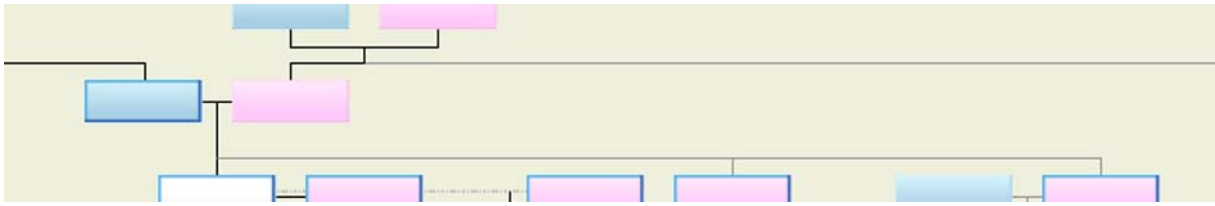


From the Kitchen

31 August 2011



When you were born, it is very likely that your parents expected that you would live a long, healthy, happy and productive life. But unlike with the purchase of, say, a car, there was no guarantee. Yet, many of us seem to live our lives as if this were not so – we think and often act as if someone else is responsible for our lives not turning out as expected.

We also grow up believing that we need to achieve certain things our parents or teachers, or other people, have told us to achieve. Whose expectations are you living?

Most of us are brought up to believe that we should live according to certain rules. For some, these rules can be distilled into the commandment: behave towards others as you would want them to behave towards you. For others it is a strict moral and/or social code, often based on religious teachings.

Many of us live on the basis that, if we behave according to the rules and codes we were brought up with and get our education or training, the world will be a wonderful place to be in and we will coast through to old age and a peaceful death. It rarely works like that. So, who is responsible for the mismatch of expectations and reality?

My cosmology (my world view, my philosophy) includes the belief that I am ultimately responsible for my life. I don't believe that responsibility for my life rests with any other individual or group, or with a higher force.

Where do you place responsibility?

Your parents are the children of four people, each with their unique genetic makeup. Your grandparents may have belonged to a recognisable ethnicity, or two ethnicities. Thus your grandparents and parents made choices which dictated your genetic makeup. Your maternal grandparents chose to be together and have your mother; similarly your paternal ones. Then your parents chose to get together and chose to have you. You can go right back generations – at each level decisions were made which ultimately formed you.

Because of choices your parents made, you live in a certain place, went to certain schools, and may have gone to university or into a trade. Maybe only the last choice was yours. Or maybe you left home at a certain age in order to get away from their choices. Do you blame your parents and/or grandparents for any of the choices they made which have affected your life? If you do, does such blame lead you to any choices of your own that make a difference in your life?

At the schools you went to you may have had no real choice about the teachers you ended up with. Wherever you now work (if you work), you may have had no real choices about your superiors or co-workers. How have any of these circumstances affected your life?

You may have lived in situations where the environment had an effect on your health. For instance, you may have lived near a busy highway and been affected by lead in the exhausts of vehicles; you may have lived in a house with a very high radon load; you may have been exposed to asbestos, tobacco smoke, urban atmospheric pollution or any other of a myriad potentially harmful substances.

You may have been born into a society or community where you had little or no contact with the world outside that society or community. You may have been home-schooled on a large property in outback Australia with almost no contact with other children. You may have been an only child; or the oldest of a small or large number of siblings; or the youngest; or in the middle somewhere; your siblings may all have been the same gender as you, or all of the other gender.

I could go on. My point is that you are who you are, and where you are right now, partly or largely because of choices you did not make. No-one is where they are now entirely through other people's choices – at some time you will have made at least a few choices of your own. The question is: how do you respond to all those choices that were made without your input and maybe on your behalf? Your answer to that question can tell you a lot about your life and how you are living it.

[to be continued in next post]