



Chapter 4

Streaming vs Dreaming and Da Vinci (High School)

There are 2 key processes going on at high school. One is streaming where young people are encouraged and directed towards subjects which they are best at and hopefully interested in. Choices about a young person's future work become a key focus of the school, parents and the student. What future career will suit their abilities? At the same time faced with all these choices young people begin to dream about doing the things they are really interested in. Dreams influence by aspirations of the culture around them. This second process, happens with the background of a mythical capitalist story "if you work hard enough and try hard enough you can achieve whatever you want to".

Place

I spent grades 8 to 10 living at Bellata St (high school started in year 8 back then). These were very good years for me. In grade 11 Dad was promoted to run The South Australian division of PGH a brick making firm. We lived in the Adelaide Hills district at Aldgate¹ for 9 months where I was not particularly happy before

¹ As I have lived most of my life within 120 kilometers of The Gap, its worth some reflection on my brief stay so far from 'home', while in grade 11. The move to South Australia was a big shock for me. I had to get familiar to an entirely different area from scratch. In Brisbane I knew the terrain and where ever my family drove to, I had a good idea in what direction home was and how to get there. I could just look to the TV towers on Mt Cootha to get my bearings. In South Australia I had to study maps. In Aldgate we lived on a leafy rural/bush acreage block. The Adelaide hills were beautiful and I enjoyed extending the native gardens on our land. I liked our new home. The Adelaide hills had an artistic intellectual affluent feel with many art galleries in the Aldgate village. It was known as the home of the Heidelberg School of artists. With Dad's promotion and our move to acreage living, it seemed we had moved up in the world.

However overall I was a bit lonely. Most of my peers lived at a distance from the high school. While I developed some friendships at school, it did not progress to activities after school. It was just too far to walk to a friend's place. Also there was no local soccer team and dad and I would travel 20 kilometres down the range to Adelaide so I could play with a suburban team. I had gone from having good friends through school and sport in grade 10 to being a new and marginal person at Aldgate High school.

I discussed with Mum and Dad the option of me returning on my own to stay with my sister and brother in law for year 12. My parents were open to this, and I think this is what I would have done, but fortunately we all came back in any case and I finished the last ¼ of grade 11 back at The Gap High.





we returned to The Gap when Dad was promoted again to run The Queensland Division. Coming back, we lived in my 4th house in the Gap at Barrabooka Drive. It was good to be back in my familiar geography.

The Gap State High School

It was a big jump up to high school from primary. We had about 60 students in year 7 primary. There was about 200 in grade 8. The confidence gained through the primary years was now under pressure. I was now a very small fish again with the fear of big new predators. While I would hang out with my primary school group for a while we all started making new friends with others from different primary schools. Greg Rowe and Jeff McLennan who were new to the area have remained lifelong friends. Throughout the high school years we would spend many afternoons in Jeff's backyard playing cricket or hanging out at the Koorong St shops.



Strong friendship bonds developed throughout the class and I know many friendships between others in the class also continue to this day. Dale Parks and Mark Gebbert from the class made up a "class song" to the tune of "five foot two, eyes are blue", which we would all sing together regularly to annoy our teachers. It had the effect of helping to cement our tribal connections. Many from this class would later become good friends during University till marriages and new Careers would take people further away from each other. My friends Rowie, Jenny O'Connor and Debbie Brown have created an ongoing bet about Rowie's weight. He was very skinny at high school and they bet he would not remain so as he got older. Consequently we have a regular 'weigh in every ten years or so which brings together some from this old 9a1 class group, including me, Hazel Bateman and others from time to time.

High school was very different to primary. In primary school, students were eager to please their teachers and they were generally liked by students. In grade 8 you could quickly sense a new culture filtering down from the older students. It was no longer cool to express positive attitudes towards any teachers (even





those you liked). Teachers were now the enemy and it was our job to make it clear we did not want to be here. While much of the primary sentiment of respecting teachers and liking them secretly remained, openly we would deride teachers and the school. We made out like we were prisoners in a labour camp, but in reality, it was quite different. Teachers in high school by and large did treat us more like adults and we were much more in charge of our own education in terms of how much work we did and what subjects we selected. The change of student attitude was more about our own maturation. Moving from childhood to adolescence meant we were more inwardly focused on our own emerging identity and less concerned about parents and our teachers' views and more interested in our image within the peer group.

In grade 8 we were the new kids on the block and we kept to our area of the playground where the handball courts were and away from where the bigger kids roamed more freely. We wore our uniforms as required. Our shirts were clean and tucked in with our socks pulled up and our shoes polished. The girls were similarly dressed neatly in new uniforms with their skirts coming down to the required length. From our grade 8 territory we could see older boys with shirts



yellowing, hanging out and perhaps ripped. Many of the older girls would have their skirts hiked much higher than allowed (some much more than others), to show more leg. We would see teachers berating students for their attire with the

students reluctantly tucking shirts in and pulling skirts down. They did not seem very worried by the teacher's abuse and as the teacher would turn and walk away they would often readjust their clothing just as before. For our Grade 8 minds this was open rebellion.



