.S. bible belt, debating with allcomers. With his once-eloquent voice strained by throat cancer, and hair disappeared by chemotherapy he continued to deliver on the

topic: the greatness of god ... or otherwise. He became the attack dog for those who opposed his view. Very few dared, and if they did, they did not win.

This gelled marvelously with a view of the world that I had been forming since my teens. It fanned the flames to my cauldron, helped stir the potions within, then assisted in putting a reassuring lid on top, to keep the contents in place.

I admired others in the same circle and mostly around the same vintage as Hitchens: *Salman Rushdie, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Fry, Martin Amis*. All remarkable, non-god-fearing intellectuals in their own right, but none could hold a candle to the *Hitch*, in terms of bringing it all together, on paper and at the podium, sometimes with stand-up comedy skills that rivalled an on-form *Peter Cooke*, delivered with an impish sense of humour that could cause offense to all but those with the thickest of skins.

In the early years, my ungodlike thoughts related solely to Christianity: that was all I knew. I began to think, why would people of sound mind – male and female, well-educated and employed - gather in a tall-roofed building, for an hour or two every Sunday, to say words, sing songs and kneel down before some supernatural being? Purely in terms of logic it made no sense. When one thought about it in an objective way it seemed even ludicrous. Like following your horoscope: many of us do it for a laugh; but most of us know it is bullshit!

Later, I began to take on board other doctrines, which in similar ways also seemed duplicitous. In most, men appeared exalted, while women were subjected to men's needs, which did not seem to match what I knew about modern ways of thinking, as related to feminism and human rights. In some faiths I learnt the most devout would resort to extreme actions: flailing their bodies with whips, or bloodying their foreheads in prayer. And those same folk that fronted up on their allotted sabbath, were for the other six days law court judges and stock market supremos, corporate heads and professors of academia. While other things I learnt appeared grounded in some sort of reality, this topic was somehow steeped in mystery and subterfuge. It made no sense.

Things began to form into a cohesive whole when I went first to India and then to Africa. In India I was turned on by the Hindu faith: it seemed a fun religion. So many thousands of animated Gods. They could come in human form with an elephant or a monkey's head. Anything was possible. There was no compulsion to attend mass meetings; your temple could be in your kitchen, and on occasions you could make a long-distance, fun pilgrimage, to Tirriputti, or some other revered hill-top shrine. Then after a few years of admiring this vibrant faith, I came to realise that Hinduism too had its dark side, when fundamentalism took over from fun.

In Africa I began to understand another aspect: that education (or lack of it) can impact on the fervour of religious belief. I found it mildly amusing that Brits were berated for being bad colonialists, yet African men wore polyester suits in 30-degree heat, dark skinned judges sported long white wigs, and many sub-Saharan parliaments mirrored the holy grail in Westminster. On top of all that, people with hardly a bean to their name would gather on Sundays to sing and dance for hours in deference to *Christ Almighty*; a figure brought into their midst by those dreaded colonialists from the North. Back in Britain of course, young people were rejecting the God concept in droves.

In the case of Kenya, where I lived, I understood that devotion to God was in many ways a necessary prop; it meant for a few hours each week, people got together to enjoy singing and dancing, with family and friends, at a venue away from their troubles. For the other 150 plus hours in each week, life was a grind: fortunate if you could find three or four dollars a day to feed your family ... unfortunate if not. What turned me off were the men (they were nearly always men) who stood at the front and growled at their compliant congregation with a voice that could grate cheese. This seemed like some sort of subjugation of the poor – worse than colonialism - often with the intention of wringing the last coin from their pockets. It was hard to believe people would fall for this stuff, but in many ways, they were using it as their relief valve. Citizens of Britain have the NHS and the dole to fall back on; in Africa they make do with the church.

Like others that think about these things – and I guess most of us do - I needed to reconcile all this with my inner-most conscience. It wasn't as if I had started out an atheist. I was the one who had sat on the twin-seater stool, turning the pages, as my grandfather negotiated the menu of hymns for the day, in that small village church next to my school. I remember watching him as he pounded the three tiers of organ keys with untold enthusiasm – his white hair falling over his brow - pulling and pushing the knobs to form the rich harmonies that sailed up those long, tall pipes, to the heavens above. Some of his evergreens still linger with me today!

