

## *From the Kitchen*

23 June 2010



I love the changing seasons we experience in Melbourne. I like change. Change brings challenges and keeps me alert and alive.

The extremes in temperature are temporary, unlike in London (where I lived for some years), where there can be ice on the footpaths and roads for weeks on end. Here we have the odd, short run of near-freezing nights and, in summer, short forays into the forties (Celsius). You can anticipate a change within a few days.

What *is* a challenge, is the response to hot and cold weather by shop owners and business managers. When it is 12°C outside and I am all rugged up, it makes no sense to have to strip down to shirtsleeves because the shop I have entered had the thermostat set to 22° or even 25°. For people coming in and out, 18° would be less of a shock and jumpers or jackets would keep the staff inside comfortable. And in summer, shops can be 15° cooler than it is outside, making me wish I'd been carrying an otherwise unnecessary jumper.

At home, kids may need to be educated to wear jumpers inside, instead of cranking their heaters up to sauna level while they sit around in t-shirts. A greater willingness to endure the ups and downs of the weather would be healthier and would go some way to reducing our impact on the environment. This could also lead to a greater ability to weather the ups and downs of life. We could all be more resilient.

We seem less prepared to put up with the vicissitudes of life than I remember we were thirty or forty years ago. Or is that just my failing memory? Maybe it is a consequence of fewer people living in the country (relative to the number of city dwellers). The city offers more resources for smoothing things out – temperature, inclemency, human waste – and supplies reliable electricity, TV, mobile phone coverage, Internet, etc.

Most of our cars offer 'climate control', which may explain why so many people seem to live in the fairytale where humans can control nature. It is only a further short step to feeling something is wrong when we cannot control the rest of life.

A program now operating in over a hundred primary schools (the brainchild of cook and writer Stephanie Alexander) is a wonderful way of bringing children to a more accurate view of the world. It teaches where food comes from as students grow their own vegetables and use them to prepare meals in class. These children are no longer under the illusion that food comes from the supermarket. It is a step towards re-appreciating our inseparability from our environment and better government support for the program would help improve overall health.

It brings me back to those societies in which inseparability from the environment is probably not even discussed, because everything about their lives honours the fact that they are part of everything in their world. Thus, they naturally live the rhythms of everything

around them. Although *we* pay lip service to this in, for instance, our burial ritual when we intone, “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust”, most of us live our lives believing the words in the first book of the Judeo-Christian Old Testament, which appear to encourage humankind to exercise dominion over the entire biosphere, as well as over the land and sea. That the same ancient document appears to also exhort humans to look after it all, seems to be too often forgotten.

Those people fortunate, or wise, enough to not consider themselves as superior to the rest of creation, find themselves expending less energy in an attempt to change what really is not theirs to change. There are things that need to be let be. Maybe the ‘Serenity Prayer’ should be extended to include the line, “... and grant me the humility to leave alone those things that are not mine to mess with.”

Much of the messing around we do comes from thinking that *now* we know how it all works; *now* we understand. No we don’t! What this hubris makes clear, is that we consistently forget that, historically, there has always been an attitude of finally understanding how the universe works. We laugh at the naïvety of past generations and don’t realise that in a hundred years (or less) our own naïvety will be laughed at.

If we want there to be a good chance of there being anyone around in a hundred years to laugh at our naïvety or stupidity, it is incumbent on us to teach our children, our politicians and our business leaders what it would be wise not to mess with.