



## INTRODUCTION to BOOK 2: vagaries of the tree of life

**George had arrived at a place where he could claim some contentment. With earlier confusing years in the rearview mirror, he was able to adopt the new life Australia had to offer. He had - more by good luck than sound management – navigated his way to *The Lucky Country*. But what might life have been, if those crucial decisions along the way determined an alternative branch on his *Tree of Life*?**

In a more general sense, how do the decisions we make affect our future being? Along life's relatively short and meandering path to supposed heaven or hell, we each stumble on a myriad of forks in the road, where choice dictates the path we take; as if beginning our journey from the base of a gigantic oak and ending up a twig on its outer limits. Which endpoint twig we finally arrive at, is self or otherwise determined, by the myriad of branching options we choose along the way.

A few of us - a fraction of the almost eight billion – are born to lead and to rule; to prosper come what may. This legacy is bestowed through birthright (along with its allied upbringing and education). For this relatively small group there is unshrinking belief that destiny is established at birth. Essentially the futures of this miniscule portion of people on Earth are pre-ordained, but even for them, there will be significant choices – including inbuilt tussles to maintain their gilded legacy – that need to be made as they

graduate, as we all do, to that ultimate twig. This is true for all parts of the planet, whether it be the Americas, Europe, Asia or Africa: a certain few have distinct advantages over the multitudinous remainder.

In stark contrast, the futures for the remaining 99% plus of the planet's populace are not pre-determined, but related much more to the choices they (and those around them) make as they navigate their branches. For those who exist at the lower limits of our world's economic pyramid - in Africa, Asia, or Latin America - it becomes a distinctly uphill battle, and only a comparatively miniscule number are able to make the right choices that enable them to progress to a bright and relatively prosperous future.

To illustrate this aspect of *Born-to-Rule* legacy in familiar British surrounds, we can refer to the life stories of two prominent politicians. For Boris Johnson, life's pathway to the top was to a large extent inevitable: born wealthy, educated at Eton and Oxford, then on to Lord Mayor of London, Foreign Secretary and British Prime Minister; one could say he was anointed in the cradle. But for Margaret Thatcher, born a grocer's daughter, the choices to reach the summit were much more challenging, even including elocution lessons to enable her to speak and emulate those people who had in truth, attended Eton and Oxford.

Thus, some of us are given a head start, because we are provided with a better tree to start with. But regardless of that, for all of us, including Prime Ministers, the major branch choices - those that stand out as blue whales amongst a sea of sardines - tend to be the ones that most clearly determine our progress and direction. Education, employment, habitat, our respect for personal well-being, and our partner in life, etc.: these are some of the main aspects where our choice essentially dictates our future.

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*So let's now backtrack through some of the discrete 'main-branch options', faced by George as he traversed those twenty years or so, from that babe carried home in a box in England, to enlightenment in Australia. Did he, given the circumstance, make the right decisions, or could he have done better? Could his tree-of-life branch choices have*

*been more carefully thought through - less impulsive perhaps – in order to guide him along a preferable path.*

*In the early days of course, the major decisions were made for him, rather than by him; as for most of us, his family chose the branch to follow. But from his early teens, George took over the reins, and from then on, his fate lay effectively in his own hands.*

***Major choice No.1 (at 0 years): to be, or not to be!***

For George, one very early branch choice was there, even before he was born. Dorothy his mother – in the known circumstance of post-war England, closely guided by her parents – had to choose between illegal abortion or allowing her foetus to grow and emerge into a Yorkshire Winter world. Luckily for George, she and her parents made the pro-life choice. This necessitated the baby being born in secrecy, or the birth would be labelled illegitimate and the child a *bastard!* Thus George came to Earth within the confines of a trusted doctor's surgery - and away from the neighbourhood's prying eyes - before transfer to the family home and subsequent veiled announcement to the world that 'a *new wee bairn is born*' ... to his maternal grandmother. Of course, if his mother and her family had in reality chosen abortion, then this story too would have been terminated, before it had begun.

***Major choice No.2 (at 5 years) Scotland or Cornwall.***

After the birth there was one major decision (along with many minor choices of course) made on George's behalf, by his immediate family. This foremost decision, effected at an early stage in his life, involved a monumental move for himself and family, away from the grime and graft of post-war Yorkshire, to the green valleys and unsullied air of Cornwall, way towards the South West tip of England.

