



LIFE IS WHAT IT IS - A JOURNEY

Abalinx Peter Adamis 28 July 2017

Today for no apparent reason I have begun to write again after an absence of some months. I am convalescing in my place of birth, Pellana, Lakonia Greece. The alleged home of Helen of Troy and her husband Menelaus, the Master of the War Cry according to Homer the poet of the epic Iliad. I must say being here is helping my immune system to return to some normalcy and reenergise the body, mind and spirit. The time at the moment here is 8.15 am and in Australia I would hazard a guess it is about 3.15 pm, a time when the close of the working day is fast approaching and people will be looking forward to going home being Friday and enjoy the weekend break.

Waking up to the sound of an orchestra of birds, the odd vehicle traffic from the nearby road, cicadas and the buzzing of insects outside my bedroom window. I looked at the mobile and it indicated that it was about 6 am and notifications of social media markers being present. Another day, another challenge at squeezing life out what we have left and getting on with living are my thoughts.

I think of David (John) Butler in Warringal Private Hospital at Heidelberg and what he is going through. I admire his tenacity, courage and fortitude for having made the decision to go out the way he wants to go. I managed to speak to John yesterday from Greece and had a brief chat. Although John and I like many others served with 6 RAR, we also had a love of the Liberal party and were heavily involved in running campaigns. We both enjoyed the banter and shared stories at our last meeting together at the Watsonia RSL in the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne. John looked strong robust and full of energy, enjoying the moment and looking forward to political success in his region. It is now 12 months since that lunch together and it makes a person wonder what life is all about.

When I was in hospital in August 2015 at the Olivia Newton John Cancer and Wellness Centre, I too felt at odds with the world and asked the age old question whether it was time to go. My heart and mind said "NO", as I was not ready to go. My body having a mind of its own could go either way and would only respond to the treatment being meted out by the medical professionals. I remember being overwhelmed by the support from around the world with greater emphasis on my military mates who I had served with some 45 year before. It was through social media that helped through the dark days that followed. Phil (Butch) Buttigieg was instrumental at one dark stage of providing some good advice which I memorised as a means keeping sane. Now, next month it will be two since that deadly diagnosis and I am still here amongst the living. Today I am more than ever determined to enjoy life no matter what it takes and to give the body the rest it needs to recharge its batteries.

I think often of blokes like Tom Bere, Col Goodwin, Larry Laliffe and many others who are also in the grips of their won illnesses and I wonder, "Why did this happen to our generation and why it is that many ex-service personnel have been struck down with cancer? Related illnesses. Is it because of the boot polish, the Brasso, the water purifying tablets, the anti-malaria tablets, the toxic anti-mite liquid we pasted onto our jungle greens, the gasoline fumes, Rifle oil to clean our weapons, asbestos lined buildings, free cigarette smokes that we often given, the extreme training conditions and harsh training environments, all types of weather and terrain, the cordite smell from firing of weapons or was it merely our life style of hard work and play that created a crucible of hidden ailments that emerged some 30 to 40 years later. Who knows what the answer is but as I have stated above, life is what it is and we make the most of it.

I wish John Butler and others in the same boat a good journey and hope that when it comes to my turn to have the same courage as John to go out in style. Having said all of the above, I am heartened by the response from the military, ex-service organisations and response from family and friends who support those ex-service personnel in their time of need. I am very concerned about the ratio of suicides by ex-serving personnel and wonder whether the Defence Department are aware of their "Duty of Care" provisions according to the act on Occupational Health and Safety. Individuals, employers and organisations pay lip service to the OHS Act and especially the word "HEALTH" embodied within the acronym. The Defence Department willingly takes on young men and women to serve the nation, trains them to the highest calibre possible and releases them back into a society that is not as welcoming as one would expect.

Many of us who returned into the civilian world of work were considered military morons without having an understanding of the civilian world and its structure. This is in spite of our training and discipline. For those that did not seek help or were unable to cope for a variety of reasons or did not express themselves except in an aggressive manner only reinforced in the minds of the civilian counterparts the words of "military moron". This tag of "military moron" amongst other tags only went to devalue the person, dehumanise them and lower their self-esteem in the eyes of their loved ones. Depression was not and is still not unheard of and with that depression comes alcohol, drug fuelled life style to numb the emotional pain hurt, sorrow, sadness, grief and loss of comradeship and in the end feeling alone and shunning civilisations we know it.

However despite the high suicide rate, I find that the current generation express themselves far more freely than our own and in doing so help does come their way. Sometimes it is too late for some while other and seeking help at that late juncture find it is never too late. I find that Legacy and newly formed support groups are taking up the challenge after being disappointed with some Returned Service League clubs due to mismanagement, a few advocates failing in their duty to pursue the interests of the fellow human beings and the odd shonky specialist who professes to provide advice provided they get paid for it.

I wonder why our women appear (I write the word appear on purpose as I don't have the facts but going by anecdotal evidence alone), that they cope with a return to civilian workforce better than their counterparts. What is it that gives our women who have served in the military in one format or another that steely reserve to keep on going? We hardly hear of what our women are going through and I wonder what the facts, figures and other statistics can tell us. I am sure that those who have served for the duration in whatever format must be struggling with their own demons. I would like to think that women have a better support network than their male counterparts.

As much as I would like to continue with the discussion, all that I can say at this point in time is to be there for someone when they need our help, support, understand and compassion. Let us not fall into the ditch and say "Buckle up soldier and get on with life". If that is the case then General Pompey Elliot of WW1 would have survived the rigours of war and not have taken his life after serving the nation we call home Australia as a soldier at Gallipoli, Western Front and as a politician. Suicide is not the way to go and life being what it is does not mean ending it before its time. Let us all reach out to our brothers and sisters.

For the purists, please accept my apologies for the savagery of the English language, after all I am only learning and consider myself a babe in the woods. The image at the beginning of the article depicts a fig tree planted by my Grandfather on my mother's side. He planted the fig tree some seventy years ago. The tress is a symbol of food and shelter while the path way is but a journey of life. My mother was concerned that the new road would take possession of it, but I am pleased to say that it is still on the property, old weary but still bearing fruit. As such, we who are still with the living must carry on and remember those that went before us.

Last but not the least, despite being overseas, my heart still is in Australia. My current place of abode is merely to convalesce, recharge the batteries, help and support the locals and continue along the journey that appears mapped out for us. I wish all of my dear friend's good health and best wishes, and hope that those currently living under harsh conditions that life improves for the better. Take each day as it comes and plan for the future. After all without dreams we as a species would never have evolved. Life as we know it can only be sustained by vigilance and with that vigilance comes responsibility. I will continue to write about what I believe is important and welcome constructive criticism at all times. Let us hope that 2017 and 2018 are much better for mankind and for our veteran community.



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