An example of this change of culture and more rebellious spirit was particularly evident on sports days². On parade we were practicing the school war cry before the interschool sports meet. The cry involved some Aboriginal words and then the last line would spell out g. a. p. and then we were meant to sing out “gap”, but to our year 8 surprise we could clearly hear the older kids singing out “crap”. Unlike primary school, pride was no longer universal and it seemed not being patriotic to school was the cool thing to do. More rebellion was evident at the trials leading up to an inter school sports day. The older boys all crouched down in the take-off position for the 100 meter sprint but then when the gun would go off half the boys just stood and walked to the finish line, much to the amusement of the crowd and the frustration of many teachers.

Another example of the change of culture was evidenced by my mate Rowie who while a very keen sports lover and follower, decided to make it his goal to come last in the cross country . He was brilliantly successful coming in to the finish line when everyone else had gone home. In later years he had let it slip what he was up to and others then tried to also be the last. This meant a wrestling match at the finish line as they would try to throw each other over the line. Rowie was able to hang on to his record despite these ‘pretenders’ to his throne. In grade 12 we were all sitting in the stand looking out across the sports ground. The headmaster was handing out the prizes for the cross country winners and then in through the gate on the far side of the oval enters Rowie. A few of us notice and cheered and then as he got closer to the stands, a cheer went up as the winners are brought forward to collect their trophies. Rowie at this point changed direction towards the principal as if he was about to get the award much to the amusement of everyone. This idea that coming last could be a goal, was very impactful on me. While the value of completion was so ingrained in me and my peers, some cracks in its value began to emerge. I could see there was other options.

Wagging also became a very common activity in high school. Kids would come to school and the head down the creek for a smoke and return later or just head home or elsewhere. Teachers would sometimes catch kids in the act of wagging

² For some strange reason in grade 8 the cut off for school sports was different and as I was born in December and younger than nearly everyone I was place in a smaller pool for the trials and I ended up representing the school in shot put. I was a good soccer player but not a fast runner. I did see myself as strong and was quite proud of being in the athletic squad. This soon changed on the day of the school sports when I lined up against the boys from the other schools who were all at least a foot taller than men and heavily set with hairy arm pits.





and trouble would follow but there was also a strong sense of teachers being relieved that some of the more reluctant and trouble making students were leaving the scene. A friend of mine regularly begged school to go home or ride horses. Melinda was asked by one of her teachers on a day when she had stayed at school, “What are you still doing here?” So giving her tacit approval to head home and a strong sense of not being wanted.

So unlike primary school it was now clear that resistance to the authority of the school and teachers was a reality. It is important to note however that many teachers clearly held a similar rebellious attitude. The 60’s had had an effect and many of our teachers were permissive and even encouraging of this rebellious attitude. You could also sense the tension between these teachers and their more conservative colleagues. When I started high school young people were getting conscripted to go to the Vietnam War. I was always on the side of the draft dodgers and opposed the war, imagining I might be a draft dodger in a few years. Maybe it also was a way to appear brave (or cool) to my peers (and teachers) when I would have been in absolute terror if I had to go to war. It was clear however rebellion to authority was possible and it could even be supported by people in authority like my teachers.



This same tension existed amongst the students. Rebellion was not the only option on offer. There was a group of older kids particularly the prefects who lived up to the uniform policy and they would wear their blazers with achievements and awards embroidered under the school logo. To us grade 8ers





these students were more like the teachers. While some of us enjoyed watching the older student rebel, at the same time we cheered at interschool sports days for our team and valued our team stars and players. Speech night was an annual event to reward and value the sport and academic achievers in front of parents and teachers. We could also aspire to be an achiever, to fit in and receive this applause.

The question during the high school years was where would and should I fit in. I was a good student. I wanted to do well and I worked hard. It was best however not to look too keen at school and so I would do most of my work at home. I would get up early and work when my family was sleeping as there was no TV to distract me. My eldest sister Cheryl had been a very hard worker, a prefect and school captain. I had seen the hours she put in at home preparing for her matriculation exams. I had also seen the stress she put on herself to do well. This would sometimes bubble over to affect the whole family. Cathy the next oldest sister was less driven to do well academically. She was more artistic, cool and interested in boys. I learn from both and tried to find a position somewhere in between these. I know I worked much harder than most of my friends without letting on, and I also tried to look more laid back and cool than I actually was. I wanted to be (or to look) cool and rebellious, but also to be an achiever and affirmed by my teachers.



VS





Friendships and Romance

At high school the preparation for adulthood meant forming new tribes with peers and the decline of parental influence. It was also a time where young people began to imagine creating their own future families. My shyness with girls was quite extreme. I was mortified when a girl started sending me notes in class. Later with a different girl who I liked, I started to write notes back, however to actually have a conversation was pretty terrifying for me. Eventually this girl would get bored with my failure to go beyond paper. While all my friends and especially the girls were well into puberty, I was a very late developer. While now close to 6 foot in the old money, I was the second smallest boy in the class till I started growing in grade 12.

I was very self-conscious about this lack of development and quite fearful that there was something wrong with me and that puberty would never come. Thinking about it now I am amazed that I was never teased about this and it speaks volumes about the sensitivity of my class mates or perhaps I did a good job keeping this all secret. It was never spoken about in my family to me directly, although my oldest sister Cheryl once said that late maturers end up in more stable relationships. Right or wrong this was a very encouraging thing for her to say and really helped to reduce my anxiety about it.