It was an interesting choice, because his father (in reality, his grandfather) had on several occasions checked out a farm-island off the West coast of Scotland, which was thought to be the most likely destination. The family had close Scottish connections. George in fact could claim by birth to have three-quarters Scottish blood coursing

through his veins. But In the end Cornwall was judged a warmer climate, and likely to provide a healthier environment for the revered matriarch of the family (George's grandmother), who was seriously ill with what turned out to be terminal cancer.

It was a marginal decision, but one wonders what might have happened if the throw of the dice had pointed to Scotland. George would have grown up with a heavy Scottish accent, rather than a slow Cornish drawl, and because the island was so remote, he may have by necessity, had to attend boarding school thence on to university in Aberdeen, or Edinburgh. Because of this, he most likely would not have chosen to move to Australia in his mid-teens, perhaps opting for a job after university in a field where he had shown aptitude, such as agriculture or architecture. It could have been a very different George who emerged in his mid-twenties to court and marry a young Scottish lass. They would become a professional couple, perhaps following their wanderlust and travelling to Europe and Asia, and even eventually to Australia.

Thus George would have chosen - or have had chosen for him - a totally different branch of his life-tree; a branch that would deliver another discrete set of connections to people and place, though the possibility is still there, that due to his maternal relations, he might have ended up in similar circumstances of life and work in the antipodes.

### ***Major choice No.3 (at 16 years): England or Australia***

After George assumed life in Cornwall, the next decade seemed to be split in two: the first half on the up; the second on the down. By mid-teens he faced the prospect of likely expulsion from secondary school, and thus the most momentous decision of those turbulent years was taken – this time by George, but guided by family - to travel to Australia, where he would join the family of his older sister (in reality his mother). A combination of inbuilt wanderlust and need to exit a tight situation in England, prompted George, with hardly a second thought, to accept the offer and ship out to Australia. It was essentially a decision taken on impulse, with some degree of desperation.

But what if he had declined and opted instead to stay with his errant adolescence? Then, with school in the past and no qualifications in sight, George might well have

become a delinquent youth, connected to a poor mix of friends who would lead him down ill-chosen routes towards an unsociable, on-the-fringe lifestyle.

Alternatively, being the swinging 60s, when Britain was emerging from the lethargy of post-war 50s to lead the world in fashion and flower power, it may not have been all doom and gloom. He was an inherently bright lad, who had the potential to discard the surrounding influences and re-surface through fields such as music or art. Once the challenges of those teenage years had worn thin, he may well have picked himself up and begun exploring the fashionable delights of *Carnaby Street*, rather than the doldrums of Cornwall. A personal choice of higher education in his twenties could have set him on course for a new and vibrant career, while that ever-present wanderlust might still have prompted him to pick up, and act on, one of those recurring invitations to visit the *land down under*.

***Major choice No.4 (at 17 years): college or university***

George had elected to travel alone at the tender age of 16, to Australia. After arrival there his character changed out of all recognition, including excellent results at school, which contrasted vividly with abysmal grades in the UK. Then at the end of that first year *down under*, another incredibly important choice loomed from the depths. His newly adopted Australian family wanted him to persevere at school and progress to university, but George would have none of that; in the UK he had developed an inbuilt hatred of everything to do with school, and he wanted out.

Living his formative years on a Cornish dairy farm, meant George had a close affinity with, and basic knowledge of agriculture. This was the part of his former life in England that he missed more than most other aspects. Thus, it became his focus in Australia: to become educated and build a career in the world of agriculture. As a result, he set a course to become an agronomist, company representative, and finally farm management advisor, through to his mid-thirties.

However, we need to explore what could have happened if our young immigrant had followed the desires of his newfound family by attending a city-based (most likely Melbourne) university. He could have still chosen agriculture, but he also had other talents such as graphic art and architecture. In reality his later life had moved towards journalism and education, but this might well have happened earlier if he had chosen university in the first instance. Instead of employment in rural areas, the most likely scenario would have been for George to emerge from university and take up a higher-level position in agricultural research, journalism, education, art or architecture. Ultimately, he may have followed his calling to work with disadvantaged communities in developing countries - as happened in reality – but it would have entailed a different entry point and probably an alternative level of involvement. The *sons-of-landed-gentry* clique that he met (in truth) at agricultural college, would have undoubtedly been replaced by more highly educated students, who in turn could have connected him to a range of diverse, city-based individuals: an alternative lifestyle, inhabited by very different personnel, at another level.

