

# In the beginning ...

**We all have a tale to tell. That's what life is all about, isn't it? Whether a 'high-flyer', or living a life in abject poverty, it is a life: your life, my life; his life, her life. Immersed in each life, underlining every existence, there is a story to be told that has relevance to the sphere of its world.**

In the world beyond the person whose life is the focus of attention, some stories are perhaps less engaging than others. But it depends to some degree on how the story is told; how the important elements of that life are selected, then joined to form a complete portrait. A life story is a painting of countless brushstrokes: a Mona Lisa of our being.

For every individual, his or her own tale is the most enthralling story of all: more important than any president, or footballer, or film star. This is because you or I have lived every minute, every second, of our story: the highs, the lows, and the myriad of in-betweens. No other person's account of life can match our own story. The secret in making it captivating for others, depends on how the story is painted; how it is put together and relayed to the world beyond our own being.

## Introducing George

George Lachlan Peters is an ordinary individual; at least that's how he considers himself. At one stage the thought did cross his mind that he might be extra-ordinary: the new Messiah, in fact the immortal Son of God returning to Earth, growing up secretly amongst his fellow mortals, ready to lead and to live on into immortality, while his friends and relations all perished around him. Eventually he concluded that the same thought probably occurs to every other expectant person in the universe, but regardless, he would wait silently for some sign from God the Father, just in case he was right, and the other squillions were wrong!

What George did not realise was that that even if his final deduction deemed him not to be God's son on Earth, his life had in fact been very extraordinary by most standards,

and even mildly extraordinary when compared to other special cases. He hadn't managed to make it to the ranks of president or to accumulate mountains of money, or both – they usually go hand-in-hand - but the main thing that George's tale could tell, that he could sing to the world around him, revolved around one word: adversity. He had faced it in bucket loads, thrown over him at times like shit from a sewer, right from the beginning up to the present day. But over the years he had learnt to cope with misfortune – whether chronic, such as a relationship which ends in disaster, or acute, in the form bearing close witness to a terrorist attack – and move on.

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. Maybe that was true.

**George expands, with his personal thoughts:**

*"How does one evaluate a life? I look back on the seven decades of my existence on what we are told 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. Currently (in 2020) the leader of the most powerful nation on Earth, also 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 and denies climate change, which I am told will severely damage our natural environment. Yet millions of people vote for him and still support him, so obviously they think he is a good man, and a role model for life. Astonishing!*

*I remember two adages from my first decade, told to me by my grandfather, at the time in his sixties. The first: **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** became my guide on how to relate to the people around me.*

*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 E.F. Schumacher), which actually joined together the two truisms I had learnt earlier: if you're only two or three*

*people, you don't need an enormous house; if you live 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, that have underpinned my short spell on this planet, can be applied to almost all the things we do; all aspects of life 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 predominantly rural, with Victorian overtones, and I allowed myself to be immersed in this comfort zone. Then from inside what was then my Australian bubble, I began to see some of the flaws and to ask some searching questions, as related for example, to class, to race and to gender:*

***“Where did this landed gentry, inheritance crap come from?”***

***“Why did my workmates refer to the rightful owners of this country (Australia) as bungs and to Asian immigrants as gooks or slant-eyes?”***

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

*By the age of thirty I was turned off by it all!*

*But it wasn't all black and white; there were many shades of grey in between. I knew some exceptionally good people who owned large swathes of land and when times were tough, their suffering was immense. And I called many my friends, so it was with a sense of guilt that I turned away from them: abandoned the good ship's privileged and macho inheritance. I needed something more fulfilling than that, to support my inner soul.*

*In short, I needed to move away from my comfort zone, (it had become my uncomfortable zone by then) intensified with a return to studies and beginnings of an introductory knowledge of Asia. There, my three dictates of life – **waste not want not / do unto others / small is beautiful** - were underlined in stark reality: they are hard to avoid 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. Aboriginals had been given the vote in Australia, after almost 200 years of White supremacy, but soon after, the reforming labor leader, Gough Whitlam, was sacked by a gin-swilling Governor General. In other parts of the world, the impeachment of Nixon, the overbearing Cold War and the rise of Thatcherism, kept Rupert Murdoch and his media alive and well. Who in their right mind would not want to move left, in the face of all this abuse of power from the right?*

*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. 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 both sides of the coin and to see that both environmentalists and agriculturalists could on occasions, overstep the mark, by stretching truth one way or the other. At times, a path between opposing viewpoints and partisan positions needs to be found.*

*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 becomes a total sham. After taking up residence in Kenya and working to help educate youth on climate change, I often became 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 in your trolley. The topic had been in the spotlight for years, but the plastics industry ensured nothing was ever done about it. Suddenly, in 2018, Kenya introduced zero tolerance to plastic bags, with threat of serious fines, or jail, for non-compliance. The pendulum swung rapidly from words to action – from preaching to practice – and retail outlets, plus their customers, were forced to comply!*

*For myself, this was vindication of the words I had been spouting in the classroom for many years and enabled me, in practice, to reduce my use of plastics at the source. Then, I was able to re-use the new biodegradable bags (that shops offered) for garbage*

*disposal (after separating vegetable matter and re-useable items). Together this served two of my long-valued truisms: practice what you preach, and waste not want not.*

*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 being. This was accentuated when I became estranged from close family, particularly my grandfather whom I knew as my father, in those all-important formative years, from ten to fifteen. Looking back, I wish I had known my real father before he died (when I was in my thirties) and that I could have experienced a true mother-son relationship, most others enjoy. But in many ways, the independent nature that has come from being alone has given me strength to face the many adversities that have been thrown in my path.*

*I remember 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. But events like that had ceased to worry me; I just went on with my work the next day, as normal. A couple of years after that, I went close to drowning while swimming and a decade or so later, the small aircraft I was flying in almost crashed into the sea off the South Australian coast. There were also 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 thereafter are always seen in their characteristically younger image. John Lennon, for example, looking like an Indian guru with long hair and round glasses, or David Bowie, who being my age, departed as a quite youthful sixty-nine, while I live on, accumulating wrinkles on my neck and dead skin on my feet. Does this mean that in comparison David was good and that I got my guidelines for life all wrong? It's a torrid question that sometimes invades my dreams."*

*"So that's a brief introduction (or is it summary?) which focuses on my early life and the values that I came to hold dear to my heart."*

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