

BEFORE YOU JUDGE ME

BEING DAVID

David Oldfield



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Preface

There are no mysteries; everything can be explained logically and rationally. Those matters that seem mysterious are either yet to be explained or the explanation already on offer doesn't suit people. The truth needs life breathed into it because time has a tendency to erase the truth, while lies seemingly have a life of their own. I've beaten a lot of people in my life and stood up to many more, and people you've beaten or stood against generally don't remember you fondly, fairly or honestly, so don't ever be surprised by what they say.

I always tell my sons to never be afraid of anything, but to always be careful of everything. It's something I wish I'd learned as a child, because whilst there wasn't ever very much I was afraid of, I was also not very careful with anything; in fact, I probably wasn't careful at all.

How well I remember my desperate attempts to make nitroglycerine – yes, you're reading the life of a crazy guy. I was eleven at the time and fortunately I always failed; I just couldn't quite get the bicarbonate of soda wash right. I blew myself up a couple times as a child, but fortunately not to the extent I would have, had I gotten that wash right for the nitro, but I'll get to that later.

From the outset, I need to tell you that my faults are unrelated to my parents – I had the most wonderful dad and mum and I was fortunate beyond belief to have been their son. It's likely the case that at least some of what I see that's bad in me will naturally surface in my own sons, and I can already see some of that in my youngest son, and I don't like it. At this stage, my eldest son seems to take more after my

wife, and I don't like that much either, but he says he wants to be like his dad – no accounting for taste? There are aspects of my personality I don't want my children to emulate and others where I'd like them to be like me, except much better.

There were perhaps experiences in my childhood that were different and certainly, we are all very much products of our environment, or at least greatly influenced by it, and in that, I was lucky that my parents were unusually fair, extraordinarily honest people and immensely popular with all who knew them. While we can explore how I turned out the way I did, I like to think my parents were only responsible for what's good about me – something else gave me my faults, and believe me, I know all those faults intimately.

Of course I know there were things in my childhood that shaped me in certain ways and my parents have a level of responsibility for that, but to accept that on its own lays blame at their feet and they were fine people deserving of much better thoughts. In the end, we make our own choices and we must learn from the results of those choices however good or bad they may be. When we have our own children we will need to know our mistakes so as to have a chance to save our kids from the same poor decisions.

In fairness to myself, much of what my detractors say about me isn't at all accurate – much of it is merely unfair and without context and stems from the simple human character failing of wanting to do whatever one can to drag down what they don't like, fear, disagree with or just simply don't understand. Most people seem to get that the world isn't a fair place, but I'm not sure if, as a group, we acknowledge that is the case, mostly because people are often biased and unfair in their judgements. Often, they go on mistaken impressions, somebody else's information or a desire to believe the worst about someone without questioning motives for what is reported.

It is said there is no such thing as a second first impression, and how true that is – something that at times has had an impact on me that wasn't helpful. When I was very young, a lot of that would have been because I was really quite shy and not very outgoing and that never makes a good first impression, if much of an impression at all.

As ridiculous as it may seem to some, that shy little boy still influences me and perhaps that has led to some of the way I've been perceived at times.

I was, however, adventurous and dangerous to a degree that these days, even I find surprising when I think back on things. Truth be known, I'm still a risk taker but maybe the risks are a little more calculated these days.

This isn't just a look at why I am as I am and perhaps how that came about, but also a study of human behaviour and interactions. On many levels, it might very well be about you, because for the most part, it's what we've seen and experienced in life that makes us who we are and, sometimes, who we're not.

Sure, there is the matter of genes, and I can see so much of my parents in me – in the way I look and in personality traits as well. I have my mother's eyes, my father's build and my skin and hair is virtually a cross between the two of them. But how much of my personality did I inherit and how much developed through the environment of being with my parents and what I observed and subconsciously and consciously learned from them and those around me and the times in which I lived?

Personally, I lean mostly towards environment. I'm very much of the view we're largely products of our environment. That wouldn't suit a lot of people, especially those wanting to find genetic markers to explain their individual circumstances, as they see them.

I was going to say that it's the negative traits that one notices, but that's not right, it's just they stand out when looking for problems and I tend to focus on the problems. In some respects, it's one of the negative things I see about myself, I tend to focus on what's bad and not what's good. I always see the bad first and I acknowledge that may sometimes inhibit me from seeing the good, if there is any. I kind of figure the good takes care of itself, but the evil needs to be rooted out. If you're looking for a person who identifies problems and finds solutions, I'm your man, but I know not seeing good in equal proportion makes me a lot sadder than I could be and that's not great for my health, or the way others see me.

