

JUST FAMOUS ENOUGH NOT TO BE NOTICED

As told by
Michael Donovan

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11.

2013 - 2015 New challenges

*Sometimes I pretend to be normal but it gets boring ...
so I go back to being me and of course I talk to myself
because sometimes I need expert advice.*

In 2009/10, I noticed some symptoms indicating early Parkinson's. My suspicions, based on a set of indicators, were confirmed by a neurologist.

Some time later in 2012, with a successful stent operation behind me, I was at a breakfast party at the home of our friends Liz and Ron Meikle where I collapsed in a slow swan dive over a Cloisonné urn, deftly depositing a cup of coffee on the sideboard as I sank to my knees near unconscious.

Although a radiologist by career, Ron Meikle had trained as a neurologist and saw something different in the multiplicity of issues besetting me. With my permission he did research and consulted with my GP for a referral to one of the global top-five expert teams Neurosciences Queensland for a rare condition called *Shy-Drager Syndrome* or more commonly expressed as

Multiple System Atrophy. Trust me not to come down with a treatable and common condition.

It seems I have most of the indicators for MSA so a three to five year management plan was adopted. However, exercise, rehab, treatment and determination has seen the condition timescale revised to seven to nine years probably counting from 2011/12. MSA is incurable and terminal. I spoke to a psychologist friend Warren Kennaugh about the stages of grieving effect which I am yet to experience. Apparently, I may not. This is perhaps because of my lack of any belief in an afterlife and firmly believing what we get or create for ourselves, is all there is. As an atheist I have no qualms about realistically considering voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide while I still can through my own free-choice.

I am open about my condition if anyone enquires regarding my various observable symptoms, odd behaviours and tricks to compensate during the day as various aspects of my MSA affect me. Each system failure produces a set of reactions for which I have to compensate. For instance the hypotension requires me to not stand still for very long so I walk on the spot or in small circles to keep from fainting. This has been disconcerting for some who thought I was being impatient until Carol explains my condition. Unknown challenges lie ahead but the physiotherapy assists greatly with the physical aspects which are becoming more pronounced.

Further mental deterioration will likely follow and progressively present new challenges. The final parts of this book were done using speech-to-text software as my typing is poor and I've lost recognisable handwriting.

On 30 June 2013 I ceased all mentoring work, all directorships and except for assisting, back then, in trying to get the *Biosphere Institute for Sustainability: Noosa* up and running almost all other advisory input stopped.

Although, I did do a project with my old mate and talented strategy coach Warren Kennaugh (Yes, the same). Grant Crossley

of Total Executive and Mike Boorn Plener of Board Connector identified an opportunity in the marketplace for budding directors and directors facing personality based board issues. Through Warren, I was approached to produce a first draft of Day 1 of a two day course around governance basics, issues management and board engagement. A mentoring associate David Stephens edited and subsequently presented this day in late 2014. I no longer have the energy any more to facilitate a full day.

Warren did a Day 2 special on board and director interpersonal relations. A sort of EQ meets IQ and how to drain the emotional swamp of crocodiles. David and I did a review to align Warren's subjects with the legal framework. Between us, as the three co-authors, we created a courseware handbook which has proven quite successful when presented by Board Connector. Participants also get unlimited access to my large knowledge library of articles on leadership.

More authoring while I still can may provide the intellectual challenge I crave.

With this book behind me and the research and archive resources still available, I am being encouraged to write in more detail about my arts and tourism/biosphere experiences.

In 2015, I assisted the mentors in the successful Business Mentoring Noosa program with a series of conversations around technique and offered insight into the Noosa Chamber of Commerce initiatives to create a convention centre and to establish a Noosa International Film Festival. Déjà vu!

In 2016, CCIQ Noosa also initiated a pre-feasibility study working group to consider the viability for a purpose build Performing Arts Centre and similarly purpose built Convention and Exhibition Centre in Noosa. I took on the assembly and drafting of the study for submission to Noosa Council based on the group contributions. For this work I was recognised in the Inaugural Noosa Electorate Queensland Day Awards for service to our local community. A nice and appreciated accolade.

