



Life-changing events you didn't ask for

Introduction

When Clay asked me to take this service back in July I had just had a heart attack, and like many others who've been through this kind of event, it made me re-think where my life was heading.

But I had also just been on a holiday on the Great Barrier Reef And that also made me rethink ... in a more positive kind... so I thought good events can be life-changing.

Those two things both kept on making me think ... and at times I was just confused ... and thought am I really the best person to talk about this ... but the nurse who was on our rehab course said it's good to share what you think with others Your family will probably be sick of hearing about it But others will want to share what they have experienced as well

So I'll be inviting you to share your thoughts later.

My first thoughts were some general ones:

General comments about change

One reason an experience might change our lives is if we have grown up in a small family or town, and have not mixed much with other people ... we may find some experience is very tough because it's too different; it brings up problems we have not faced before.

But at other times a new experience may be very exciting, and it leaves us feeling we can carry on that excitement.

Some changes may make a person a great leader:

One example was Methodist founder John Wesley. When he was six years old his house burned down, while he was in it.

The rest of the family escaped and stood on the street terrified because John had not made it. But little John was resourceful... and he dragged a cabinet to the window of his bedroom, climbed up and called out the window. And his father tried to get in to rescue him, but the flames had got too strong. And nobody could find a ladder, but two men came forward, and one stood on the other's shoulders, and managed to rescue him.

And it was his mother who saw something good in this. She said you are like a brand pulled out from the fire. God must want you for a very special purpose ... and that thought stayed with him, and his family. It part of what drove him.

So that was a good change.

Some changes are very bad

But another famous leader drew an opposite interpretation from tragedy. It was the Chinese communist leader Mao Tse Tung in the 1930s.... the Japanese and invaded China, and the Nationalist leaders, the Kuo Min Tan, were fighting back; but they were a rich man's club, and the communists felt they were wore than the Japanese ... and it became a 20 year three way struggle, with cities being slaughterd, people being beseiged and starved to death ... in one of these defeats Mao's wife and sister were captured, and beheaded by the Kuo Min Than ... and he commented. I felt the pity drain out of me ... and that lack of pity became part of his attitude, and his leadership.

When the Japanese were attacked with atom bombs, and 60 thousand were killed in a few seconds, he said that was no where near the number his troops had killed; and it was worth it because of the better life that resulted for the survivors.

And when huis own supporters were slaughtertered; he said that too was worthwhile, because those who survived would later grow tro the same population they had at the start.

And when his own followers became better off, he started the great cultural revolution to put the poor people on top again, and made students become farm labourers, and farmers go into steel

production; and they sold food to other countries, while millions of his own supporters starved to death.

It was decades later, after he died, before his followers took a more moderate path. Some of his opponents were so terrified that they committed suicide rather than being captured by the Red Army..

Rather stark alternatives ... but still today New Zealand has a higher suicide rate than before ... of people for whom changes for the better seem impossible to reach.

So with those gloomy thoughts, I'd like to pass on my good and bad events, and where they seem to be heading.

1 Good and bad events

The bad event started with a very minor stiffness in my chest ... I was not very worried because I'd had angina 11 years ago; and that was not a big problem. I went to hospital had a stent put in and have been fine ever since. I dieted, lost weight, did more exercise, took my medication. And for years my cholesterol was down, my blood pressure was down, so was my heart rate.

But that posed a huge question once I got better ... which was only a couple of days later.

I had an appointment with a rehab nurse, and asked: how come, all the signs were good; how come I've just had a heart attack. And she said: it's probably heredity ... there's nothing you can do about it... keep on taking the treatment... but it doesn't guarantee you won't have another one.

I found this very hard to get a handle on.

So I asked my doctor... I said should I get an ECG regularly, to see when I need another stent. She said it'd be no use. ECG's can't predict a heart attack. You just have to get used to it.

2 Holiday

But she said I could still go on a holiday four weeks later I could swim, but not too far. I could go snorkelling, but not too fast, and no diving.

So I did that stuff ... and was surprised how fit I was. I kept up with the others snorkelling for an hour. I swam about six laps of a large pool. I went out in a hobie cat, and no problem.

3. Marion's health

But then surprise number two crept up on me. I got some satisfaction out of all these adventures, but Marion didn't join in any of them, because of her arthritis. She said she would go kayaking with me, if I really wanted her to.

And when we'd been there a week, Marion got itchy feet and said ... this is not much of a holiday... we're spending a lot of time just blobbing out in our bungalow, on the ground level, but we can't see the sea. Let's pay bit extra and upgrade to a room in the hotel block next door, so we can blob out with a view. I thought this was a brilliant idea... Marion pays a large part of our family budget, so she deserved to spend some of it, relaxing in style. It's not called the Reef View hotel for nothing, and we went up; in the lift which has a great sea view all the way up. And we noticed that you only need to be three floors up to get a great sea view.

