



## In the beginning ...

**George Stewart Lachlan McLoed is an ordinary individual, with a somewhat pretentious bunch of names (assuming one looks past the George that is). At least that's how he sees himself. There was a time, when the thought did cross his mind that he might indeed be extra-ordinary: the new Messiah - the immortal Son of God returning to Earth - growing up secretly amongst fellow mortals, in readiness to lead his flock to salvation, while friends and relations all perish around him. It was a hopeful dream, encompassing a number of inherent flaws.**

Eventually, as the years progressed, George saw reason, concluding that the same thought probably occurred to every other expectant soul in the universe. Regardless, he would soldier on, silently waiting for some miraculous sign from God the Father, just in case he was right, and the other squillions were wrong! At the same time, he realized that his chances of being the one chosen from the flock, were severely limited by the fact that since his rejection of Sunday school at about the age of twelve, he had regarded his potential benefactor - and would-be route to immortality - as a complete sham, dreamed up by a bunch of illiterate peasants, some two thousand years before.

What George did not fully realise, was that even if in the final analysis, it did turn out that he was *not* God's heavenly son on Earth, his life compared to many, had been quite

extraordinary. To date, he had not managed to reach those hypothetical human heights of Everest that most of us strive for - though who could guess what was still to come - and had not accumulated mountains of money, or both (hypothetical heights and mountains of money usually travelling hand-in-hand). No, the main feature of his gathered experience thus far - the theme tune that he could sing to the rest of the world - revolved around one word: *adversity*. He had faced it in bucketloads; it had been thrown over him at times like effluent from the underworld, from the start right up to the present day. But over the years he had learnt to cope with such misfortune and move on, regardless of whether the adversity he was asked to withstand came in the form of chronic and continuing, or catastrophic and acute. His periodic persecution we could call it, might well have appeared for example, either as the gradual failure of a long-standing relationship over months or years, or a surprise attack by terrorists, wielding guns and grenades: either were equally valid.

And who knew what was to come? More of the same most likely, if the past was anything to go by. *'Our history helps us to know and predict the future,'* he remembers being told at school, which all sounded a bit pompous, but maybe it was true.

***George expands on this topic, with some personal thoughts:***

*"How do I evaluate my life you ask? Well, that would be a tricky question for most people, and for me, certainly no different. I guess I look back on numerous decades of existence on what we are all led to believe is our Planet Earth, and wonder increasingly, what the hell it was all about. Have I led a good life? What is good? What is bad? I am no longer quite sure ... and I'm not sure anyone else in this confused world can be either. Or at least if they can be, then I wonder if they're telling the truth.*

*Currently (as I write this) the leader of the most powerful nation on Earth, a man with seven decades under his belt, behaves and talks as if he were still in his first. He causes mayhem wherever he goes, belittles the coronavirus pandemic and (even more importantly) denies climate change, which most of us know will severely damage our natural environment and the future for our children. Yet millions of people voted for him,*

*and still support him, so obviously they think he is a good man, and a role model for life. That for me is quite astonishing, almost unbelievable! But the longer one lives, the more one realizes that anything is possible – conceivable - believable. And perhaps what comes next could be Trump with a brain ... then the rest of us could really be in deep shit, unless we get our act together to prevent such a catastrophe happening.*

*I remember two adages from my first decade, told to me by my grandfather. At the time, I believed him to be my father, but he was into his sixties when I was approaching my teens, and though I loved him dearly – until the time we fell out – he had an air about him which was something of a hangover from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Victorian era: the period into which he had been born. The first, shall we call it proverb: **‘waste not, want not’**, became my rule for life, on how to interact with the environment around me. The second: **‘do unto others as you would have done to yourself’**, assumed my guide on how to relate to people I was in touch with: my family and my circle of friends.*