Figure 1 Me and the grade 10 debating team

Despite my youthful looks or perhaps as a result of them, several girls (none from this photo) had crushes on me. When I was in grade 9 or so a group of grade 8 girls would follow me around at school to support one of their number who was keen on me. All my contemporaries would have jumped at the attention but for me it was so embarrassing and I would do my

best to hide or run away and ignored all these overtures. A similar thing happened in year 10 with a girl from my own year who was keen and with 6 or so of her friends they hung around my house at night, calling out my name. My body still





goes in to shock thinking about this. I hid in my room under the covers hoping my parents would not notice. My reaction must have been a terribly insulting thing for these girls, but it was not personal, I was just incredibly shy. I developed my own crushes on girls from my class but my interest was definitely expressed very subtly, so much so, no one ever knew.

After my brief stint in South Australia, puberty thankfully had started and I was much more confident with joining in on these flirtations. The move to South Australia left me feeling a bit lonely and isolated wanting to get back to my old friends, but when I did return things were not as they were. Parties, alcohol and sex were now in full flow and there was a lot more connections between people across the whole year. The class based tribes had come together and the hormones were racing.

After returning from Adelaide I would sit at lunch with some of the cool rebellious friends from my grade 10 class who had now more clearly adopted a hippy/surfie vibe. Mark, Robert, Jenny, Paul and Martin were all very humorous characters and lunch time was very enjoyable. I am not sure how I ended up in (or more correctly on the edge) of this group. Perhaps it was because I was keen on one of the girls in this group. My good friends Jeff and Rowie mainly played table tennis at lunch time, which I did not get in to, but the 3 of us would continue to play cricket in Jeff's backyard after school.

Jeff had taken to wearing his dressing gown around the place. My father still 40 years later still comments on his attire. This began while I was in Adelaide and I never really knew why. Maybe Jeff knew he was going to be a barrister and later a Judge and was practicing wearing a gown, or maybe he found a career where he could wear a dressing gown at work. Rowie was now referring to Jeff, as Dr Y, which apparently arose from saying his name 'Jeffery' backwards. I think I realized the Dr Who connection in a vague way with the dressing gown. Recounting this memory I realized I had never twigged that Dr Y was actually Dr "Why?" and the obvious connection to Dr "Who". This more recent insight reminds me how clever Jeff was with words and my own serious limitations.

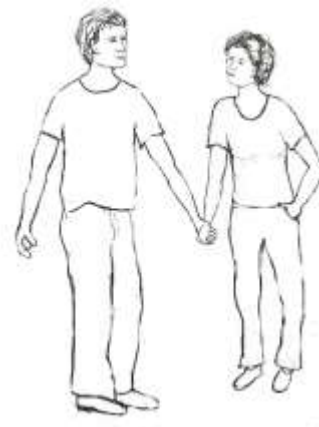
I liked being on the edge of these different social groups. One way to deal with shyness is to just stick with one tribe, another way is to not fully commit to any





tribe and just move from the edge of one to another keeping a safe distance away. I could enjoy my hippy friends without getting into smoking marijuana I could enjoy my more nerdy friends without being labelled too much with this persona, and I could enjoy my jock friends again without been seen as a jock. I could be in the background for a few different groups.

While fitting back in to The Gap was not as easy as I expected, I was so glad to be back in familiar territory. I had a new sense of confidence and ability. I was now much more ready for romance and while slow of the mark by the end of grade 12, romance had become more of a reality albeit a naïve, clumsy one and by the end of year 12, I had my first serious girlfriend. I naively imagined a future life with Bella, but she was always much more sensible.



Learning

I am sure if there was research done on what occupied the minds of high school students the most, it would be to do with these friendships and romances. Nevertheless it was also a time for learning and to start to think about areas of interest for a later career.

Grade 8 acted like a sorting year to work out what skills and academic ability we had. In grade 9 and 10 we would be streamed in to 3 areas. Academic and manual for boys, academic and commercial for girls. At the end of grade 10, it was expected that those in the manual or commercial streams would gain an apprenticeship or work in an office doing secretarial duties. I was in 9a1 and 10a1 and we were expected to go on to higher education.

This streaming of my peers was also happening within me. I liked and was good at maths and science but was very poor at reading and writing. This difference would grow as I studied hard with maths and science, but avoided reading and writing. I was good at Art and would often do well in history by producing very artistic covers and ways of displaying my work. Teachers could recognize my effort even when it was clear I could not spell or write well. My poor ability with





English made me feel quite dumb.³ I never put any effort in to getting better as I felt I was just no good. So streaming my own abilities, I focused and got better at maths and science and fell further behind in English. I was very honoured to get both the Maths and Art prizes in grade 10.⁴

At the end of grade 10, I would tell people I was going to be a civil engineer. This was a choice that pleased my father, it fitted with my abilities and I thought I would enjoy this work. I liked the idea of building dams and bridges, to me they were like giant sculptures. I visited Moogerah Dam with Jeff and his Mum for a picnic and I was amazed and in awe of the dam wall. It was a real buzz to stand on top of this massive concave structure.

Grade 10 was a year where I really excelled at school. I also represented Brisbane and Queensland in soccer. I was captain of the debating team. I had many good friends. My confidence was high and I was on a bit of a roll. I could see my self as an important successful person in the future based on my science/maths strengths. This momentum however was lost in the move to South Australia and I began to consider an entirely different future.

