

The Work Ethic

Having a work ethic is considered a virtue, but some may say that a compulsion to work hard and regularly can disrupt normal family and social relationships. I have always felt a commitment to achieve something each day, and this has been present since an early age. I think I can explain why. I can blame my mother for my work ethic. I loved her dearly, and I have to thank her for bringing me up as a solo parent most of the time, and ensuring that I had a good education. But she was an eccentric, and although she was the oldest sibling of seven in her family, she was very definitely a “loner”, and was prone to making unusual life decisions.

My father was an itinerant engineer for Ruston and Hornsby, married my mother in her early 30s, and whisked her off to Singapore, where I was conceived. But my mother, fearing that I would be born in a foreign country without a British Passport travelled by sea on a Blue Funnel Line back to Lincoln, England, where she gave birth. After a long convalescence, she returned to the Singapore life with Chinese cooks and amahs, and a chauffeur. World War 2 had commenced, but I recall her life with friends, the Swimming Club, concerts, watching military parades continued. I think she did not believe the warnings about an imminent Japanese invasion, until bombs were dropped on River Valley Road where we lived in a flat. She caught the last ship out of Singapore early 1942, another Blue Funnel Liner, and there is film footage of her dragging a recalcitrant hyperactive goldy-locked child up the gang plank. I was five years old at the time, and remember the ship docking in North Western ports before arriving in Perth. They are we lived for three years, and I went to school at Saint Hilda’s Kindergarten and Christ Church Preparatory School. But before the end of the war, my mother stated that she “wanted to go home to see Daddy”. So we caught another Blue Final Liner, in huge convoy which entranced me, round the Cape, stopping briefly in Casablanca which was a free port, before arriving British Channel, where a dense fog stopped all shipping. The ship behind us was torpedoed by a U-Boat, but then the fog cleared and I remember the extreme joy of seeing the White cliffs of Dover and the green hills of “home”. In London, waiting for a train to Lincoln, we heard the buzz of Hitler’s V2 bombs.

In Lincoln, my mother learnt that I could get free education at the Lincoln Grammar School if I was a cathedral choirboy. After intensive singing lessons for several weeks, I was in a long queue to attend an audition, which was successful and I joined the choir! This was a wonderful experience for four years, and the choral music of anthems and oratorios lives with me still. I think the discipline of having to attend Lincoln Cathedral every morning at 9 am for choir practice, and 4 pm for Evensong every weekday with three services on Sundays, ingrained my work ethic. We returned to Perth in 1950, and I think I was a better student at school, and subsequently in my medical studies, because of it.