

SO WHAT DOES IT ALL ADD UP TO?

As I write in 2004 I feel I am able to reflect back on a charmed life. There can be few generations as fortunate. I have not known war, pestilence, hunger or want and I have been gifted with the talents and personality to succeed in life. I have also enjoyed the love of the most wonderful wife, have two children that any man would be proud of and more than a little good fortune. In comparison with the majority of the population of the world I feel truly blessed.

After spending a fair few hours considering and weighing my life of work and leisure, family and pleasure and all the interwoven relationships that made it what it was, what have I learned about myself? What kind of a person am I? What makes me tick and what legacy, if any, will I leave behind me?

I have always thought of myself as a good natured and jovial sort of person, a bit of a live wire in company and quite fond of mucking about. I may have mellowed over time but I always seem to see the bright side of life and am seldom down-hearted. I have a stable personality and I am not prone to mood swings. I like to think of myself as principled. I have a clear set of values which I was brought up to consider virtuous, things like honesty, trustworthiness, self-discipline, frugality, care for others and a good solid work ethic. These are the Christian values and they provided the moral code upon which I tried to build a life of integrity. They underpinned my decisions and choices and gave a solid foundation to life. Without them life would have had little purpose and no direction.

I am not particularly adventurous, neither am I content with the mundane. I have never allowed the grass to grow under my feet. I like to be stimulated by new and different things and I have seldom been without some new project or cause. My life has therefore been one of continual growth. I have never known boredom or stagnation. Although I would not regard myself as particularly intelligent I have risen to life's challenges and could never contemplate failure. As a result I have grown in wisdom and honed the character traits that bring success – vision, determination and perseverance. If somebody had told me at the age of 13 that I would achieve a Masters Degree and a senior position in Education I would have laughed in their faces. Neither

my parents nor me would have considered it a remote possibility. The key to it was the success experience, a very powerful motivator. Although it took me all of my formative years to build any self-esteem it was the intoxicating discovery of success in singing and school work that gave me the confidence to kick-start my life. It is frightening to think that this fell on the shoulders of a few individuals who recognised the potential and believed in me sufficiently to encourage it. Success is addictive. Having tasted it and come to an understanding of what was needed to achieve it I had to have more. I took deep breaths and rose to the opportunities that were presented to me and as a result my life has been one of happiness, satisfaction, challenge and revelation. Unfortunately modesty has not been a strong point. Whilst I do not openly boast I tend to wear success like an aura. I do not mean to be smug or conceited but the satisfaction permeates through and it may not be one of my most endearing qualities.

Since the age of 13 I have enjoyed work hugely. No matter how menial the task I always viewed it as a personal challenge and not only did it to the best of my ability but strove to improve my performance. I gave work my all and drew immense satisfaction and pride from my achievements. I have never done a shoddy day's work in my life. I am focused and single minded and I am a finisher. I like to get on with things, am impatient with interruption or delay and will exhaust myself before I give up. I have prided myself that I often finish a job whilst other people are still thinking about it. The pride and satisfaction which follows accomplishment have been among the greatest pleasures of my life and I have never been able to stop myself from showing off. I am driven to work hard to attract attention, acclaim and appreciation. I have a deep seated need to be noticed, respected, even revered. Positive strokes have always been the elixir of my life and I would sell myself into slavery to achieve them and to be valued. Diligence, reliability, consistency and perseverance are all qualities that employers hold dear. I worked hard to ensure that I had them all in good measure.

I am also driven by enthusiasm and creativity. There have been episodes of great intellectual excitement in my life where I have stumbled upon ideological revelations that have had career changing consequences. At these times I have been able to unleash a flood of creative energy to illustrate and record my discoveries for the purpose of stimulating others. There have also been occasions when I have been inspired by colleagues and have been carried away with exciting possibilities.

I am an organised person. There is a place for everything and everything has a place. I cannot stand a mess and cannot relax surrounded by disorganised clutter. I have a developed sense of visual geometry. Pictures on walls, items on mantelpieces and patterns on pages must balance and be symmetrical. It is a symptom of finickiness which I apply to nearly everything I do. I am a perfectionist and am not happy until things are right. There are areas of my life, however, where I am not so diligent. I have little dress sense and, if it were not for Jenny, I fear I might be considered slovenly! Strangely this has never bothered me. I wanted to be known for who I am, not what I looked like!