If you have an open mind you're very rare; but if you do, then reading what is ahead will explain almost everything about me, people I've met, many of whom you'll be aware of, and, I expect you'll see something of yourself as well.

Being David: Early Family Life

I always respected and admired David's passion and dedication to his family, a family that shaped his views and values. He wore his father's suffering from the war deep in his heart and his mother's passion for life on his sleeve.

– The Honourable Bob Baldwin MP,
former parliamentary secretary (assistant minister) and
Member for Paterson,
March 2018

I suppose I could start with the usual of where I was born and so on and to a degree that's a part of the story, but it's a time over which you have no control or memory of. In reality, these are matters you are aware of through others – family, friends, and often just photographs.

Photographs are interesting. I meet so many people who tell me about the things they remember as a child, the experiences they had, and yet for the most part, these are not their memories as such, but the memories of others and sometimes a memory they manifest due to a photograph they have. Adults genuinely remember little if anything before the age of three to four and for a range of reasons some will have difficulty remembering much of their lives before five or six, or even later. There are specific events that may be imprinted in our minds, things we clearly visualise, but for the most part, our early memories, if they're still there, are not terribly accessible. When an adult tells you about something they remember as a baby or perhaps as a toddler, they're not having you on, but they are having themselves on

– they likely genuinely believe they remember, but chances are what they really remember is a story about themselves that someone told them later in life.

I only note this in the sense that there are so many things we think we know about ourselves that we really don't. Sometimes, even the memories we think are ours aren't ours at all, though the experiences those memories tell of may very well have been ours, and no doubt they shaped us, even if only in a small way.

I can very clearly see what I consider to be the first time I kissed a girl – maybe I had done it earlier, but there is a specific experience that I can see in my mind like a movie playing. Her name was Sally, she had a short blonde bob and it happened in the sandpit of my preschool in Condamine Street Balgowlah. Don't go looking for the scene of this remarkable moment in history – today, it's a car park and where David met Sally, is now asphalt. I used to mark this event as having happened when I was six years old, but writing this now, I realise I was four or slightly less, because I know I didn't go to that kindergarten after four years of age.

So was that the first time I kissed a girl or just the first time I remember? We'll never know, though I know for sure the last time I kissed a girl and there'll be no more of that for me – I'm done with women. Just kidding. Can't live with them, but willing to try! Sorry more kidding around. I've often thought I'd happily be gay – you know, men together, doing things men do, adventure and fun without all the drama we allow women to bring into our lives – then I get to the sex part of all that and the prospect of being gay goes right out the window. I'm strongly of the view that a person's sexuality is entirely their business – anything that floats your boat, however much of a freaky weirdo you might be, is entirely your business not mine, and good luck to you provided it's all between consenting adults!

I was born to parents who even now, many years after their deaths, I'm still trying to understand. Perhaps make that, wanting to understand so much more, to know so much more.

My parents had both been married before and back in those days divorce took a while so some plans got put on hold – I was one of those

plans. Mum and Dad met the old-fashioned way, or in more traditional circumstances – they met at work. My mum's name was June and my dad, the always very cheeky Bill Oldfield, when mum was introduced as June, said to her, 'I was born in June.'

These days I imagine that would be some kind of sexual harassment in the workplace and my mother would be tweeting herself as involved with #MeToo. It was the early 1950s and clearly she didn't take it badly as they soon after started dating. They were engaged and eventually living together and I suppose that was in sin at that time, but Dad's divorce from his first wife hadn't been finalised and that's why I was on hold. My dad desperately wanted a son, but neither of them was willing to do that while they were unmarried – call them old-fashioned. Dad's divorce finally came through, he and Mum got married and the quest for a son got under way. Dad is said to have readily told people he was having a son and that, 'I put my order in last night.'

My parents always said I was the longest pregnancy on record as it was fifteen months from when dad started 'putting in his order' until I appeared, as desired, a bouncing baby boy.

Bill was oh so proud of David – he regaled us with all the things David was going to do.

– Betty Brookes,
June Oldfield's last surviving friend,
May 2018

For some context, Mum turned thirty-five the year I was born, and Dad had turned forty just two weeks before I was born, in 1958. That was relatively old to become parents for the first time, except it wasn't the first time for either of them. It was, however, a long time between drinks. Dad had married during World War II and late in the war, when he was considered 'missing presumed dead', his then wife took the worst to be the case and thought herself a widow. Whatever happened between them, his return some weeks after Japan surrendered in 1945 didn't make for much in the way of a reconciliation and he moved from Perth to Sydney.