In Grade 11 at Aldgate high in the Adelaide Hills I studied Maths Physics, Chemistry, English and French. I really wanted to continue with Art but this was not a choice I could have with the science stream I was doing. The South Australian kids had been learning French for a year longer than us in Queensland and after the first lesson, the teacher pulled me aside and said to withdraw as I would certainly fail. Not appreciating this put down I tried to catch up but after a while I realized he was right and I dropped this subject. I had thought I could be good at anything if I tried. Apparently not. A further affirmation of my poor

³ I am still a very slow reader and writer and a hopeless speller. While I enjoy being around very articulate people, it does remind me of my own inabilities.

⁴ In recent times, when I have been ridiculed for saying something dumb or for my spelling I have been able to remind my children joking but with a desire to lift myself up, that I beat Neil Bergmann in Grade 10 maths. Neil was clearly so much smarter than me in maths and he was also very good at English. He was the Einstein of our year. The maths exams, however, did not have seriously hard questions. If you could do the problems in the text you could do the exam questions. So it really came down to who would make a trivial mistake. Neil got 99% and I got 99.5% and the grade 10 maths prize. Even now when I struggle with understanding tax and accounting matters I find some comfort in reminding myself that I once beat Neil Bergmann





ability with words. Nevertheless, I began to think about Social Work instead of engineering as a future career.

In returning to The Gap I was again disappointed not to be able to do art with my science stream subjects.⁵ My favourite subject was physics. We had a good physics teacher who allowed us to muck up enough to not feel too nerdy but who also encouraged some deep thinking about physics questions. I sat with my friend Rowie and we both asked enough questions to show our real interest in the subject but also to allow us to have a bit more latitude to be silly in this class. I loved thinking about infinity and the beginning of the universe. I liked that there were multiple theories, which invited more theories. I would often go to sleep working out how I thought it all worked. I liked the idea that there was a big bang, the universe would expand and then contract creating another big bang and on it would go.

In contrast I did not think much of my English teacher. He was a real right winger and was aware of my family connections to the Labor Party. He did the opposite of encouraging me, and on several occasions publically belittled my abilities. Not surprisingly I did not put an effort in to improving. I received a failing grade of D in English. I could comfort myself with the knowledge that I still managed to be in top 2% of the state despite my poor showing in English. Nevertheless my failure in English did leave a cloud over my general confidence.

Despite my skills in Maths and Physics and my poor English, I made the decision to do social work at Uni. As I look back I find it hard to really be sure what lead to this decision but it was clearly a radical departure from the stream I was on. Maybe my loneliness in Adelaide got me thinking about helping people. Maybe my failure at English helped me identify with people with struggles. Maybe it grew from my family's strong support for the underdog. Maybe I just wanted to break from what was expected from me. I really don't know. My father tried to counsel me out of this choice but my mum and friends did not seem surprised.

⁵ Things were taught in a different order in SA and when I returned to Qld I had to teach myself $\frac{3}{4}$ of the year's maths content. I was quite proud that after about 4 weeks of working my way through the text book by myself, I had pretty much caught up on 7 months of Maths.





My second choice on the 'Entrance Form' was Creative Arts in Toowoomba. Engineering was 3rd choice. Three very different lives were possible here at the critical juncture and I feel like in hindsight my rationale for any choice was very wobbly to say the least. Each would have lead along very different paths to very different groups of friends and lifestyles. I would love a sliding doors experience to see what could have occurred had I done Art or Engineering instead.



Politics

While school was a time for our own personal choices about our future in society it also offered a chance to be think about the choices a society makes about its future. Subjects like history particularly raised questions about these societal directions and issues of politics.

When my grade 8 history teacher told the class how bad communism was, I felt suspicious of her argument or more properly lack of argument for these claims. I was very impacted by my father's response when I quizzed him about Communism. He explained how good the ideals of communism were to me and seemed angry at my teacher's narrow mindedness. This was a very influential response for me. It made it clear that ideas can be debated and that authorities could not always be trusted to speak the truth or be unbiased and so you need to work things out yourself. Even though my dad was a successful ambitious business man in the capitalist system he was open to ideas and alternative societal models. I knew in my friends' families things were much more rigid and not open to debate. I very much valued dad's openness, perhaps particular as it was contrary to the stereotypical businessman. He could be different to his context. I could also be. It was a liberating moment.

Australia and Queensland had been governed for many years by very conservative right wing governments, but in 1972 the election of the Whitlam and Labor with its very radical reforming agenda gave strength to the idea that change was





possible. Politics became heightened in Australia as the conservative forces grew louder in response to planned reforms. It all lead me to believe that ideas could change the world. I was seeing it happen.

On reflection, in my high school years I can see five different political orientations affecting me. These were being discussed around family dinner tables and in the media, each with different values and each trying to structure things in very different ways. There was the National Party lead by Joe Bijelki Petersen which via an extreme gerrymander controlled the Queensland government. Joe and his extreme right wing values represented for me the opposite of what I was about. Gough Whitlam was a hero, I supported the Labor party and its commitment to equality. After Whitlam came Malcolm Frazer and the Liberal Party which for me was all about individualism and self-interest and failed to see the benefits of community. In grade 10 I also learnt about Mao-Tse-Tung, and I admired the commitment to a more equal society. I believed a revolution to replace capitalism with a socialist state ownership of the means of production would be a good thing for all. A fifth orientation was probably not as consciously recognized at the time but was to do with the alternative lifestyle movement which was on about living simply and self-sufficiency, something shared by my hippy mates. It was more of a nonviolent revolution through people creating intentional egalitarian communities. I was sympathetic to the Labor, Communist and alternative lifestyle orientations.

