

## **Living beyond life: my maternal Grandfather**

I think of my grandfather Percy sitting in an old armchair reading, the book lit by a simple lamp on a hexagonal occasional table, and now and then making notes of salient points for later reference. He has only one eye and diminished sight in the other.

I see him in a small, crowded living room barely enough for two comfortable armchairs, an overflowing bookcase, a desk built to his own design, two woven cane chairs, a simple dining table pushed in a corner with three rigid upright chairs. The piano, beyond redemption, is squeezed into another corner. The picture is completed by a wide wooden window ledge where I sit and read, delightfully at peace.

I think of the eye that is not.

Overnight glass sitting in a glass, adjacent to the teeth.

It intrigues me, and I do not sense or understand his sensitivity to the sight of his unseeing eye socket.

I see a life untroubled by desire for material possessions. A sober, gentle, scholarly, modest, unassuming, and humble human being. He possesses dictionaries, a thesaurus, and fittingly a concordance.

I think of the pleasure he evinces when we collect, from the local railway station, a parcel of books from the Melbourne Public Lending Library (and on alternate fortnights from the Melbourne Athenaeum Library).

I think of my mother's observation that her parents were never so well off as when they received the old age pension.

I see a life not of frugality but one carefully balanced with resources available: when that means the extravagance of only one 100W bulb, where the remnants of soap bars are carefully saved and amalgamated, where shirt collars are turned, where worn woollen garments are carefully picked apart and the yarn reused, where every rubber band, paper clip and scrap of paper is saved for a rainy day, and bed sheets are sides to middled. Not quite 'shoe box in middle of road' but also not 'luxury'.

I think of him as a pacifist who could accept the death in war of his only begotten son, and yet maintain a simple but complex and deep Christian faith. He lives in a world where his God would walk with him and talk with him and tell him he was His own.

I see him as a father who plays cricket with his children, who works on his orchard but will happily design the local church and represent his fellow fruit growers with the export of their fruit.

I think of him walking across the paddocks to school with his children, and I'm grateful that at 98 years of age my mother still has the pleasure of reciting from memory much of the English romantic poets. I wandered lonely as a daffodil in Kubla Khan.

I think of his love of nature and its expression in later generations of his family in their love of Australian natural history.

I remember long evening walks on which he introduces me to aesthetic aspects of gardening and garden design (in the shade of Edna Walling), to music, art, architecture and design, and every dog along the way. Education through observation and experience. My brother and I have some altercation, and he demonstrates with a bundle of sticks that in unity there is strength.

I wonder why I was so involved with my own life that I neglected to ask him the how and why questions; and could be satisfied with what. I ponder his decision to forge a life not as an architect in London but to migrate to Australia, rusticate, and recuperate. And I am grateful.

COVID-19

Different times: different places  
and yet!

I am sitting in an old armchair reading, the book lit by a simple lamp on a hexagonal occasional table, and now and then making notes of salient points for a later reference.

#### Postscript

In the final year of secondary school I was the only one of my friends whose grandparents were all still alive and 'had their marbles'. My paternal grandparents lived next door and my maternal grandparents only 2 miles away. My father was an only child and my mother's brother died early in World War II, so we had no aunts and uncles and therefore, not surprisingly, no cousins. My four siblings and I were the sole focus of grandparental attention and we all benefitted from that. During my adolescence I would stay at my maternal grandparents on one night each week seeing that there was enough wood chopped and doing odd jobs. My grandmother provided coaching in Mathematics, English and French. It was one of the highlights of my life and lives on.

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