There is a deep seated need in me to be liked as a person. I am very sensitive of people's feelings towards me. I am happy when people like me and happier still when

they look up to me and respect me. By and large I like people, am genuinely interested in them and am prepared to listen to them and help them. I tend to see good in people. I am not naturally suspicious and tend, somewhat gullibly perhaps, to trust people too easily. I don't like long faces and automatically joke about in order to lift people's spirits. I also listen more than I talk. Over the years I have learned to read body language and have become adept at humouring people and telling them what they most want to hear. There is little gain in being brutally frank or hurtful. I hate to upset people, it upsets me! My nature is more towards empathy and understanding. The need for approval is too strong to set people against me. Basically I prefer the light touch. I do not succumb easily to heavy intimate relationships. I therefore have a wide circle of acquaintances but few real friends. The only true friend in my life is Jenny. I shun other relationships because they create demands and conflicts of interest which upset her and sours the atmosphere between us. I can't stand living in an atmosphere. I am too transparent to conceal the battle between my conscience and deceit and falsehood and cannot pull the wool over peoples eyes for long without having to come clean. Needless to say I shrink from disapproval and avoid it at all costs. I only put my head above the parapet when I am sure of my ground and can argue my case. I have an acute sense of justice and fairness. It overrides everything. If I feel that either I or any member of the family are the victims of an injustice I come out fighting and woe betide anyone who stands in my way. In most other circumstances I avoid confrontations and will walk away from arguments or disagreements. I seem to have real difficulty in coping with the extremes of negative emotion. There are few people in my life that I have disliked but I do have an aversion to arrogant, priggish people who have the effrontery to believe that they are better than me and I can't stand overbearing bullies, especially women. I am not slow to show them my contempt and take every opportunity to put them down.

Unfortunately I recognise a selfish streak in my personality and I am not nearly as giving to my loved ones as I ought to be. I covet both money and possessions and look after both with immaculate care. I am very possessive of the things that I value. I keep them in tip-top condition and do not like other people interfering with them. There's nothing I enjoy more than making something out of nothing. Consequently I do not dispense with things lightly but tend to hoard them against a rainy day. My shed and garage are full of rubbish that one day might be useful and I get great satisfaction from using it and saving the pennies. I do not part with money easily. Risk taking and gambling are not in my nature. I weigh the benefits of everything I buy. If I feel I could do without it I don't buy it. Part of my reticence is that I am not a practiced spender. Jenny does all the day-to-day buying. There's very little I need for myself. The result is that I seldom have more than a few pence in my pockets. I do not subscribe to charity and can't bring myself to buy lottery tickets. I am too lax even to buy those all important tokens of love and gratitude for the people most dear to me. To cover my shame I often joke that I am so tight that I squeak but I could kick myself for my lack of forethought. Fortunately my meanness is balanced by Jenny's generosity and feeling for occasion. The only exception to my penny-pinching is cars. Perversely, whilst I sweat over the pennies in most things I buy I squander thousands

of pounds to have a good car. I suppose it's my status symbol – a public statement that I am worthy and have position. It's the sin of pride all over again!

My selfishness extends to getting my own way. Whilst I am happy to go along with Jenny and the family at home, provided I have kept abreast of my chores and responsibilities, at work I was always more assertive. As my status rose I became less and less inclined to take orders and I fought for the right to do things my way. I therefore became increasingly independent and less of a team player. I grew impatient and frustrated at what I saw was the obstruction of others. As a manager I was equally determined to have things done my way. I listened to people, took on board their ideas and looked after them but I left them in no doubt that I was in charge. I enjoyed the power and influence.

In weighing these character traits I get a sense of what I have inherited and what has resulted from environmental influence. I see a great deal of my parents in me, I recognise traits which result from being a sibling and I see characteristics which are purely reactionary to both my parents and the environment in which I was brought up. There are also traits which have been nurtured by Jenny which emanate from our love for each other and our need to mould to each other and others which more directly result from fatherhood. From this melee I feel I was born to be a teacher. So many of my personality traits seemed to fit me for the role. I slotted comfortably into it and it provided exactly the challenges and rewards that kept me happy, motivated and fulfilled. It suited me perfectly. Work was always a pleasure, never a chore. I was lucky! Of course there was some conditioning which impacted upon my personality. I very definitely developed and refined a public persona. As an example and role model for children it was important to be above reproach and to exemplify the virtues. As an educator and leader it was equally important to be assertive, determined, fair and approachable. It demanded the ability to act in order to win the hearts and minds of the youngsters and to be able to turn the emotions of pleasure and displeasure on and off like the turn of a tap to maintain order and control. At home I was a different person. Some of my pupils would have been amazed to discover just how soft I was beneath the shell. One trait that would have surprised them is my romanticism. I can quite easily be moved to tears by romance and sentimentality. I can feel it and identify with it. This aspect of my personality underpinned much of my stage career which I was equally equipped to handle. I seemed to specialise in romantic leads rather than the macho hero. Perhaps there is an effeminate side to me though in every other respect I am all man!!

So what is my legacy to the world? What will I leave behind me to show that I ever existed? Well beyond two wonderful children and a lot of memories not a lot really. There is very little that I have built or created that will outlast me. I like to think that I may have influenced people along the way. If that influence led them towards a better and more rewarding life then I shall be well pleased. As it stands I have no cause for complaint. I have had all that one could ask for out of life. I am content. God has smiled on me.