**ANZAC DAY ADDRESS 2023 – Roger Stuart-Andrews**

**SHOULD WAR BE MERELY A FACT OF LIFE?**

Because as an historian, I see little evidence throughout our recorded history of our species ever learning anything from past wars, whether they were on the defeated or the victorious side.

Thanks to Pete Seeger we know where the soldiers go – “They go to graveyards everyone. When will they ever learn?” – but I wondered where do all the soldiers come from? The only answer I could come up with was, to paraphrase Pete, “they came from children, everyone”.

We shall shortly hear our children’s choir. They sing beautifully, they sing with meaning, they sing with joy. Their future is a wide-open book simply awaiting the words.

Recently I attended my grandson’s 7th birthday where his seven chosen best friends were gathered playing happily together. He was the only European – his friends though were Josh, Tom, Dick and Harry not a Chinese, not an Indian, not a Jew, not a Muslim, not a Japanese. All played happily. Each saw the other as a friend not as a racial stereotype. I wondered then and wonder still how and if they may become the warriors of the future.

We are here today to pay tribute to those who gave their lives in the service of their country and not for one minute should we resile from so doing. They took on burdens thrust upon them, gave their all, in pursuit of the dream of freedom and must be so honoured.

I feel saddened not only that Oscar Hammerstein was moved to write some lines in the musical ‘South Pacific’ in 1949 but that the song was considered inappropriate and banned from many productions. It affected too many sensitivities!! No one seemed to listen to what he was actually saying – so worried were they that others may be offended if the lines struck close to home.

The song is called “You’ve got to be carefully taught” and is an attack on the racial divide in the States which survived the war; the comradeship and egalitarianism of the trenches and the battlefield; the intimacy of the tanks and aircraft.

Racism never reared its head in any of our armed forces while the war was on but come the peace and the sacrifices were forgotten – racism was alive and well.

The fight over this song’s inclusion was long and bitter and resolved only with Rodgers and Hammerstein’s threat to scrub the whole show. Money always speaks and the show went on with this song:

*You've got to be taught to hate and fear*

*You've got to be taught from year to year*

*It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear*

*You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught to be afraid*

*Of people whose eyes are oddly made*

*And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade*

*You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught before it's too late*

*Before you are six or seven or eight*

*To hate all the people your relatives hate*

*You've got to be carefully taught.*

Did we adults teach Douglas Wood from Hawthorn to join up at 14 years 5 months old and die at 15 years 6 months old at Fromelles.

What about wee Bernard Haines who weighed just 45 kg and whose nickname was ‘baby’?

Did we incite Leslie Prior from Brunswick to enlist six days after his 14th birthday and die at Bullecourt aged 15 years and 3 months?

This possibly unconscious fomenting of the young extends beyond childhood. It certainly worked on me.

I remember freezing evenings in a public hall in Dunedin while serving my years as a conscripted soldier in the 1960s New Zealand army swallowing the tripe fed to us via a broad American accent, a black board and a white piece of chalk. The depiction thereon clearly enunciated the passage of the yellow hordes who were massing to sweep down through Asia, across Australia’s huge landmass and somehow keep their lines of supply intact to finally envelope ‘South Pacific’s triple star’ as we are designated in our national anthem.

This furphy was the so-called ‘domino theory’ but was well sold as I, along with most of my mates, volunteered to go to Vietnam! It was only the growing opposition coinciding with the end of my enforced enrolment that led me to resign my commission and re-enter civvie street.

We must not focus only on the soldiers we commemorate today. War destroys our children. The facts speak for themselves:

* between 1.5 and 2 million children died in WW11
* 84,000 in the Vietnam war
* 500 so far in the war in the Ukraine.

And it continues with 500,000 children dead in world conflicts over the last five years.

You tube shows us the trembling, emaciated, defeated Adolf Hitler shaking hands in the last days of his thousand year Reich with 14 year old boys he is sending out into the shattered streets of Berlin to go up against the battle-hardened Russian army and its tanks. He forced the boys to share his manic aims, if he and his Reich wasn’t to survive then all Germans should go down with him – even the children.

Perhaps that Greek philosopher, Plato, hit the nail on the head 2,400 years ago when he espoused the concept of the ‘noble lie’ wherein the elites tell stories to persuade the masses to their will.

Remember the weapons of mass destruction furphy told to us by politicians who one cynic said were the fellows who would lay down your life for their country.

George Santayana, a Spanish-American poet, novelist and essayist warned from 100 years ago that “only the dead have seen the end of war” and that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.

History teaches our children about the past, yet history is taught only every two years at Victorian schools and becomes an elective after year nine. Without their history our children are rudderless ships adrift on an ocean of misinformation and ignorance. They are not well equipped to face these pressures hence it is easier just to drift along with the herd as a wilderbeest does at migration time.

Santayana also said “the family is one of nature's masterpieces” yet some of us fail to educate our children about the past. History is stories about the past. L.P.Hartly reminds us “the past is another country. They do things differently there”. Yet our libraries are combed for all those books beloved by us but unsuitable for our children. They want to change that which should be immutable to sanitise the past.

This simply hides the huge advances we have made in moving on towards a greater understanding of others. I fear we denigrate our children when we destroy their access to the past. Should we cover the wee one’s ears when I bemoan the censoring of Enid Blyton from using phrases such as “shut up, George” and “Don’t be an ass”? Listen to any playground for the answer. See how your little ones are dealing with the plethora of modern diversity issues. They have so much more on their plates than we. Do they need this as well?

Gemma Tognini in ‘The Australian’ points out that strong adults don’t just happen, they don’t fall up, they are brought up. Sometimes dragged up. But it is deliberate; it is parenting; it is teaching values such as tolerance of other’s differences.

Benjamin Franklin’s aphorism rings loud and clear ‘life’s tragedy is that we get too old too soon and wise too late”.

Are we too late?

Take heart from the great cellist Pablo Casals who was heard to mutter on a particularly stressful tour: “The situation is hopeless. We must take the next step.” A Libyan saying suggests that “those who don’t break your back strengthen it”. There is always the next step down a path to who knows where.

Are we sending them forth imbued with peace, tolerance and acceptance or have we helped create the next generation of soldiers?

I close with the book of proverbs wherein King Solomon warns “In the days of peace, without vision the people perish”. Perhaps these words may encourage us to look at our little ones with fresh eyes and think about what we have taught them – carefully or otherwise.

A radical idea would be to let our children teach us. I feel we just may have much to learn, and they may make us ashamed of some of what we say and positions we hold.

Weep for the dead but perhaps we should spare some tears for ourselves our little ones and the future.