In June 2015, I continued my on-going community contribution as a member of the Noosa Council facilitated Local Economic Plan Project Group.

Writing this autobiography has turned out to be most stimulating. As I look back to January 2012, it was then when I commenced work, with my book editor Paulette Gee, but only completed chapter one by October 2012 due to other commitments. The first memory-based full draft was done by July 2013. I then extracted recollection corrections, adjusted timelines and forgotten details from thirty-seven years of diaries and files into the first cut completing the assembly on Thursday, 19 December 2013. The original word target was eighty thousand. I have left much out still at one hundred and forty two thousand words. Phew!

It was not my original intention to save and preserve all the records which have been used to write this book for that specific purpose. But I did retain them, as taxation and business records, and have long seen the opportunity to use the resource once they became a collection of substance. The recall, research and writing experience have been surprisingly very emotional.

Another six months of review and edits was to follow. I agree with Paulette, everyone with an interesting story should write it down for their family and friends. I hope my tome hasn't bored you.

So what is next? Carol and I are travelling more using our timeshare and our love of cruising to fit in as much of what we want to see and experience as we can before such exertion is unmanageable by me. I have rediscovered my interest and skill in photography.

According to the journey dBase in TripAdvisor, which I have back-filled along with current itineraries, Carol and I have visited 40 countries over the years and are within striking distance of 160 cities visited in our time together. My reviews have a surprisingly large readership.

Our mutual interest in food and wine is central to the extended experiences we seek as travellers. The impressive photo books,

which Carol so cleverly puts together after each trip, feature images from markets, restaurant meals and our own creations with local product. We do not necessarily go to a country because of a particular cuisine rather, once there, we seek out the unusual and look to dine with the locals, join cooking classes and sample sustainably sourced and harvested delicacies.

Our Noosa pantry has some exotic items gathered on trips and dispensed in creating meals for our friends and neighbours. The time together, with a glass of champagne and preparing food is a time to talk, reminisce, plan, taste and prepare for wonderful company. We are just as happy with a cold bottle and fish and chips down by the river at sunset. To entertain friends, engage in lively conversations, eat good food and drink good wine is a joy.

We will miss having mud-crab with Carol's brother Doug. He loved food and had been a student of mine migrating his steak and two veggies upbringing into a fine palate and cooking talent. Doug wasn't well for a decade suffering multiple heart attacks and strokes, diabetes and more. Brother and sister were close and Doug often stayed with us in Noosa and the occasional holiday away. Doug died on 29 March 2015 following a sudden downturn in his overall health complications. He was only 58. His father Ken had passed at only 52.

As I look back over my life with the experience of years, I see silly mistakes, huge errors, stupid moves and less than sensible decisions taken. But I can equally balance these against effort, drive, enthusiasm, innovation and creativity. Lots of failure but also much success, from lots of sheer determination. On balance, I believe I tried to make a difference in everything I set out to do. I resist convention in preference for living outside of the box even in non-conformity.

I am pleased to have been able to record my life for family and friends who may be interested. I've enjoyed living it and cannot think of what might have been a better or more diverse range of career options or choices. I have let 'life' take its course with me. A somewhat chaotic bricolage certainly,

but much fun. I am naturally curious; I like to use the web to improve my understanding of a very wide range of interests and I love the anticipation of "What next?" Wouldn't it be great if, late in life we could sleep for five years and awake for two to catch up? What wonders could be discovered! Discovery is what I will miss.

So much of what I have done would never have happened were it not for the companionship, support and love of my wife Carol. She has tolerated my behaviour under stress, been there when I needed to cry and has never been given to blame but rather helped with solutions. Her strength when the going was tough is greatly appreciated and acknowledged. Her generosity of time and effort with charitable work and social co-ordination is legend. She is the *glue* and a wonder.

I close with this adapted extract from Marianne Williamson's *The Route to Love*. To me anyway, it is most apt but I hope not too arrogant.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be thinking this way?

Actually, who are you not to be?

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Finis