And perhaps that is the main issue. I myself did manage to make my escape, in tandem with onrushing puberty, but most others steeped in their particular version of faithful creed, it becomes an almost impossible task to erase that which has flooded their minds and overrun their beings since the time they learned to walk and talk. But despite the fact I spurned the creed of my family in Cornwall, it never really ceased to be a part of my life. I had discarded the trappings – the carpets and furniture – of a faithful soul; but the surrounding structure – floor, walls and ceiling – of religion, were still there whenever I chose to return to the place of my formative years. I continued to attend church-based weddings, christenings and funerals for family and friends; I sang along to carols pumped out by brass bands on bleak winter evenings, and attended the school nativity plays that my kids were so excited to be a part of (the same plays in which I had eagerly participated, in that same church-affiliated school, many years before).

The *bruncl* of course was always in the background, watching over and taking care of proceedings. My mother was a teacher of religion at high school, before I was born; and it's a fair assumption that to teach is to know, and more importantly, to believe. Thus, having had half her heart and soul removed when she left me and the sunny shores of England behind as she sailed away to Australia, she turned to religion to support the half that remained. Before leaving England, she had been part of a Wesleyan protestant family. On arrival in Ballarat, now part of the family of her newfound husband, she had to gravitate upwards, to a higher form of the Anglican church. And while it was the same Jesus Christ whom both churches followed, the methodology used to pay homage was

intrinsically different. I can only assume the service, bordering on Roman Catholicism, with holy communion and long golden robes, was something of an anathema.

Thus a few years after arrival in the once frontier, gold-mining town of Ballarat, Dorothy turned to a new creed; this was a much more devout and soul-searching faith than the once-a-week Church of England communion service she had come to know, and to some degree despise. The faith my mother turned to in those guilt-ridden days was *Christian Science*; the US-based church, founded by Mary Baker Eddy. Here she found a belief system she could immerse herself in, plus like-minded souls in the vicinity of her new home, whom she could turn to for advice and succour. *Christian Science* is not to be confused with the *Scientology* of Tom Cruise; it is a religion which perhaps more than most, asks its devotees to search for inner goodness, in the belief that love is the value that heals all ailments. In fact, my mother took this value of love on board in no uncertain terms, refusing all medical intervention for any family illness or accident, until her 94th year, when nearing her last moments, she gave in to the doctor's wishes.

I was suitably intrigued, though never convinced. My mother would hand me the latest *Christian Science Monitor* whenever I visited, and while most of them – I have to now admit – were dispatched to the bin, I would sometimes sit down to read a page or two. A few years after this fairly harmless form of proselytization had commenced – and after I moved into the global education sphere - I was quite taken by the fact that writings in these newsletters often took a very informed and bold stance on issues to do with development; a stance with which I generally concurred.

So it was to some degree confrontational: no, I didn't want religion, but yes, what this religion said – on love as the supreme value, on non-violence, on social justice - actually made good sense. From that, I began to view my mother in a new light; a light which told me she had sought out what was perhaps the best religion, from a bad bunch. She had needed to immerse herself in a new world, to surround herself with like-minded souls. It was in some ways a prop – similar to the prop that the poor in Africa used to forget their daily grind - but for her, it was a prop to help her forget the guilt of her past; of leaving

me behind, when in her heart she knew she should have insisted on taking me along. Later the prop became a shield, when she knew that I and her other children, all knew the truth; then *Christian Science* became the shield to hide behind, and co-habit with.

This more recent, somewhat arms-length encounter with religion, was for me a good teacher. It taught me not to purge religion in a wholesale, across-the-board sense. Of course, religion *is* a myth, based on illogical and misguided thinking that confounds the science we know. I believe this wholeheartedly. But at the same time religion can be a means of support for the poor, of solace for the guilty, and friendship for the lonely. If religion can project itself in this way, then even though its underlying framework is not based on truth, it can be a force for good in an ever-more scientific and technological world: good fake news in a hard truth world perhaps.

Of course, we all know that *IF* is a very big word.

My ongoing search for positive change

I have an ever-nearing stalker; getting closer by the day. Peering down into deep reflections, I see him stretching gnarly tentacles to pull me into the unknown abyss. At times he has almost succeeded; one day I am sure he will. But in truth my main concern is not me - *George McCleod* - it's those who come after me I care about.

In addition to the late *Christopher Hitchens*, I have also become a devotee of historian and philosopher, *Yuval Noah Harari*. Harari excels both in print *and* at the podium; his ideas and deliberations far surpassing mere mortals like myself. And what he lacks in charisma and wit (compared to *The Hitch*), he makes up for with pure genius when it comes to teasing out what we are as human beings: where we have come from, where we are at, and perhaps more importantly, where we are going to.