Mum had also married during World War II and, sadly, her husband returned from combat a damaged man who turned to alcohol and soon after became a violent and abusive husband. My mum, at twenty-four years of age, took her daughter and son, both under three years of age, and left him. She asked for nothing in the divorce, not even any form of child support; she didn't want her alcoholic husband to have any hold over the children.

I never knew my mum's first husband. I heard about him and I learned of his war record and I can't help but feel sorry for him – he saw a lot of ugly things while in combat and the fact is, some dealt with it better than others. There is more help for such issues now than there ever was in 1945.

My father's daughter from his first marriage, Lesley, lived with his ex-wife in Perth. I didn't see a lot of her. I met her for the first time when she was eighteen and I was four. Just like kissing Sally, I have that memory stored like a film. I can picture the drive over to pick Lesley up and the hotel in which she was staying, but I don't remember much of her beyond that. For the most part, our lives have been entirely separate.

My dad adopted my mum's two children, Carolyn and Wayne, and we all lived together, but they were much older than me, so by the time I was three, they'd both moved out of home. My brother had joined the air force as an apprentice and became an electrical engineer while my sister was a secretary and was flatting with a couple of her girlfriends.

I referred to them as my brother and sister because that was how I saw them, on the occasions I did see them. My brother was stationed at Richmond and later at Wagga Wagga and my sister was amazingly popular and enormously busy. It wasn't until I was well into my teens that I had any idea that while Wayne and Carolyn were brother and sister, I was only their half-brother, and ultimately having that information didn't alter the way I viewed them.

People back then carried something akin to shame at having been previously married, I don't know if that's why I was never told the nature of our household make-up or whether no-one thought I needed to know. We didn't look that much alike except that we all had dark

brown eyes, dark brown hair and olive skin courtesy of my mother, but I wasn't quite as dark as Mum, Carolyn and Wayne, and I was physically different because of my dad's influence.

I wish I'd gotten my dad's blue eyes, but at least my son Henry has them – lucky boy. I often see my dad when I look into Henry's eyes and as a newborn, Henry looked so much like my dad it was as if it was him.

I'm very proud of Wayne and Carolyn, though I tend to think they kind of tolerated me. It must be difficult to be out-and-about eighteen and nineteen-year-olds and have a brother in preschool.

Also, in the case of my brother, I inadvertently changed his life by simply being born. Dad had been the father he so wanted and had been in that role for years, but then I came along, and that relationship changed. As soon as I was walking, my mother became concerned Wayne's beloved dog, Kim, would knock me over, so poor Kim had to go. In this way, I was held responsible for Wayne losing his dog. By the time I was a bit over two, I'd taken his dad and his dog – it wasn't a great start to brotherly love. Still, I didn't know these things and my brother wasn't around except on the occasional weekend.

As a regular, he volunteered for Vietnam and did his tour in 1968–69, and just before that he spent three months in New Guinea for jungle training. It was a tense time in the Oldfield home as mum worried about Wayne getting wounded or killed in action. I don't recollect being worried. I wasn't up on the notion people I knew would die; I suppose I thought it was people I didn't know who died.

I can't remember how Dad saw it. My dad was always very stoic and by that time he was fifty, so to me at ten he seemed old and wise and tough as nails. I suspect he was concerned for Wayne but he never seemed a very emotional man – or not so that it showed. I don't remember ever seeing my dad cry. That may have been something men of his generation just didn't do.

You'd fairly describe my dad as old school. He was born towards the end of WW I and was a teenager in the Great Depression. He'd had a hard, old-time traditional sort of life. He left school at fourteen and went to work, an especially difficult thing in Australia in 1932.

My dad's Christian name is Ernest, but when he started work, the boss said, 'We've already got an Ernest, so we're going to call you Bill.' Just like that, his name was changed for him and he was 'Bill' for the rest of his life. He even used to get mail addressed to W. Oldfield because many assumed his name was William.

By the time he was sixteen, 'Bill' was essentially the company's accountant. You couldn't do that today – leave school at fourteen and be in charge of the accounts at sixteen – but Dad had a head for figures and fourteen-year-olds then were completely different to fourteen-year-olds today.

In 1939, at twenty-one, Dad volunteered for WW II. He joined the army and in 1940 he transferred to the air force. He trained as an air gunner wireless operator and was assigned to 2 Squadron, a unit flying Hudson light bombers. He was on duty at the RAAF airfield during the bombing of Darwin and weeks later, the last man on the last plane out of Ambon before the Japanese overran the island. He flew seventy-eight combat missions, was decorated for bravery with a DFM and PUC, commissioned from the ranks and made Western and North Western Area Gunnery Leader.