In his twenties, George admired and in some ways envied the freewheeling music-driven life of his half-brother, five years his junior, who attended university in Melbourne, later to become a teacher. Pubs and clubs, the dreaded weed and the artworld, where hallmarks of the bohemian lifestyle his younger brother led in the 1970s: wine, women and song an apt way to describe it. In contrast – due to his transfer from England to Australia and more rural existence - George managed to miss much of the revolution that was going on around him. His brother, being city-based and university-bonded was in the thick of it (albeit in Australia) while George was towards the outer. And in many ways – looking back to those days - he regretted that.

***Major choice No.5 (at 19 years): Victoria or South Australia***

After agricultural college, George was directed (and accepted) to move for work from the state of Victoria to South Australia. Just before that, he had become engaged to a young teacher in Victoria, but after the move he met a new love, whom he married in Adelaide. His bride was a teacher, and like George an immigrant from Britain with a bit

of a wanderlust (perhaps due to her father's many postings in the Royal Air Force). After a few years of life together which saw them working and travelling to various parts of Australia, they ventured back to Europe to re-unite with relatives and see the continent. This tends to prove the theory that one's destiny is governed by circumstance: where you are, and whom you meet, at any given time. If George had elected to stay in Victoria, marrying his original fiancée (whose parents were third or fourth generation Australians and not particularly outgoing), this could have underpinned a different-looking future, that may *not* have included travel to Europe, and could have impacted significantly on his subsequent life and work in other parts of the world.

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### ***Deciphering our stories, our choices, and our realities***

For George of course, many more key decisions were made after this, as he progressed through the middle years to later life, each of them offering alternative pathways to differing futures. But these particular choices selected from his earlier years (above) held the most major and long-lasting consequences. For each, the alternatives on offer would have brought about a seismic shift in his life as it moved forward. Indeed, if the first decision had been to opt for abortion, then his life would not have happened at all: a choice made for George that when viewed with hindsight, was of paramount and unequalled importance.

But as we know, George's earthly existence *did* continue, and once that was assured, then subsequent alternative choices had to be dealt with whenever they occurred: an ongoing selection process, where choosing other options would have brought different places and a new breed of people into his life, heralding major directional changes compared to the reality which actually occurred.

But what is reality? This tale is drawn from one life; meticulously pieced together in something approaching chronological order, providing a portrait of one person's presence in the known universe: a painting of a thousand brushstrokes, about one sense of being. But is the painting, the story, the tale ... that sense of being ... is it real? This is

the ultimate question that every thinking person must ask. Is what I experience ... what I hear, see, smell, taste and touch ... is it a reality? Or is it a dream?

With this in mind, George recalls a short poem he wrote when he was in his early 30s. It refers to a long-gone TV drama - cops and robbers from the US – and tackles the exponential growth of the digital dimension (whilst addressing the inner workings of an active mind). In an interconnected sense the poem also focuses on the osmotic-like influence of American culture: something which George, at that stage of his life, had begun to detest. The last verse is particularly relevant, because it asks: what is fact ... and what is fiction. Could our lives in reality be so devoid of meaning, that the two – fact and fiction – can be interchanged?

***Imagine a dream of last night's view,  
With 'Starsky and Hutch' and adverts too.  
Bombs in the cornflakes,  
Blood in the coke;  
The dream is for real,  
It's the day that's the joke!***

For the sake of this tale, we can only hope the concluding lines are not true. George has only just entered his third decade and has a long way to go, with a multitude of anecdotes from his past, which when pulled together make an absorbing story.

We will pick up where we left off, with our hero embarked on a new life in a new place, and about to become embroiled in his first serious job, under the mentorship of *Tom*, a somewhat unique person who lived life to the full ...and makes it his business to show George how to do the same.

At this stage of the story George has reached the age of full recall, not dependent on outside sources for the facts, as he had been to some degree, through many of the chapters to date. Thus from here on, the complete story will be told by George, from his own lips, and in his own unabridged words.

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