My sister Cathy's boyfriend Arch Bevis (junior) was very involved in the Labor party. His father Arch Bevis (senior) was leader of the Transport Workers Union and was regularly on TV. By the end of grade 11, I was going along to Young Labor meetings with Cathy and Arch. This affirmed for me that we can all participate directly in politics and public policy and I enjoyed advocating for change in these meetings. It was good to be part of something where people were clearly working for things beyond their own self-interest. From a very young age I had always thought it was strange that some people got paid more just because they were lucky to be born smarter while people who often had to do very boring or awful jobs got paid very little. It was good to be part of a group where equality was an affirmed goal.





High school heroes

My thoughts and aspirations for myself and society were influenced by a number of people who I admired during the high school years.

Jesus - Believing in the Christian teachings seemed to be an accepted family thing. It was part of the culture. I certainly never heard an opposition as a small child. My eldest sister was a teacher in Sunday School. The Easter movies about Jesus were instructive and some familiar themes emerged in what I am attracted to, or connect with. Jesus is someone trying to do the right thing by others who also seems to have some superpowers (like my earlier heroes) to produce a few miracles. He is focused on the poor and the sick, a healer, not a seeker of power



We however, were not a devoted family. We attending Church mainly for baptisms and weddings. This lack of conviction is of itself enough to raise questions for a child like me about how to understand it all. Why only the occasional miracle when so many around doubt his claims and when there was so much suffering? My scientific bent, lead me to be sceptical about the resurrection. Why not return, and keep at it? Why not be a bigger presence in the world? Why would the son of God not reappear more regularly? So much seemed not really convincing, and yet part of me was very happy to be convinced rather than rock the boat. No one around me was raising strong objections. However the lack of a devoted stance in my family does actually speak volumes in itself. Surly you are fully a Christian, or not one at all. The part-time convenience approach of my family and friends greatly weaken the message for me.

In late primary school, all my neighbourhood friends were all involved in a Methodist youth group and I was eventually roped in. It involved lots of fun physical games. The leaders of the group made it very easy to get badges to sow on our uniforms (just like Scouts), some were physical challenges but others were a way to draw young people in to the church I had to learn the books of the bible off by heart to get one badge for example. At some point I was made Dean of the group and had to read bible passages each week. We all had to go to Church as a group in uniform once a month. While not getting any strong religious





instruction at home, I could feel the church trying to lure me into the fold via this youth group.

The local Cricket team also played in a church league competition and for a prize for doing well as a bowler I received a copy of one of the gospels. I was very disappointed to get a book for a prize rather than a trophy. It was the gospel of Matthew and it was translated in to everyday contemporary language for young people. I am not sure why, but one afternoon, I read it. It coincided with my growing interest in thinking about the universe and what life was all about. I felt like I had something of an epiphany. I felt I could see (arrogantly, and in contradiction with my religious teachers) what Jesus was really trying to say. This involved reading a bit between the lines but also involved trying to see what could actually really make sense. Christ was claiming to be the son of God but he was also very clearly calling us to all be children of God. He was saying we are all the same, he had no special superpowers. We could all be in the same relationship to God as him. This message made sense and was more believable than the resurrection and miracle stories. We could do away with all the mystical stuff and see him as a man with a new philosophy that he was trying to bring in against the dominance of the Old Testament. It was clear he wanted to do away with 'eye for an eye' and to replace this with the value of 'doing to others what you would have them do to you'. From that point on I could not understand why the old testaments were relevant at all.

I had no one to really talk about these ideas with, it was not really a family topic of conversation. It did not feel a cool topic with my grade 8 friends, but it did feel like I had stumbled on a truth of some sort that could guide me. So I guess I adopted at this point in my life a sort of humanist version of Christianity.

I had moved intellectually away from the mystical, from Superman, Prince Planet. Not completely however, I was still open to gaining some super powers if they were on offer. Even today I can get a bit of a tingle when something sort of mystical happens in a movie. "Let the force be with you Luke". I am still a sucker for these sort of plots. It seems from the popularity of such story lines in stories like Star Wars and Christmas movies I am not alone.





Mao-tse Tung - We had to study China in grade 9 or 10 history and I choose to do a project on Mao-tse-Tung. Again here was a story of a person who went against the orthodoxy to bring in a whole new approach. He was like Robin Hood, trying to create a more equal society where people worked to together in a communal way. He moved around the country living rough and talking to the poor and getting them on side. There was a lot here I could enjoy.



My father and I made several trips in to a communist store in town to get Chinese propaganda for my assignment. Again I could not imagine my friends' fathers doing the same. I really appreciated this openness. I was firmly becoming anti-capitalist and it was comforting to note that my father, the ambitious businessman, did not seem at all perturbed. He has always said it was a very honourable well intentioned system to look after everyone. As a young boy he was accused of being a communist sympathizer by family and he wore it as a badge of honour as he was always up for an argument.

John Curtin - Later I did an assignment on John Curtin. Again I was very impressed. A real person, and an Australian, to emulate. He was a very idealistic young person who wanted to bring about a more equal society. He joined the Communist party as a young person shifting to Labor later. While he had all sort of radical goals he ended up Prime Minister during the war years and so had to curtail his goals to focus on the country's survival. His story said something to me about the value of pragmatism, of trying to achieve somethings, rather than just holding out for a revolution that may never come



The Goodlife - This TV show was a favourite in my high school years. I think I had a bit of a crush on Felicity Kendell. This show about a couple seeking to live a simple self-sufficient life in the city, while living beside





the snobbish next door neighbours would turn out to be something of a template for my 20's.