Unfortunately, all the rooms were full. We went back each day to see if anybody had gone home early.

two days later they said, there was one, but it was on the 18th floor. I asked how much extra would that cost. They didn't expect me to ask that. So they went and checked, it would be double what we had been paying \$800 a night.

Marion thought this was ridiculous. But I knew she would like it, so I pushed her and said. Let's do it,.

4. A bit of luxury

And we did. And it was a mind-changing experience. For both of us.

For a start, the 18th floor had fantastic views, in all directions. And it was a giant luxury suite; four balconies, one for the bedroom, one for the lounge looking north, another from the lounge looking east. And one on the end of the building with a spa pool, going round the corner.

And for me the highlight was, these top two floors were also the favourite roosting place for about 50 cockatoos; who were constantly visiting us. I loved it when I accidentally left the door open, and one of them was sitting on our kitchen bench opening a packet of biscuits.

We didn't need entertaining. Every morning way below us, a fleet of 15 hobie cats with rainbow coloured sails would set out together ... so next morning I had to join them. And at high tide it was all blue and low tide you could see the reef.

The 18th floor was obviously millionaires row, so I checked what the millionaires were wearing, and the men all had plain shorts, and plain t-shirts, and sneakers with no socks. I already had those clothes, but with socks, so those last three days I went without socks.

Marion just liked blobbing, reading crosswords.

I also liked the nespresso coffee machine. Since I've been on a diet the last 11 years, I haven't really enjoyed my coffee So this was heaven to get the flavour and strength exactly right every time..

5. Back home

Back home, the readjusting continued.

One day we both had a very heavy pile of jobs So we said ... today we work, tomorrow we go and see a movie.

I went to a weekly rehab course. Marion asked if she could come too... The nurse said that's good idea... That particular lesson was about how to do CPR, and Marion was the only one who wanted to try it out. We figured that she was more likely to need this skill than I was.

And that was surprise number five. It was nice to be sharing more of our lives together.

6. Change number four a Birthday present

Change number four was my birthday. Last Wednesday was my birthday, and Marion's family have the disgusting habit of buying

their own presents and then asking other people to contribute to the cost.

So I said to Marion, I'd like to get a nespresso coffee machine. She thought that was a huge waste of money, and we didn't have any room for it. But she looked at them on line with me. I liked one like we had at the hotel: it was quite cheap, and brilliant red. She said it wouldn't match our colour scheme. I said not every item in the kitchen has to be the same colour. She said: she pays more for our house, so she should get to choose the kitchen colour scheme.

I felt this was a bit outrageous... but wondered how to put that tactfully And said ... would you like me to get my hair dyed to match yours. And she laughed.

But that night I checked the sales again, and found all the Home appliance people had been having specials, to clear out old coffee machines, but the specials were all running out. One I especially liked ran out the next day,. So I ordered it online, without consulting her. She was not amused.

But two of her relatives gave me some money towards it, but it was still less than half the cost. And Marion said, How much is there to go. I said don't worry.... Just give what you would like. And she gave me \$200. I said that's way too much. But she said: I want to do it, because I love you.

But that was another learning experience for me, to assert myself more.

It is really a snowball of good things.

There are bad sides still ... I still don't know what things are signs of a heart attack. I had one series of twinges on my birthday and wondered whether I should call an ambulance. And decided not to.

Psychologist

Another one of our rehab sessions was particularly helpful It was by a psychologist, and her topic was coping with stress..... she said we cannot avoid all stress ... but it was not good to have sustained stress that takes up most of our lives.

So one of the best ways to manage your feelings and prevent the build up of stress is to regain balance in your life.

Here's the recipe:

Every day:

Do some form of physical activity I already take a walk every day But I have been doing a five km walk about three times a week ... and have decided to go into the 5km walk with the Auckland marathon. I did it two years ago, in 52 minutes And I can now do 59.

Have some rest and relaxation time ... We are doing that more. More movies, more reading, more shared walks.

Do some form of work where you feel useful, productive and get a sense of achievement. I'm going to stick with my religion in schools campaign ... but not every day. I'll turn down some of the requests for help I get, and opt out of some of the debates.

Include some enjoyable activities, especially those that make you laugh.

Get plenty of sleep. This will take some change in your pattern.

I would add - be assertive at times.

Talk with others including your family or whanau. So that's what I've been doing today. But that also means listening.