

Who am I? Was I caused by family, travails and travels, schooling, experiences, people in my life, the environment? Planned or luck? Goals or reactions? Whenever I share some personal information about my journey, I learn that almost everyone has a story of challenge, planned and unplanned events and the unexpected.

As I was growing up, my Mum was more often than not in a mental hospital. I have memories of travelling in a tiny bus with my maternal, widowed, grandmother (named "Ga" by me and taken up by the whole family) to visit Mum at Gladesville Mental Hospital – it did have another "something" Asylum name.

Ga grew me up. She introduced tea as the solution for all problems. "Put the kettle on" was the start of a conversation. Bread and milk were delivered, but from age six, I would often walk to the butcher, daily to get meat (there was no fridge). I learned about honesty and not accepting second best. "Tell the butcher I wanted best-end neck chops not the scrag end". A scared little boy returned the butcher's paper parcel facing the butcher's huff of exasperation. I remember having to return money if they had given too much change - even if less than a shilling. Then, the shops seemed to be miles away.

Ga had come from "old money" which brought a style and status and an accent. I do remember bread and dripping, bread and butter pudding, and yet always fresh orange juice to start the day – prepared by Ga. Stewed apricots and apricot jam were a serious part of our diet courtesy of our backyard fruit trees along with eggs and the occasional chook.

Ga was a committed Christian who rarely attended church but made sure my sister and I never missed - so Sunday school, Church, and later Youth Fellowship took away Sunday every week. At eight, while I was going to Lane Cove Public School, Ga would drop my younger sister (three) at childcare on her way to work in the city. After school, when I was eight, I took the tram, a penny a trip, to childcare to collect her. Ga returned from work at 6pm. We were trend-setting "latch-key kids"!

Later in life, I received calls, "I must be your sister" and another time, "You must be my father".

Mum and Ga had often spoken of my dad. I found my older brother John (Victoria), just 3 months older than me and four others a little younger (Brisbane) following our feature on an ABC TV program.

The lenses shaped through my earliest years fostered my love of reading, accepting people as they are, respecting fairness, honesty and hard work. I later learned much more through my children and family.

Now I am 73. What do I see? Locally, great people are contributing positively against a background of governments that have lost their way. In my forties, I could see the world becoming a better place but for the last 30 years, I have seen an incessant search for power and greed leading to corruption. I have no faith that we will see a happier world soon, if ever. I was more than happy with my own place in the world and with my family and friends until I learned my oldest daughter had terminal cancer. The lens through which we view life seems to run us at times, but that's when we must take charge.