The humour revolved around the contrast between their self-sufficient agrarian lifestyle and the upper class one of their neighbours. Various conflicts ensued but always the friendship and neighbourly feeling between them won in the end.

Leonard De Vinci – While never really studying and reading about Leonardo at school in any depth, I greatly admired his creativity and inventiveness and I was aware of the idea of him being a “universal man”, someone who was good at different things. I loved this idea and wanted to be like this also, good at art and science. I wanted to be someone that could be creative and hoped that new ideas could change our world for the better. I really wanted to be like him.



Cathy - While I wondered about being a social worker or a civil engineer for a career, I dreamed about being an artist. I did not really think this was a possible career, but I liked the idea of it. I never really wanted to be a rock star or a sports star but it did like the idea of becoming a great artist, maybe not a famous one but one perhaps remembered in the future. I was not good with words but felt I could say something with pictures. Other subjects involved lots of constraint and conformity to established theory. Contemporary Art on the other hand seemed to suggest anything was possible. So it was a very liberating dream to have.

My sister Cathy was a painting inspiration. She was recognized at school and at home as being a good painter and went on train as a high school art teacher. So different ideas and techniques and a bit of art philosophy would flow into our conversations and her comments on my work. She was encouraging and allowed my own creativity to come to the fore. She took a real interest in helping me develop my artistic side and skills.

I also thought I was good at art. When I was in primary school I won the local Lions Art prize competing against others many years older. It was a self-portrait that I did in front the mirror.⁶ I also received the grade 10 Art Prize. I could not

⁶ Looking back now I wonder why my parents never had it framed or kept hold of it.





study art in senior school the dream slid away, but I always felt I would keep painting.

Working at grandma's

Before reflecting more generally on this period of my life the final area to consider is my work on Ringwood farm. Much of my current approach to work came from working on this farm through my childhood to my 20's. Everyone always worked long hours and quickly. It was physical work, lifting heavy boxes of produce and moving the full cases of oranges from the bench to the truck as quickly as possible. The encouragement of my uncle and father fashioned my approach to work. In my current job with organic fruit and vegies, I am still loading and unloading fruit and vegies from a ute every week, still trying to go as quickly as I can. So not much has changed.

When I was about 5 or 6, I picked oranges with my sisters and cousins on my Grandparents farm. Granddad gave me a few sixpences for each bucket of oranges that I picked. This was my first job. I can vividly remember his hand opening up with 4 or so sixpences for me to take (my first wages).

From a very early age we were allowed to drive cars and tractors and so there was sense of being treated more like an adult on the farm. Visits to the farm were always fun and we all looked forward to going there. In the city becoming an adult was a long way off. In the country kids became workers early and in this way I think my country cousins has a certain increased maturity. My male cousins often had a little patch of their own crop and so could take on the farmer's role in a very direct way. They learnt how to work physically but also they were budding businessmen at the same time. School seemed a distraction for them. The plan was to become farmers.

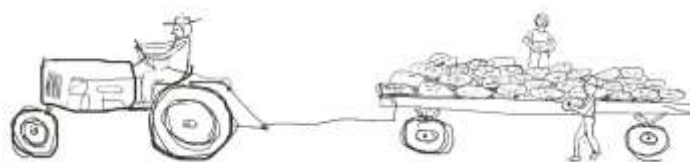
My granddad died when I was 11. My Uncle Robin took over running the farm and I would often spend a week of most school holidays working for him. He was the baby of his family with 3 much older sisters, so he was more like a cousin in age than an uncle. Robin was a keen cricketer and so lunch breaks often involved often a quick game of cricket. Work with Robin was fun particularly at the end of a session of picking fruit, when a piece of rotting fruit would come





whistling past your head and an all-in fruit fight would begin. While fun, the days were generally very long. Grandma would wake me with a cuppa about 6am and then we would spend an hour or so in the packing shed getting oranges ready for sale. Breakfast would be a 2 course meal followed by a few hour picking or packing. We would stop for morning tea (bread and jam or biscuits), then more work. Lunch would be a 2 course meal followed by more work, afternoon tea (more sweet treats), more work, then another a 2 course dinner. There was generally more packing in the shed after dinner. This could sometimes go quite late depending on orders. There was generally another cuppa for supper and then a bit of TV and then bed. Every day was a cycle of work, cuppas, and food. I loved it.

In summer it would be the same work schedule, but instead of oranges it was picking watermelons which I preferred. This involved walking down the crop rows picking the melons that were ready and then passing them along the line of other workers to be loaded on to the wagon. Grandma or Aunty Kay would be driving the tractor pulling the wagon. In later years it could be one of Robin's young sons. After a few days a semitrailer



would arrive and a small group would begin loading 20 tons of melons on to the truck. This would involve someone throwing them up to a middle person who would throw them up to the person stacking them in the bulk bins on the truck. Seeing this huge load drive off gave a great sense of accomplishment. Knowing that 20 ton had passed through my hands made me feel strong. I could feel my muscles strengthening over the weeks of doing this work. I felt like I was a good worker and that I could keep up with the others working there which often included some other young locals from the nearby town of Grantham.

