
Ordinary Blokes Finding Peace

Clive Duffy

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I'll just tell you about the story of my life.

My Family

I grew up in a very loving family in Brisbane. We had a lot of tragedy in our family. We had three grandparents and my little sister die in a four year period. My father was very ill, near dying, for many years through that and beyond. And my Mum, who is 93 still alive and with a bright mind, kept us all going. She has always been the backbone of the family.

My Schooling

I went to an all-boys Christian Brothers college in Brisbane. It was fairly hard for me because I was a child who had a lot of sensitivity. In those days, sensitivity in children wasn't as valued in children as it is now. At school we had cadets and we went on army camps. In those days that was a very big feature of male training.

Another big feature of male training was to try and eradicate any sense of emotion within a male. My father was a very sensitive person. He had been a very good rugby league player. He played for Brisbane and I think he was reserve for Queensland one year. He had a great sensitivity and taught me lots of things about life, that I think even today a lot of people don't understand.

Dad died when I was 21. I had left high school by that stage, and I had gone to uni, and I had failed first year economics three years in a row. I had a good time. I enjoyed myself immensely but I didn't learn much about economics. And I think it's better for the country that I didn't become an economist.

Work

Then I joined a bank and went to Bowen in North Queensland. I worked in the bank for nine months. I didn't find that really interesting so I decided I would move on. I got a job doing

clerical work, which is like paper work, at the local meat works in Bowen. I did that for two and a half years.

I enjoyed living in Bowen, living in a small town. I was living in the only boarding house in the town. I'd never lived outside my own home before that. So, like you boys living in college here, that was the first time I'd lived away from home. So that was a unique experience. I lived with a lot of men - there were all males in the boarding house, who did things differently to what I'd ever seen before. So that was a real education for me about people.

Social Work

While I was in Bowen I also joined the St Vincent de Paul and I found that I liked helping people. I really enjoyed that. So then I found that there was a career called social work. I didn't know that it existed before that. So I decided that I would come back to uni and see if I could get in to social work. I came back and found that because I had failed all those years before, they had the opinion that I couldn't study. It took a bit of convincing to get back into uni.

Again this is the sort of thing that I have found has happened in my life quite a bit. I used to go out to see the heads of department at uni to try and convince them to let me back in, and they would say 'no'. They sent me an official letter saying they wouldn't accept me and that I would have to go and study some grade 12 subjects part time and pass those before they would consider me again.

And then about a week later, I got another letter from the enrolments section saying that I had been accepted to do social work and that if I would just go ahead and pay my fees I could go to uni. That's the sort of thing that's happened for me quite often. When there is something that I've had in mind that I've wanted to do, and it seemed like it wasn't possible, suddenly a door would open for me. All that was required of me was to put in the effort to get through that door, in this case, graduate in social work.

I didn't have any problem studying social work. I didn't fail any subjects and I was able to get through. It took me six years because I worked to earn money all the way through. So I was going to uni and I was also working because in those days you had to pay up front fees, there was no HECS or anything like that. So I had to earn my income for my keep and also pay my uni fees.

In the second last year of uni, I married my wife. That was 32 years ago. I still did my final year of social work. I used to drive cabs to earn money. And for 3 years I was a welfare officer in a homeless persons hostel. For 2 years I was doing clerical work for a multi-national corporation. When I graduated, I went to work as a social worker in a psychiatric hospital. It was an area I had a lot of hope for and understanding. But when I got into that system, I realized it was a system that I alone wasn't going to be able to change.

So after about three and a half years of doing that I went on to become a Family Court counsellor. The Family Court is a place where people go for divorce and also custody and

access. The counselling service helps people sort things out rather than go through the court system.

Children - Life through your own eyes

I did that for about three and a half years and during that time our two children were born, our daughter, Meggan, who is now 30 and our son, Ryan, who is now 29. Their coming changed my understanding of life a lot. Kids teach you so much because they see the world with fresh eyes. By the time they came along, I was thirty and they looked at life with new eyes. They taught me a lot. I think that's one of the good things you have as a younger person. You actually have the opportunity to see life through your own eyes. And that's really important to know, that inside you is a person and you're looking at life through your eyes. The person beside you might not be seeing the same as you but that doesn't matter. It's what you're seeing that's really important. I think that's one of the things that my father taught me that's really helpful in doing what I do.

So when I left the Family Court I started part-time work in my own private practice and for a social worker that's not very usual. There were not many social workers at that time that did that. I also worked for Queensland Marriage Guidance Counsellors, which is now called Relationships Australia. So I had half a week earning money by being paid and the other half I had to earn it myself. Again that was another big change. When you start off your own business it's a totally different world to when you work for other people. You have to have a lot of things that you create from within yourself.

Discovering my Innateness

I've always found working with people very enjoyable. A lot of people say to me, "How do you do this?" because I have about 32 appointments a week, sometimes 38, where I'm sitting and listening to people very unhappy with their lives and problems. But what I like is I've been given a gift which I think I've developed. This is the thing which I think at the School of Total Education they call your innateness. What you're naturally good at. And what I'm naturally good at is hearing people and what's happening to them and trying to help them. When I look back at my childhood, all the way through, if I go to school reunions they all say to me, "Oh, you were the bloke we'd all go to to talk about our problems". I didn't realize that at the time, but when I look back I realize that is what was happening. So I always had that ability to listen to people and try to help them with their problems.