He lost virtually all of his original friends. His best mate, Isaac Reed, was beheaded by the Japanese in February 1942, and by 1943, Dad was the only original air gunner of the squadron who was still alive. While flying as an observer in a B24 Liberator bomber late in the war, he was shot down and taken prisoner under fire.

He'd fought a hell of a war my dad. Many called him a hero but he never thought of himself that way, not even close. Dad didn't talk about the war, though I remember we weren't allowed anything in the house that was made in Japan, until the time came when that was impossible because so much was made in Japan and no longer in Australia.

Mum's good friend Betty told me that she and her husband were at my parents' place for dinner around 1956 when Dad happened to notice 'made in Japan' on the underside of his coffee cup. He immediately smashed it on the table and got Betty's husband Bobby to help him remove all the rest of the crockery from the table and get rid of it.

It would be very difficult for Australians today to understand the

hatred of the Japanese that was left over from WW II. I suspect many people could never excuse the way my dad was about such things, but that'll be because they are people of this time and unable to picture his world. Most of my dad's mates, including his best mate, were killed in the war. A lot of them weren't killed in action, but murdered as prisoners of war.

Dad himself suffered indescribably as a prisoner of war – beaten, interrogated, tortured, starved. His experiences and knowledge of the crimes of the Japanese were such that in 1946 he was called to give evidence to the United Nations War Crimes Commission.

In the 1990s, he told me of a recurring dream that stayed with him for more than twenty years after the war. He'd invited his interrogators/torturers to dinner and they all had a nice time. All seemed forgiven, and then when dinner was over, he killed them and buried them in our backyard.

Dad eventually managed to put the atrocities of the war behind him. In the late 1980s, he told me he'd forgiven his captors, but he said he would never be able to trust them. He did a great deal to help a Japanese friend of mine, Kyoichi, so clearly he didn't carry his thoughts over to the generations of Japanese not directly involved in the war.

One of the thousands of things I never asked my dad and often kick myself about, was, 'What was it like for you when Wayne was in Vietnam? What were you thinking?' I suspect he would have comforted my mum, but never let on about his own concerns for fear of worrying her even further. When Wayne came back, I remember going out to the airport when he arrived in Australia. The waiting is a blur, but I remember seeing him suddenly emerge – I can see him in his uniform and dark blue beret and I remember my mum's tears of joy.

I can't much understand what Vietnam was like for him. He was a bit messed up. I think they all likely were to one degree or another, but Wayne seemed okay – looking back, maybe a little angry or aggressive. It's understandable; he'd fought a war without being appreciated. It's awful how Vietnam veterans were treated for decades afterwards – truly a dark time in Australia's history and I still haven't forgiven those

responsible, nor will I. One of the very clear memories I do have of the early 1970s were the grubs who screamed at my brother's ilk that they were murderers, baby killers. It affected me so God knows the effect it truly had on him.

In my twenties, I once said to Wayne, 'I don't understand. Dad had six years of war, his best mates were killed, he was captured, beaten, tortured nearly killed dozens of times and he's okay. You were gone for a year and you're a mess?'

My brother just said, 'They were tougher than we were.' And that was all he said.

It's true, my dad was a tough bloke and he'd lived a tough life like most of his generation, but my brother was no softie – not even slightly. After six years he left the air force and went straight to work in an electrical business in accordance with his trade qualifications. He was soon the boss of that business and soon after that he started his own business and did very well.

He's not very big my brother but he's stocky and tough. He used to collect his own debts – if you owed him money, he'd pay you a visit at your home. I remember him teaching me how to fight with a knife when I was thirteen – you'd have been very unwise to be on the wrong side of my 'big' brother.

I don't know if Dad's generation was tougher than my brother's, though I expect they were, but what I'm sure of is this, my dad came home a decorated hero from a war we won that everyone supported; my brother came home from a war we lost that many were against. There's a big difference between the two.

My sister Carolyn was an amazing young lady who in some respects lived in a time where there was less expectation and I imagine things seemed simpler. People worked hard and there weren't all the advantages provided by the technology we have, but your life and future seemed more readily defined. You went to school, got a job, got married and had children. That's a simplified version, but in a nutshell, that was what people expected would happen. I wonder how many women today, who can't find Mr Will Do let alone Mr Right, would love the simplicity of my sister's time.

Carolyn was beautiful, intelligent, vivacious, outgoing and popular. She'd been the captain of her school and was much loved and respected. She did well in high school but didn't have aspirations for further education. She flatted with girlfriends, travelled, and settled into a job as a secretary. It was a time in history where there wasn't a lot of expectation as to what a daughter would do. That's how it was – happiness was considered to be brought about by marriage, children and being a full-time mum, at least until all your children were in school.