So from an early age, hard physical work was a valued thing. My parents and my older sisters all joined in. Age and gender was not relevant. I took this to be the way all things are. It was honest healthy work. This work gave me a sense of confidence and competence. I was learning to do most of the jobs on the farm, driving tractors, ploughing, sorting fruit, driving utes and so on. School was all about skills for the future, but work on the farm was in the here and now.





Streaming and dreaming

Reflecting more broadly on this period of my life and those around me, I want to suggest it can be understood by 2 processes – dreaming and streaming.

Careers - Primary school was preparing us to be citizens of the state. High school was about streaming us to take a place in the capitalist economy in keeping with our abilities. School was now filtering and selecting us for certain careers. I liked woodwork but clearly the focus was not on pursuing what you enjoyed, rather it was a combination of what you were best at and what careers were more highly valued. Education funding is primarily a response to the needs of society for people to contribute to that society through work. While education is talked about as an end in itself, as a benefit to the enrichment of the student, its real purpose is the next generation of workers.

Choices about future work options become a key aspect of the high school years for young people and their parents. “What do you want to do when you finish school?” becomes a relentless inquiry from adults. The wider society/culture is really saying it’s time to start making choices about your future. What is also clear is that some answers to this question evoke more positive responses than others. Saying you want to be a doctor or a lawyer lead to nods of approval, while not knowing or opting for a low paid option would lead to more of a grimace. Clearly there was a hierarchy of choices.

It was good to aim high to get a positive nod but at the same time if you aimed too high the response might be one of laughter and ridicule. If you were a poor student wanting to be a doctor, friends and family might just assume you were joking. A similar reaction could be expected if you said you wanted to be a rock or sports star when it was also clear you had no talent. Friends around me would dream of being artists, novelists, sports stars, actors, radio announcers or just to be very rich. They would not tell adults about such dreams for fear of having these dreams crushed.

So while being encouraged to aim high by society, the society also sought to moderate a young person’s dreams to steer them to what was considered a





realistic option. Teachers would particularly inject themselves in to this choice by either affirming a student's choice or to dissuade them either tactfully or by explicit mockery. Up to grade 10 I often responded to the "what do you want to be" question with "the town drunk" (following my grade 7 drama success) and then would follow up with "civil engineer" which would get an affirming nod.

This tension between what a young person dreams of doing and what is possible is an internal process but clearly is strongly mediated by those around the young person and the education system generally. I felt academically able to anything I wanted to if it involved maths and science. Deciding in grade 12 to do social work was a much more challenging option for me. My father in a very explicit but gentle way would try to dissuade me away from this choice on several occasions. My mum never expressed any concern and it did not seem to matter to her what I did. In comparison I was aware my class mates experienced a lot more pressure to work towards what their parents considered a good career choice, typically a well-paid one.

So the high school years began the process of streaming us and guiding us to our future work and career options. It also graded us on the way, telling us who is good enough to do what. This streaming process is an unquestioned part of the way our society is structured. The streaming really serves the needs of our capitalist market economy. It rewards those who have the skills and abilities to enter the higher paid careers even though others perhaps had more desire to actually do this sort of work or better emotional capacities for particular positions.

While the needs of the capitalist economy sought to match young people's talents with a valued career, hard work was encouraged by the idea that if you really believed in yourself and worked hard you could achieve your goals. So we were at the same time encouraged to dream big and work hard while from another direction being told to accept our place and to realize our limitations.

The streaming process and grading process does not stop at high school. It becomes a feature of our current culture. It encourages competition for people to maintain and keep improving their position in the system. Once people are streamed in to a particular career, they are then streamed in terms of their standing in this profession. Who are the best, who are competent and who are just good





enough? This creates a constant background of evaluation criticism and competition which is stressful. This evaluation is not only external. Part of our socialization is to internalize this criticism, to be constantly self-evaluating one's effectiveness. Even if you are one of the best surgeons you can still feel unsatisfactory in relation to a better surgeon. You are always worried about your spot on the greasy pole and falling further down while others climb over you for more senior positions and promotions and so on. The whole streaming grading process sets up people against one another, it increases anxiety and then potential depression for everyone. The capitalist system benefits and is reaffirmed and strengthened by this constant competitive churn reinforcing the whole process while all participants suffer.

Streaming leads to greater inequality. The academically difficult jobs go to the brightest and they get the big wages while those less able are streamed towards menial jobs that are poorly rewarded. The rich people stop doing their own menial work and leave that to the less well paid. They employ cleaners and gardeners and pay \$20/hr while they get paid \$100/hr. In a way this is not really that different to the old days of the 'lord of the manor' with servants to do different tasks. It's just organized more efficiently and you don't have to provide accommodation for your servants, they can live all together out in the poorer suburbs. Should we not all take responsibility for cleaning up after the mess we make and caring for our immediate environment? For Gandhi, everyone in the ashram had to clean the toilets including him and his wife. Why should someone with the good luck of being born with greater intellectual ability get paid more than those with less? Particularly when they are often in jobs they say they enjoy while the less well paid are often asked to do jobs they dislike and which no one else will do.