Towards the end of *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* - the third volume of his unique and inspiring trilogy - Harari declares: '*The first thing you need to know about yourself is that you are not a story... human feelings are not part of a cosmic tale ... they are ephemeral vibrations, appearing and disappearing for no particular purpose*'. This, according to his

sense of reality - and scientific fact to date - is perhaps as near to the truth as we can get, given our fragility and miniscule period of time, as an infinitesimal part of the perceived universe.

Nevertheless, if we have no story to tell then what is the point of our existence. Not much point at all says Harari. But then, so many stories have been told across the millennia, by a myriad of people from different parts of our magical planet. Many of us are aware of Cleopatra, Sigmund Freud, Florence Nightingale, Albert Einstein: this is our collective history. Recently I was quite moved by a video story from my own era, which portrayed an elderly Sir Paul McCartney going back to his Liverpool roots, to sing songs – karaoke style – that he had written and made famous over the past 60 years. For his achievements he received his society's highest accolade: a knighthood. Can this all be consigned to the realm of atoms and molecules?

No. Humanity exists to tell its stories, within its own sphere of comprehension. In the longer term and on the scale of the known universe, the stories we have to tell have no significance; but for the here and now - even despite the fact we might just be a bunch of transient tremors – they are profound.

The ultimate mystery, constantly discussed and debated, is what happens when the story ends. What comes after the memoirs? In my case, will the gruesome monster pull me into that gloomy underworld, or will I float skyward on cottonwool clouds? Will my body and soul re-emerge as a worm focused on regurgitating soil, or could my being come to light in another realm altogether - in another unknown universe - where existence is above the level of human comprehension? Or ... will there be nothing?

The answer, according to Harari, is irrelevant, lost in the vastness of time and universe. But the answer also means everything, if we focus on the then and now: our own past and present, and what that means to the future of oncoming generations.

But my own story alludes to another intrigue, played out over the same timeframe as my existence on Earth; this period marks the transition by homo sapiens, from basic

industry to advanced technology; from self-sufficiency to almost total dependency; and while some of this can be viewed as positive progress, there are numerous aspects which appear to harbour more negative change. Recently I encountered a situation, which to my inquisitive mind clearly demonstrated this challenge:

Seated in a café, a family of four arrived at the table next to me: parents around 40 and kids, an older boy and younger girl. What caught my eye was that immediately seated, the parents and the older boy were all 'phone-active'. The young girl - perhaps deemed too young to own a phone – seemed an outcast from the ritual.

Food and drinks arrived, causing screens to be put aside, but only momentarily; as soon as consumption was over, mum and the older boy were at it again. Dad seemed more reticent, perhaps sympathetic to the plight of his daughter, who was excluded from the club. As they left, all three had phones at the ready, mum scrolling, the boy texting, dad's on hold just in case. The girl made her escape and ran ahead.

Rather than being able to pick and choose where and when we need *it* to work for us, technology now seems to dictate how we can serve *its* insatiable needs for exponential growth, via a manufactured culture of consumerism, driven by *Silicon Valley*, devoured everywhere. I am today well aware that village-dwelling Africans, having leap-frogged several stages on the hi-tech circuit, know more about the intricacies of a smart phone than I can ever hope to understand. And the tech companies obligingly come down to meet their needs, in terms of price.

According to *Harari*, what we now see as the global growth of hi-tech, is just the beginnings of more to come: the phenomenon could become our biggest challenge. He surmises that *Artificial Intelligence* may turn the tables on humans, by taking control of many aspects of our daily lives, leading relatively quickly to the creation of an Orwellian society, with a few humans in control, and multitudes subjected to their wishes. He suggests this outcome will be the result of a merger between Info-Tech and Bio-Tech, where marketing methods involve understanding more about our desires than we know ourselves; medical advice given by computers that scan possible ailments faster than a flotilla of doctors. This is a world far removed, alien to that place I first knew when I emerged on the scene in mid-20th Century, post-war Britain.

My mother had five siblings, all born between the wars, in the 1920s and 30s. As duty demanded they married, and those six couples went on to bear a total of 24 children: the so-called baby boomers of the late 40s and 50s (of which I was one). Now, 100 years after my mother was born, only two of the initial 12 are alive, and a bit like the X-factor, the two remaining compete in the finale, to find the last one standing.