Carolyn married at twenty-three and had two children by twenty-six, Darren and Danielle. But after the birth of her second child, there was something wrong. Carolyn had Hodgkin's disease.

If you got Hodgkin's disease at that time, it killed you – it was just a matter of how long you could last. Carolyn was in the final stage when diagnosed so her prognosis wasn't at all positive or hopeful. She was a fighter and had two little kids – she wasn't going to be taken from them, but she was. Carolyn was not quite thirty-three when she died. She'd battled for seven years – no-one had lasted that long before her.

I'd just turned nineteen and was oblivious to everything around me, utterly self-absorbed and interested only in pursuits that culminated in the conquest of females. I was a piece of work, that's for sure. I knew Carolyn was sick, but it's as if I wasn't paying any attention. My mum and dad came home from the hospital and I was lying shirtless on the lounge watching TV. Mum said to me, 'Carolyn died tonight.' I have tears in my eyes – I had them before I finished typing my mother's simple, three-word sentence. That's because I know what a useless, uncaring sack of shit I was.

Stunned, I looked at my mum and said, 'You're kidding.' Imagine that; of course my mother wouldn't walk into the room and joke about the condition of my poor dying sister.

It's one of the many things I'll never forgive myself for. I knew Carolyn was sick, but hey, it never occurred to me she'd die – how could she possibly die? People don't die? Do they? What a fuckwit I was.

Carolyn's funeral rammed home for me just how loved she was. The church was packed to overflowing – hundreds and hundreds of

people. I met a couple of blokes who'd gone to school with her and hadn't seen her in nearly twenty years.

It is said that for a parent, the worst possible thing that can happen is for your child to predecease you, and that was the case for my mum. It crushed her. She carried Carolyn's loss with her forever.

My sister's poor distraught husband, Paul, had a responsible executive position and it must have been very hard to find himself a widower at thirty-seven and with two small children to raise. My parents, mum in particular, stepped into the breach and for the next several years, essentially raised my niece and nephew. It's a blur to me what I was doing, though I expect I wasn't any help.

As is evident, despite having two sisters and a brother, I was really more like an only child because the age gap between us was such that they were gone from the family home by the time there was any chance I'd notice them. It convinced me I didn't want to have a child who would be without siblings. I'm very much of the opinion that I'd have been a more rounded and better person earlier in life if I hadn't been on my own.

My dad was in a job with a great deal of responsibility. In my early life he was general sales manager for Samuel Taylor Pty Ltd, which was then a privately owned entity and the producer of Pressure Pak products. These included Mortein fly spray, Aerogard insect repellent, Gossamer hairspray, Santa Snow for Christmas decorations, Fabulon for ironing, Preen pre-wash spray, to name a few, as well as Y-Cough for colds and Trix detergent.

It was a big job. As a private entity, the structure was such that the only people senior to dad were the owner and his son. Before I was a teenager the company had been acquired by the international group, Reckitt and Colman, and Dad became sales director, and soon after, managing director and CEO.

It was a long way to come. Having left school at fourteen, my dad was now the CEO of one of Australia's most profitable and successful companies. Especially interesting given when he applied for a sales job at Samuel Taylor in 1947, they weren't hiring! He only got the job by offering to work two weeks for free so as to prove himself.

Bill Oldfield could only ever be called a 'man's man' – and how!

The Bill Oldfield I knew had a number of personalities. One of them being mischievous and my God he loved a bit of mischief. He had a wonderful sense of humour and the two combined made for pretty good company.

I loved being with Bill, having lunch, just sitting around and talking, and doing commercials with him, believe me, was an experience like no other.

Bill was a thoroughly good man.

– John Laws,

TV personality and legend of Australian radio broadcasting,

May 2018

I didn't see a lot of Dad when I was very young, but I don't feel deprived at all – I think he spent as much time with me as he reasonably could. He'd take me to Rugby on Saturdays and I remember getting up really early sometimes before school and we'd go for a swim in the ocean pool at Fairlight and then down into Manly for a loganberry pie with cream from The Manly Pie Shop. They'd just been baked an hour before and were still hot. I can see them now, and almost taste them.

I love that memory so very much, Dad waking me up and getting me out of bed with me still sleepy, but keen to go. On many days when I wake my own boys I visualise my dad waking me. My dad was a person who sprung out of bed. He understood responsibility, and nothing slowed him down. I'm like that now, at least in regard to my own sons. If it's about them, it doesn't matter how I feel, I just do it.