*It wasn't until I went back to university studies in my thirties, that I began to understand the value of a third maxim: **‘small is beautiful’** (coined by German philosopher, E.F. Schumacher). This actually joined together the two truisms learnt earlier. If you're only two or three people you don't need an enormous house; if you reside and work in the city you don't need a massive car. When you live in a palace and drive a monster, then your environmental footprint is bigger than it should be, while at the same time you are depriving someone else of a decent lifestyle by using more than your fair share. These three dictums together, having underpinned my short spell on this planet, can be applied accordingly to almost all the things that all of us do; all the things we strive for: all aspects of life as we know it on Earth.*

*My own circumstance shows clearly that the reality of experience influences what one thinks and does. Nature slowly becomes engulfed by nurture. The first twenty years or so, were for me predominantly rural - with Victorian overtones - and I allowed myself to be immersed in this comfort zone: to get pulled along by the family gripe that Clement Atlee and the Labour Party destroyed private industry in Britain during the 1940s, or to give tacit agreement to the 'White Australia Policy', until it was discarded as colonialist*

*and racist in the 1960s. Then, in my early twenties and from inside my Australian bubble, I began to see some of the flaws, and to ask some searching questions related for example, to class, to race, and to gender:*

*“Where does all this landed gentry and inheritance crap come from?”*

*“Why do my workmates refer to the rightful owners of Australia as ‘bungers’, and*

*“What is this male, macho, drunken-orgy stuff around the campfire. all about?”*

*I had adopted Australia in my teens, with a degree of blinkered gusto, but by the end of my twenties, I began to see a country where the majority of white males (all immigrants themselves) got half-pissed before six o’clock closing, whilst loudly deriding the rightful aboriginal owners of the place, for being alcoholics, and then knocking most newcomers to the country for gatecrashing the cosy existence of the incumbents.*

*By the age of thirty I was turned off by the whole thing!*

*But it wasn’t all black and white; there were many shades of grey in between. Through my work I came to know some exceptionally good people who owned large swathes of land, and when times were made tough by lack of rain, or locust invasions, their suffering was immense. I especially remember the horrors of a mouse plague, when the road at night appeared to be moving in front of the headlights: a living sea of mice scrambling this way and that. In conversation with one farmer friend, I listened in horror as he told me how mice would nibble on the ears of his kids when they were asleep in bed! Many of these ‘land-owning gentry’ were indeed my friends, so it was with a sense of guilt that I turned away from them, abandoning the good ships of white privilege and inheritance. I needed something more fulfilling than that to support my inner being.*

*In short, I needed to move away from my comfort zone - which had become my uncomfortable zone by then – and this feeling was intensified with a return to studies and the beginnings of an introductory understanding of Asia. There, my three dictates of life – **waste not want not - do unto others - small is beautiful** - were underlined in stark reality; in truth these are omnipresent facts of life and hard not to adhere to, for people and communities at ground level in India!*

*This all happened during my third and fourth decades, when the political views I aspired to, veered markedly from right to left. In 1967, native Aborigines had been given the right to vote, after surviving almost 200 years as inhabitants of their own country, under British rule and without such privilege. Not long after that the reforming labor leader, Gough Whitlam, was sacked by Sir John Kerr, a gin-swilling Governor General and representative of Queen Elizabeth. In other parts of the world, the impeachment of Nixon, the overbearing Cold War and the rise of Thatcherism, enabled Rupert Murdoch and his media buddies to flourish. Who in their right mind would not want to move left, in the face of all this abuse of power from the right? That, for what it was worth, was my somewhat naïve take on life at that time. By the end of my 30s I had come full circle and remember attending a peace rally in Adelaide, with close friends and my eldest daughter in a push chair, fully committed to the cause.*

*But though I became a 'Leftie', I was in many ways a moderate Leftie. I could see the value of compromise and came to understand that most things in life can never be viewed solely from one side of the spectrum; there was nearly always at least two opinions to go with any argument, and for any topic one might choose. The two disciplines of environment and agriculture for example, can be diametrically opposed; but having worked as an agriculture advisor, before moving to environmental education, I was able to view each from both sides of the same coin, and came to see that environmentalists and agriculturalists could on occasions, be equally right, while at other times wrong; either could overstep the mark, by stretching truth one way or the other. Over time, I began to realise that a path between opposing viewpoints and partisan positions was almost always available to be found and developed.*