The original family of six, was a group born before the age of plastics and information technology, who grew up with austerity and hardship as a part of their being. The maxims I learnt from them at an early age - *Waste Not, Want Not*, and *Do Unto Others As You Would To Oneself* – I held onto as unwritten guidelines for life, which I (and others around me) followed without question: an integral part of our upbringing. But today those dictums have been cast to the winds: ideals that no longer seem to have much validity. Today those voluntary principles are replaced by involuntary laws, controlling issues such as single use plastics, or protecting the less fortunate in society.

In many ways, things of course are better now, for the lucky ones in a material sense at least. But these perceived rewards come at enormous cost, to our environment and to humanity. It is as if we have ascended several steps on the development ladder, but while doing so the ladder has dropped to the floor below. And despite the outer glitter of instant, pan-global communications, plus total access to products from all over the world, we have in reality gone backwards, rather than forwards.

In the 70 years since that start-up generation began to multiply, the population of the wider world has more than tripled in size - from 2.5 to almost 8 billion people - but along with that exponential growth in numbers, has come a range of enormous challenges that surround our daily lives and threaten the planet we live on. The pollution of land and water by non-biodegradable plastic residues, coupled with the overarching phenomenon of global heating, are the two greatest environmental dangers that humankind has ever known - greater than terrorism or a pandemic, or all the world wars combined, even outstripping potential nuclear war.

But in the shorter term there seems to be an even greater challenge to humanity, which relates solely to humankind and the ways in which we interact with each other. The rapid advance in communications technology has meant that many of us - and this is now beginning to include the have-nots, as well as the haves - connect much more easily to screens than we do to actual people.

Back in the 80s, the company I worked for put a CB radio in my car, attached to an enormous ten-foot aerial ... and I hated it! This intrusion meant that *Big Brother* could forever watch over me. Now of course, that notion is absurd; we are in instant contact with people anywhere on earth and we have all become used to *Big Brother watching over us*, every minute, every second of every day.

And so, I ask myself, are we any better off than that *Generation of Six*, who when starting out, knew nothing of computers, or smart phones, plastics or climate change. Yes, we have restaurants that serve fine foods and wines from all corners of the planet; and can fly to any of those corners to laze on the beach or go spotting rhino, with our latest iphone at the ready to capture the image. The *Generation of Six* awoke to learn that Hillary and Tensing had conquered Everest; now there is a line-up of moneyed people queueing to kiss the summit, leaving a trail of litter from the peak back to base camp and beyond. That generation appreciated that their forebears had suffered wars for the sake of their children, and their children's children; now such thoughts are so far in the fading past, they are hardly credible!

Of course, it's impossible to turn the clock back. Fossil fuels, plastic products, the technology revolution and now the climate crisis, have all become an acknowledged part of our make-up, our daily language, our daily lives ... and regardless of future hazards, many would want things to stay that way. But many others - myself included - see an imperative need to re-visit those values of yesteryear in order to re-evaluate the world of today. In this 21st Century there is a growing need to re-group, re-visit the past, learn from history, and retrieve that which we feel necessary to bring about positive change. In our stampede for progress, we threw the baby out with the bath water. Now

we need to return to the bathroom, and begin to assemble a lifestyle which blends the good from previous generations, with the sustainable advances of today's world.

This process of re-visiting and re-evaluating, relates in particular to two ever-increasing challenges that loom large in today's world (and which probably cause more division between people than most other issues): *the climate crisis* and *immigration*. And if we revisit the past, it becomes clear that the two key maxim's I learnt when I was young, could provide the key to solving the thorny issues that confront us today. Today we expound at length about this thing called *Sustainable Development*; in lay man's language this simply means *Waste Not Want Not*. Today we talk about building walls, to keep legions of poor away from the resources of the rich, but if we took on board the old tenet of *Do unto Others*, those wall-building attitudes become redundant; unthinkable.

In addition, the two truisms work together, in that by revising our systems and building a more sustainable world, around renewable, non-polluting energies, we are building something worthwhile to hand on to future generations: doing unto them a service, that we would want to have done to ourselves, thus enabling a livelihood for them as good or better than the one we ourselves have experienced.

If we are a self-respecting society that encompasses self-respecting humans within its bounds, then surely the two maxims that have been with me since my childhood should ring true for everyone, and we should do our utmost to follow them. If we do not, then our society - built on a finely balanced planetary ecosystem, which has stood the test of time for millions of years - could be confronted by a painful, but relatively rapid death, played out over just one or two centuries!

To have and to hold; or to have and to throw away
... such is the power of humankind.

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