Probably as far back as I can remember, we always had a boat and Dad was mad for fishing, had been his whole life. It started really small, an 11-foot Quintrex – an open aluminium boat with an outboard. We went across the heads in that once, going from the spit to Manly. It was a little boat and it seemed like we were in the middle of the ocean. Next, Dad moved up to a 16½-foot plywood half-cabin cruiser. This was quite a leap. It had a small, V-shaped bunk section and Dad and I once slept on it while it was moored where he kept it at the marina in Fairlight. I can still hear the damn water slapping against the sides

of the boat. I think I was awake all night – no doubt from excitement.

By the time I was in my mid-teens, the family boat had morphed into a company boat, which became a 24-foot Sea Ray, then a 32-foot Cresta and finally, a 49-foot Alaskan with a full-time captain. Samuel Taylor was the only division in the entire Reckitts worldwide group with its own boat. Late in the war, Dad had been in charge of procurements for the air vice-marshal of the air force – Dad had a reputation for being able to make things happen.

All in all, my dad wanted to spend time with me, and he did. He even took me interstate on a couple of business trips when I was eight and nine, and when I started high school, I would get a lift each morning with him, so we'd chat in the car, just like I do now every morning with my little boys.

In the 1960s, a lot of entertainment was brought about by a variety of guests and activities at home. My parents loved throwing a party and I was very much in my element serving drinks and hors d'oeuvres. In those days, the men mostly just drank beer and scotch and the ladies, were typically drinking moselle and riesling with perhaps someone occasionally opting for a shandy (beer and lemonade). My Auntie Lydia had a taste for those.

There would be the card nights, where several couples would turn up to our home to play canasta – does anyone play canasta today? A lot of interesting people popped into Mum and Dad's place – well I thought so.

One Saturday, when I was just a toddler, a very young man named Kerry Packer knocked on the door of our modest home in North Balgowlah. He was accompanied by Bill Buchanan, an executive working for Kerry's dad, Sir Frank.

It's a quirky story. Kerry had just gotten a new car and wanted to show it off, so he and Bill were driving around Sydney visiting. Kerry, at that stage, wasn't the heir apparent – his brother Clyde was in line to take over at that time. Amongst the things Bill Buchanan did for Sir Frank was keeping an eye on young Kerry. Imagine my poor mother as she answered the unexpected knock on the door, her hair in a scarf and midway through vacuuming the house.

For all Dad's toughness, there was one mistake I think he made with me – he wasn't tough on me. He didn't drive me and push me and I'm sorry he didn't do that. I needed to be pushed; I needed to learn discipline and to be responsible in every sense and he should have been harder on me. I can only guess why neither he nor Mum were tough on me. I think it was because so much of their lives had been difficult and hard. Maybe it caused them to be too gentle with me – I'm just guessing.

And when I note the hard nature of their lives, it was the early part of their lives. Once the simple matters of the Great Depression and the horrors and losses of WW II were behind them, things were looking good. Maybe it was also that it was a new era. It was the sixties and if you'd been born around World War I, there would have been a lot of things, especially socially related to young people that must have been hard to accept.

Then came the seventies, perhaps an even stranger decade? I was allowed to grow my hair long. My parents resisted at first, but by the time I was fourteen, it was touching my shoulders.

It's true I was rebellious and had my own ideas about things, and I don't mean just having long hair. My mother said I was 'uncontrollable', but while I might have seemed that way to Mum and Dad, I clearly had quite a bit of personal control because despite all the insane, dangerous and downright foolish things I did, I always very consciously steered clear of drugs. In my youth, I was surrounded by drugs – I was the only kid I knew who didn't at least smoke marijuana. Not much has changed; even at certain parties these days, it isn't uncommon for me to be the only person not snorting cocaine or dropping something.

I think my parents did a great job. They loved me as parents should love their children and either or both would have taken a bullet for me. I couldn't have asked for more and I'm thankful on a daily basis that I was their son. I wish they'd imparted to me more of the discipline and organisational abilities they exuded themselves. But now while I'm writing, I realise they must have done that because when I want to be, I'm disciplined and organised beyond belief. I suppose the key is 'when

I want to be', and I've demonstrated that throughout my life, but perhaps not seen it as clearly before – I couldn't have done the things I've done, or succeeded as I have, without discipline and organisation.

That shows I'm still learning about my parents and still learning about myself. Life is so crazy and strange and screwed up in so many ways, but you know that, right? Such is the downside of being human, and, in my case, an over-thinker.

The lessons they taught me finally sank in. It took a while, and even though they're gone, their lessons are still guiding me. I say things to my children that my parents said to me and I hear Mum and Dad saying those things to me whenever I say them to my boys.

My mum loved me and worked for me as long as she could. I can see her in her seventies wearing running shoes and out and about putting flyers in letterboxes or dressed to the nines and standing at a polling booth giving out how-to-votes. I didn't deserve her, though she wouldn't see it that way.

