

From the Kitchen

8 July 2009

I am who I say I am because I say so. I am a writer because I declare it. I was a lawyer; I was a social worker; I was a therapist; I was a CEO; all because I said so.

It's easy to have what we do and who we are be the result of chance, mishap, happenstance or fate. If we take that path, we believe we have no control over our lives. If we allow any of these to be the excuse for our current identity or work (or lack of either) then we are denying that we actually made a choice, or a string of choices. To allow what happens, to dictate what we do and who we are, we make a choice to allow it.



Every circumstance offers us the opportunity to stay on our present path or to stray off and explore another. Or to go bush. Most people whose lives we admire have made such choices, especially when circumstances have been difficult or 'disaster' has struck. Many people have coined sayings around the idea that if opportunity knocks, you had better be home to open the door.

An opportunity may only appear as such if it fits in with our plans and with our view of who we are. If it doesn't fit, we ignore it, or even curse it as an interruption to our career.

Career – I have always disliked the concept of having a career. It has a sense of being out of control – careering along, having to go as circumstances dictate, following an ever-deepening rut.

I learned the value of taking responsibility for my life from my parents. Like many people living in Europe in the 1930s and through the '39 - '45 war, their circumstances were terrible. They survived because they bucked against those circumstances as much as they could. After the war, they made choices that appeared to lead in the wrong direction. As soon as they could and as much as they could, they made new choices in response to 'mistakes'.

When we came to Australia in 1955, the expected course would have been for us to go into a migrant hostel, such as Bonegilla. They decided 'no' and embarked on a different course, with many twists and turns, halts and restraints. They had made prior arrangements for private accommodation in Sydney, and this fell through. Undaunted, we spent six weeks in a boarding house. My parents' attitude led them from Sydney to the NSW countryside to Melbourne, through many jobs and occupations, to finally going to university in their forties and joining the teaching profession. Nobody was allowed to tell them what they could and could not do.

I am the same. The fact that I'm sitting here at the kitchen table, in the afternoon sun, in the middle of the week, is evidence of that. I left a job I'd had for sixteen years, took long-service leave and declared that I was now a writer. I had no idea how I was going to generate money and I decided that that was a secondary concern, if a concern at all. People told me that most writers don't make a living from their writing. My answer has been that some do and that I will join those some.

Not long ago I learned that some writers were invited to sit in cafés as 'writers in residence', to talk to customers about writing and to sip coffees as they resided. No-one invited *me*, so I invited myself: I went to the owner of a local café and suggested they needed a writer in residence. Now I spend one afternoon a week soaking up the attention and the coffee. I have

no idea what, if anything, it will lead to, but my ear is tuned to potential knocking at the door. My experience is that the universe seems to respond to my intentions.

The dog has just got up from his sunny spot, stretched, and come over to me. He's nuzzling my leg, demanding attention. The angle of his head and his soft whimper tell me that he wants to go for a walk. He is a prime example of a creature who is easily satisfied with what the world around him offers and is also capable and willing to attempt to change those circumstances; and his ear is finely tuned to any 'knocking on the door' that may mean food or an outing, or simply attention.

How can I not respond to that?