

From the Kitchen

20 April 2011



“ ‘Grandpa, get a life!’ That’s what Jed said to me the other day.”

“They’re all the same, these youngsters. They forget we have navigated our way through decades while they have less than two and they think they know it all.”

So went the conversation of ‘The Venerables’, a group, this morning, of two couples and a widower, ranging in age from seventy-two to ninety-four. They were sitting in their usual spot on a Thursday morning in the sun outside Café on the Mount. In any given week they could number from two to nine, depending on the vagaries of health, mood, visiting family, travel and weather. Their sworn duty was to discuss the world’s ills and heal them – if only anyone would take any notice.

“Did we say things like that to our grandparents?”

“We wouldn’t have dared. I’d have been cuffed around the ears and sent to bed without supper.”

“Maybe we *are* too old and too much from another world to be of any use to the youngsters. Perhaps we don’t understand their world sufficiently.”

“Maybe so, but the fundamentals haven’t changed. Some of our kids are still searching for their place in it, as we did and as *our* children did. Our son wanted to be a Jedi knight and ended up settling for being an accountant; and then called his children Jed, Leia, Mara-Jade and Jacen.”

“And our daughter, Phoebe. She’s in and out of one career after another and then not working at all; no husband and no children. She told her mother the other day that she can’t work out what to do with her life. At forty-three!”

“It was easier for some of us. We were often told what to study or what trade to get into, or we went to war or followed our fathers. I became a builder like my dad and Mary was expected to stay home until she got married.”

“Didn’t you ever question that?”

“I wondered sometimes how my life would be different if I’d stayed at school. But then I wouldn’t have met Mary at the builders’ annual picnic.”

“Perhaps that’s the difficulty the young ones face today – too many choices and too many competing pressures.”

“They’re not all lost causes. Take my grandson Josh for instance. He’s seventeen and leading a group from schools in his area to encourage other students to help make their schools ‘energy neutral’, as he puts it. He says that his parents’ generation has messed it up and now it’s up to his generation to fix it. Actually, ‘messed’ wasn’t quite the word he used.”

“Our generation wasn’t much better. We blithely took what we wanted from the earth and dumped our waste into the oceans. We believed that the resources available would never run

out and the oceans were effectively infinite. When I worked for the government, I helped build the sewerage outlet into Bass Strait. Stuff went out totally untreated.”

“Yes, there are a lot of good kids around. My niece’s daughter was in a school group of year eleven students that visited Timor earlier in the year. I think it was organised by one of the large NGOs. They were all students who are considering careers that may help the developing countries. Some of these kids have great hearts.”

“You’re right. There *are* good kids around and they’re concerned about their future. Some, like your grandniece, seem to know where they want to go. But what about the others?”

“What others?”

“You know, those roaming the streets aimlessly on the weekends, at a loose end. They need guidance and they don’t seem to be getting any.”

“Where can they get the guidance? Most have parents working long hours, their teachers are overworked with extra duties and large classes, the local councils seem to have reduced the number of youth workers or dropped them completely. There’s not much there for those kids.”

“If they are going to end up as decent citizens, something certainly needs to change.”

“Well, rather than just sit here and gab about it, what can we do to help these kids along, to encourage them?”

“We could offer to talk to them at local schools.”

“We could meet here in the afternoon instead of the morning so that students can drop in for a chat after school.”

“We could make ourselves available to those kids who are already doing positive things – help them along with our knowledge and experience.”

“We could sit in the local libraries and ‘lend’ ourselves out to children who want to soak up our wisdom.”

“What, take us home with them? That could be interesting.”

The lively discussion continued through another round of coffees and they finally left with promises to use such contacts as they had in the community, including the police, councillors, teachers and community workers, to turn their discussion into action.