It would be hard for young people today to understand my mother's early life, or that of the children of her generation. She was born June Emma Hawkins on 17 November 1923. As an eight-year-old, my mum had a burst appendicitis and developed peritonitis. She was in a ward with nine other children and she was the only one who survived. How she survived, I don't know. There weren't any antibiotics, so if you got peritonitis, you died, just like the other nine kids in her ward.

Mum told me how the surgeon who operated on her came to visit her and said, 'Here's the little girl I took apart and put back together again.' The scars she had from that made her look like she'd been cut in half, but he saved her.

They say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, and while for many things that would be rubbish, sometimes it would be true. I'd reckon a child surviving peritonitis while all those around you were dying and being quietly carried away would toughen you.

Mum also beat oesophageal cancer, which is nearly impossible. Generally, most people are dead within a couple of years, but mum was thirteen years beyond it when she died, and it wasn't the cause of her death. She was diagnosed at seventy-eight, which was beyond the

age they'd operate, but I convinced the surgeon to make an exception. I've been quite convincing at times.

My mum was slight, though reasonably robust. I think she was more mentally strong than physically. She seemed to cope with a lot of things that went wrong. She just made herself like that – discipline.

She was a Scorpio and loved reading the stars. For years, she'd cut mine out of the newspaper whenever she thought there was something good and give them to me when I popped in to visit her. I'm a Cancer. Scorpions and Cancers are said to get along very well and neither my mum nor I were serious believers in the stars, but I think she liked whatever was positive that she thought might somehow be helpful to me.

When my mother put her violent first husband out the door she needed to support her two children without financial assistance from him – she chose that to avoid him having contact. She did the unthinkable for the late 1940s; she went to a bank and convinced them to lend her 500 pounds. That was about one and a half years pay in those days and the money was to start a business – risky, without security, and lending a woman (a single one at that) money was virtually unheard of then.

My mother could sew and that's what she used the 500 pounds for. She set up a business designing and making clothes – frocks, fancy petticoats, hooped skirts and wedding dresses. She was quite the designer and I still have some of her drawings. Soon, she was not only selling privately, but to department stores as well, and she had six other ladies sewing for her. All out of her flat in Bondi and other homes – the original sweatshops!

There was my mum, a female entrepreneur and ahead of her time. Living with her was her own mum, my grandmother, Violet. Mum was doing well for her family at a time when women really didn't have much of a place in business.

In the seventies she revived her design career for a bit of fun and designed a line of fashionable upmarket ladies raincoats. Mum also got the travel bug when I finished school and made an enjoyable career of organising large groups for international holidays. On a couple of

occasions, the groups she coordinated were so large they chartered jumbo jets.

My mother wasn't a feminist in any way and I'm sure she'd find much of the notion of feminism quite silly. She was a smart, strong woman who succeeded against the odds from the beginning. She was ahead of her time, but lived appropriately and responsibly in her time. She never felt downtrodden or discriminated against by virtue of being born female.

June Oldfield was what she wanted to be: mother, wife, lady, businesswoman. She was all of those things by intent and design, without ever entertaining the idea she somehow played roles that were constructed by a male-dominated society.

Towards her end, my mum probably could have gone on for a few more years. She had a level of dementia but otherwise she seemed to still be reasonably okay. But then, as is so often the case, she had a fall and broke her hip. They mended her hip, but rehabilitating her wasn't successful. I don't think she had the will to live any longer and so she declined quite rapidly. When I would see her, she would be in and out of consciousness. Sometimes I would just sit with her and hold her hand; if she awoke, she was always glad I was there.

One day when she was drifting in and out, I told her my dad and her mum and her grandpa were all waiting for her and I said Carolyn (my sister) was waiting too, and it's been a long time since Carolyn has seen you. I said, we all love you so very much, but you go when you want to mum, it's Carolyn's turn to be with you again. Mum died the next day. I like to think she went because I said it was okay.

For the last few years of her life, I used to pray she would at least get to ninety because in my own mad thoughts I believed if I had that time, I'd be able to do more for her. By coincidence, or maybe divine intervention, she got those last few years and she made it to three weeks past her ninetieth birthday. Up until the last days of her life, I'd have put her in intensive care and had her plugged into anything to keep her alive, but all of a sudden, I realised I was doing that for me, not for her.

I miss my dad terribly. He died in his ninetieth year in 2008 and I don't think a day goes by that I don't think of him. I had to stop here

for a few minutes to collect myself – I can't think of my dad without crying. If only I could hug him. I sometimes see him in my dreams and even cry then – sometimes I wake up with my face wet with tears.