Learning lessons

Around about 46 I found myself very unsettled. My kids were 16 and 15 and what I realized was that I always wanted to race motorbikes and I'd never done it. I happened to meet a fishing mate who was also interested in motorbikes. So we started racing historic motorbikes. Historic motorbikes were from the 1950s and 60s. We did things like went down to Philip Island and raced down there, which was fantastic. The bikes themselves

would get up to about 160 or 170 kph on the straights, so not as fast as modern bikes which are up around 300 kph, but fast enough that if you come off at that speed you hurt things. Falling off a motorbike is a bit like falling off a chair. You don't actually have a far distance to fall, it's the speed you're going at and the stop at the end that creates the problem, as you're sliding along.

I only had two crashes on motorbikes, both of them weren't bad crashes. But when I used to get out on the track there would be a 19 year-old in me who would want to go absolutely berserk and kill me and it would be my 46 year-old struggling to try and keep that 19 year-old under control. So I'd be out on the track and, don't worry about the other competitors, I'm battling myself inside. And it took a long time for me to get those two to work together so that I could be adventurous enough: the 19 year-old had adventure but was a bit reckless, and the 46 year-old had a lot more wisdom and understanding, and could keep control. So when they got together, I could have a lot of fun. I never went out to win races because I wasn't as competitive as some people. I went out to have fun and I enjoyed that.

The best thing for me was when the time came to finish I knew I had got that out of my system, so I could move on. I think that's one of the things that's really important. There are yearnings inside you as you are growing up that it's really important to explore. Go and try and see what they are. Sometimes they teach you what you think they will, and sometimes they teach you something else. Sometimes you don't need to keep doing that anymore because you've learned the lesson.

Knowing yourself as a person

I'm 61 and I'm only half way through my life. I'm only at half time. I must be playing junior games. As Andrew was saying, as you grow older, you learn so much more. One thing for me at this age is that I have understandings of life that eases things. I see trouble coming and I can get out of its way. Or if something happens, I can go to the wisdom that's inside me and sort out what is the best way for me to handle this situation. I've had a few times where I've had people hold guns at my head; when I was racing motorbikes, people coming up on a corner when you could only fit one bike so we were both in trouble. When all those situations happen, what I find is my mind goes inside me and things go into slow-mo, even when you're racing high speed, you'd think it had taken 20 seconds but it's actually happened in a click of the fingers. But inside me gives advice on how to handle it so I survive.

So it's very important for you as you're growing up as men to realize that men are taught a lot to notice things outside and to go for achievements outside. And that's okay. Doing that is important. What you do with your energy is very important. But knowing yourself as a person inside is very important. What I teach people is knowing that in your heart you have principles and values that you believe is the right thing to do in life. It's a knowing you have. It's not words. You don't have to grapple with words. It's just a knowing. You can tell when you're in touch with that because you feel very calm inside.

So when these things are happening outside me at a great rate of knots and my life's in danger, I get this very calm advice from within about how to handle it. Every time that

advice is very accurate and works well. But I've had to make that connection. And younger people in the audience, you won't like to hear this, but I don't think anyone becomes an adult until you're at least 30. I think it takes that amount of learning before you can start having a sense of being in control of your own life. I think that's the essence of what Andrew was saying. Being in control of your own life. You have to respond to what's outside. And that comes also in what Andrew was saying, deciding what your passions are. See that crazy journey of mine, failing economics, working in a bank, going to Bowen, living in a boarding house, working in the meat works. I couldn't have had a better education to be a counsellor. Because I kept meeting all these different types of people and they kept teaching me about people and what happens inside them. By the time I came to be a counsellor, I already had a knowledge from those experiences. Whatever you do and wherever you go, there is no such thing as making a wrong decision. Some decisions you suffer more from and some decisions you benefit more from, but there is always learning. And that learning is what wisdom is. Wisdom is what you learn from your experiences in life. So be aware of your own internal wisdom and be able to talk to it and hear what it says inside, so that it can give you advice as to what is best to do.

Emotions, they're not good advisors. They're developed in childhood and they only have childlike solutions. The wisdom in your heart is where you have got to learn, what is the best thing for me to do.

I have had a great life. I've enjoyed every moment. My mum is 93 and she and I have conversations that I absolutely enjoy. I'm amazed how that at 93 she can keep opening her mind to new learning. She is a great role model for me. I hope that at 93 I have the same ability that she has.

Growing up as a male in this era is a lot more difficult than it was in mine. In the 60s and 70s we actually got a pretty good time. Those before us had been in the depressions and wars, but we actually got the benefit of that in that period of time. In actual fact in that era there were less controls on us than there are today: like you could hoon around. I started driving a motor vehicle when I was 16 in Brisbane. You knew if the police caught you they would say, "Now you're a naughty boy, you drive home." They didn't confiscate your car or anything. Just, "You drive home and don't let me catch you doing it again." As long as they didn't catch you again, you were alright. You had that old way of life where there was great cooperation between people. And there were less expectations of us as we grew up about what we had to do or be.

Taking Advice

The other thing as I said before, I found that if I just kept going on and thinking, "Okay well this feels alright for me to be heading in this direction." When I got into trouble, someone would always appear at my elbow. A friend or sometimes it would be someone I had just met, and they would give me some really good advice about how to handle this because they had been through some part of life that had taught them this. And I was able to hear that advice. And then, I always had to do it my way, you've got to do it your own way. It's no good doing it someone else's way because that way fits their life. You have to do it the way it fits your life.

I've enjoyed being a male and I look forward to a lot more years of learning and understanding and enjoying myself. Age is not on the outside, age is what you have in your heart. I certainly don't feel 61 in my heart. I think I might have got to 45 in my heart. Thanks for that.