*A fourth guiding star to grow out of all the above, is the notion that it is especially important to **'practice what you preach'**. If you do not, everything else – including the three other truisms - becomes a total sham. After taking up residence in Kenya and working to help educate youth on climate change, I could often become infuriated by the over-use of plastic bags: supermarkets would pack milk in one, eggs in another and soap in a third; you could walk out with ten or twenty bags derived from oil in your*

*trolley. The topic had been in the spotlight for years, but the plastics industry (which had ties to the retailing trade) ensured nothing of any significance was ever done about it. Suddenly in 2018, Kenya introduced zero tolerance to plastic bags, with threat of serious fines, even jail, for non-compliance. The pendulum had swung rapidly from words to action – from preaching to practice – and retail outlets, plus their customers, were forced to comply. I was heartened by this, it was at least vindication for the words I had been spouting in the classroom for so many years: ‘waste not, want not’, backed up by ‘practice what you preach’.*

*Growing up without knowing my true father and with a spurious relationship to my mother, I formed a thick skin - an independent persona – for my own being. This was accentuated when I became estranged from close family, particularly my grandfather - whom I always knew as my father - in that all-important formative time from 10 to 15 years. Looking back, I wish I had known my real father before he died (when I was in my twenties) and that I could have been able to experience the true mother-son relationship most others enjoy. But in many ways, the independent nature that has come from being alone and having to carve out my own path, has given me strength to face the many obstacles and adversities thrown on the track.*

*I remember quite vividly my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday - normally a reason to party with family and friends - where I found myself sitting at a dinner table in a remote part of Australia, with people I hardly knew. They were all a bit taken aback when I announced I was ‘21 today’. But events like that had ceased to worry me; the next day was a normal working day. A couple of years after that, I went close to drowning while swimming, and a decade or so later the small aircraft I was in almost crashed into the sea off the South Australian coast. In addition, there were incidents in other countries of near-death circumstances: frightening experiences, that I survived and moved on from, but which I feel may have tested the resolve of those with more cushioned backgrounds.*

*Occasionally, I get the feeling that the good die young – and in addition are perhaps lucky to do so - thereafter always seen in their characteristically younger image. John Lennon for example, looking like an Indian guru with long dark hair, that wide-brimmed*

*hat and narrow round specs, or David Bowie who departed life a relatively youthful and very stylish sixty-nine; whilst I live on into eternity, accumulating wrinkles on my neck and dead skin on my feet. Does this mean that I messed up, and got my guidelines for life all wrong, while Lennon and Bowie got the whole damn thing right? It's a torrid question that sometimes invades my dreams."*

*Of course, mine is a singular story – not one other, amongst Earth's almost eight billion, can boast exactly the same – but in some ways it is by no means unique. Many years after I had gone through the trauma of realising the details of my heritage were a pack of lies, I discovered the Hollywood actor, Jack Nicholson, recounting a very similar experience. For about 26 years he lived with people whom he believed to be his parents and older sister, then the 'sister' died of cancer. Ten years after that, he discovered the people he had grown up with, were actually his grandparents and his mother! He never knew his father. Later still, with the advantage of hindsight, Nicholson commented:*

***"I'd say it was a pretty dramatic event, but it wasn't what I'd call traumatizing, After all, by the time I found out who my mother was, I was pretty well psychologically formed. As a matter of fact, it made quite a few things clearer to me. If anything, I felt grateful."***

*I was a bit younger than Jack by the time the truth would out for me, and different to his experience, my sister/mother lived into her 90s, but the basic story is quite similar: a cover up by grandparents to protect their daughter, and her child. In essence I concur with his statement. Like him, I was obviously affected, but in the final analysis things became clearer, and I too felt grateful.*

***But I digress. Let the story continue .... "***

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