Private vs public -At this point in my life a second streaming process was also occurring. Several of my primary school friends went to prestigious private schools in grade 8. Their parents believed they would get a better education in these schools and so they were prepared to pay the huge fees. This generally reflected a class divide where the richer families would send their kids to private schools. I believe the actual educational advantages were not actually significantly better, but what was really occurring was that the private school kids were being grouped together to build an upper-class elite network. They wanted





their children to associate with the elite and to avoid friendships with the working class riff raff that could not afford a private education. It was parental social engineering.

At The Gap High we had a big mix of class, there was lots of middle class kids from The Gap with also many poorer kids coming from the working class inner city suburbs of Red Hill and Paddington (pre – gentrification). Initially kids stuck to their primary school friends which were more likely to be of a similar class but by the end of grade 12 there had been much more of a mix with friendships across these classes. This was a different form of social engineering encouraging relative equality compared to the elitism of the private system.

This private/state divide was another way we were being streamed. This was particularly evident when making our way home after school. We could see the private school boys with their grey suit coat type uniforms in contrast to our rough bedraggled look, their outfits were always clean neat and ironed. The contrast between the girls was very similar. The private uniform was a clear preparation for the suits that they would be wearing in their later professions as businessmen, accountants, lawyers, military officers and doctors while we state school kids looked more ready for our manual working class jobs. The prefects at our school wore similar blazers to the private schools and the message was that this select group of state school kids, could also aspire to a professional career.

This streaming made it very clear that privilege existed and that a future career did not just depend on skills, it was also about what social circles you moved in. You need to know your place. My father had gone to Ipswich Grammar and I wonder whether that helped him in his business career. He encouraged me to sit for a scholarship to Brisbane Grammar school where my friend Scott was going. Had I got the scholarship I guess I would have gone and I would love to know how different my view of the world would be now. It would have been very difficult to have held on to my egalitarian sympathies within such an elitist culture. I am sure my parents would have sent me to a private school if I had wanted. I am glad I did not.

Gender - Another streaming process very evident in these years was that of gender. This was evident in primary school but it became very strong and explicit





in high school. In grade 8 the boys covered manual arts subjects while the girls did home economics (cooking). In grade 9 the academically inclined boys and girls were treated somewhat more equally. The less academically inclined were streamed to completely different careers, girls for clerical jobs and trades for the boys. There was also a strong sense that girls would have a short clerical career before becoming a homemaker and raising children.

I am the only boy with four sisters. I was always accused of being spoilt by my older sisters and by uncles, aunts and other adults. As a small child it was nice to know that in this way I was privileged compared to my sisters. However, at the same time, being shy I hated this special attention that being the only boy gave me. Also I yearned for a brother, someone to play soccer with. When I was about 12, my youngest sister Louise was born. I can remember crying when I heard the news in the middle of the night that I had another sister. Years later I realize that maybe I would not have enjoyed losing my status as the only boy and I often wonder how different I would have been had there been 2 boys. My father's attention to my sporting activities would have been split if there was another boy. So in hindsight part of me liked my special privileged place. Even though I would challenge any suggestion by my sisters that I was spoilt, part of me knew I was, and maybe I should enjoy it while I could?

While feminism was not a feature of my mind at the time, I did know in a vague way that this attention was a gendered thing, in that if I was the only girl with 4 brothers I don't think it would have attracted the same type of response. Being a boy I knew very early that I had to assume a certain place in society, in particular I would have to have a job. My mum and the women in the neighbourhood were all at home with their children while the fathers were at work. My future was clear. I can remember thinking when Mum was going to some social activity and dad was going to work that I would much rather be in mum's position. I was very ambivalent about the role in society that my gender had chosen for me and this ambivalence has perhaps reappeared at key decision making points in my life.

Today times have changed significantly but the gendered nature of social expectations inside and outside the education system is still there. I would like to say that the class divide between private and state systems has significantly changed but it is just as strong as it was in the 70's.





These 3 steaming processes (class, gender and academic ability) all act to reinforce inequality in our society. The school system acts to create pathways for young people to enter the workforce and to take their place in the social hierarchy. It also encourages an acceptable level of dreaming so that people struggle to succeed and improve their place in the hierarchy by being more successful. The competition at school for marks and better grades is transferred in to struggles for better pay and promotion. We are all explicitly being prepared for a life of constant competition and struggle.

What would our world look like if we did the opposite of streaming? What if in our education we were helped to work on the areas we were the least good at? What if the most energy went in to helping the unco-ordinated improve their sports skills, rather than helping the most skilled? What if those with the least ability in maths were given the most help in maths? For me this would have meant a focus on my English and spelling. Clearly this is an anathema to the capitalist system but maybe such a society would be one that encourages co-operation rather than competition and which might focus on happiness rather than success. Both doctors and carpenters might have a good grasp of philosophy. The toilet cleaners might be better paid and more likely to have a hobby as an artist or poet. Everyone would have a more rounded education with most of the educational resources going to those that most need them. ⁷

Conclusion

I started High School as a small fish in a big pond but slowly gain my confidence with sport, studies and romance. There was a rebellious mood in the air as young people and from the idealism of the 60's. I became interested in imagining a better more egalitarian society. I was expected to do something like engineering by my family (and myself) but perhaps going against what was expected (even by myself), I choose to do social work. The choices for young people are very decisive in their future and it is clear this choice is limited and mediated by family, the culture and societal institutions, but perhaps it also involves a fair bit of random decisions. The choices affirmed and validated the inequalities of class, gender and academic ability.

⁷ gonski





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