Perhaps you think that pathetic, not the stuff of a grown man, but I don't mind, it's the truth – I love my dad. I'm sorry he was gone before my sons could know him, and he them, and I'm sorry I wasn't a better son, but whatever his reasons, I know he was enormously proud of me – more so than I deserved.

My dad's death was unexpected; I'd been told by the doctor he would go on for many months. Lisa and I were going away for the weekend and I'd checked with the hospital that very day to be sure Dad's condition was stable. We were almost out of mobile range when the call came through. I saw the number and knew immediately it was the hospital. Contrary to what I'd been told only a few hours before, I now get the frightful news my dad was going very quickly and may not last an hour. Up until that time, it was certainly the worst moment of my life – we were at least ninety minutes away. We did a U-turn and headed back as quickly as possible.

If you haven't had the experience, it will be hard to imagine what it's like to be far enough away that you know it's likely you can't make it in time. It's impossible to adequately describe the pain I felt – my dad was about to die and I probably wasn't going to get to him to say goodbye. It was one of those times when things are beyond anything you can do yourself and so you call upon unearthly powers to somehow help you – one of those times when the atheists manifest beliefs.

As it turned out, whether it was by design or plain luck, my dad held on and I spent about six hours with him. There wasn't much I could say and there was nothing I could do and the pragmatic doctor telling me he would die that night served no purpose at all.

I was a complete mess. Neither before nor since have I felt so helpless in every respect. I wasn't praying for him to somehow pull through because it didn't occur to me that was at all possible. They were giving him lots of morphine, and now I of course know they were assisting his death.

My mum was there and Lisa and a few other relatives, but at the

end, it was just Dad and me. I was so sad, so powerless, so guilty for not being a better son.

I kept saying, 'I love you Dad.' I told him he was the best dad in the world and that one day I would have sons and I would tell them all about him and that they would love him too. Then I told him he was going to die. Through all this, he'd been lying there on his back, his eyes closed, and the only movement was his breathing, but then a single tear ran down the outside of the corner of his right eye.

He slowly breathed out, and didn't breathe in again. I sat there holding his hand until they came to take him away. I don't know why I told him he was going to die. I still don't know; maybe one day I'll work that out.

My dad was the bravest man I'd ever known, and he'd demonstrated that his whole life – there must have been times he was scared, because you can't be brave without first being scared. If there is no fear, there is no bravery – it's overcoming fear that is true bravery. He is my hero.

My dad's funeral was well attended by his many post WW II friends and those who didn't know him as such, but respected him, especially so from the local Returned Serviceman's League. There were former work colleagues, including those who saw him as a mentor, and a lot of people who didn't have to be there, but had taken the time to honour my dad and to bring us comfort.

I considered the words I would say at Dad's funeral would be the most important I'd ever written, but I was so close to falling apart and couldn't show it. A lot of people make the mistake of thinking I'm cold – if anything, I'm too emotional, but for the most part, I keep it to myself.

Alan Jones did a piece for Dad on his show on 2GB – another example of the extraordinary decency for which Alan is often not credited.

You will therefore be saddened as I was to learn of the unexpected passing of David Oldfield's father on Friday night.

I understand David was with him at the end, and David's mother and family are traumatised by the passing. He was the CEO of Samuel Taylor, but that was perhaps the least significant aspect of his life.

David Oldfield's dad was a decorated combat veteran, commissioned from the ranks and a survivor of the hell of being a prisoner of the Japanese. He was one of the last of a generation of Australians of whom we most probably will not see the like.

– Alan Jones AO,
arguably Australia's most successful broadcaster.
Excerpt from on-air tribute to my dad on 2GB,
25 February 2008

When I was growing up, my dad was reasonably well known and everywhere we went, I was referred to as 'Bill Oldfield's son', but as time moved on and I became publicly known, people at large referred to him as 'David Oldfield's dad/father'. These days people often note my boys as 'David Oldfield's sons', but I'll be more than happy if the time comes where I am simply referred to as 'Harry and Bert Oldfield's dad'. Perhaps that is something of the circle of life?

I often think about the fact we will all one day be gone, as indeed will all those who knew us and all those likely to remember us – we will all be lost forever like almost everyone before us. It will be as if we had never existed. As long as the human race exists in its current organised form, there will be historical figures with lives documented for all time, but the rest of us will disappear as the loved ones we left behind follow us into the abyss. Eventually, time will effectively erase our existence. Our complete lack of any consequence is a terrible thing to contemplate. At least, that's how it is for me.

My parents mean so very much to me and yet, not so long from now, everyone who knew them, loved them and respected them, will be gone. I hate that so much; I hate that so very much – they deserved more.