



Book Recommendation

The Inner Self by Hugh Mackay

In the lead up before attending a **Readings in Conversation Event** at which Hugh Mackay introduced his new book, *The Way We Are*, (I now have my signed copy for Justin and me and I can't wait to read it!) I returned to an earlier book of his, *The Inner Self, 2020*. There is a story about this book which I want to share with you.

Justin passed on a copy of this book for me to read (and those of you who know Justin well, will know he shares so many of his books or gifts them) when I was finishing my final year of classroom teaching. I began it but met a great deal of internal resistance and did not continue to read it. It is only recently on my return to it as mentioned, that I worked out why I felt this resistance.

The premise of the book is that in our journey to discovering who we really are, we encounter many ways we hide from ourselves. Mackay continues to devote much of his book to an examination of these hiding places —the top 20 of them! A glance down the list had me squirming! Remember, I was on the cusp of beginning the **my manifesto** journey with Justin but had not yet begun.

The hiding place of *Addiction* was a major stumbling block for me at the time of the first attempted reading. All my life, (and being a publican's daughter who had been introduced to home-made wine as an infant and was regularly exposed to the great Australian drinking culture through the hotels my parents owned) I had struggled with a tendency to turn to alcohol for not only the celebrations but for the times I was too stretched or indeed overwhelmed. It became the mask I adopted to make it through a complex and busy existence. As Mackay identified, it was my chosen way of "distracting [myself] from [my] inner life". To stumble into this realisation that I was avoiding examining my inner life closely by making this choice was confronting and I was not ready to take responsibility for this awareness.

How marvellous then that this time around, (and now a teetotaler, in the old parlance) the beautiful heartfelt words of Mackay only strike grateful recognition in my heart. Here are a few examples of his wisdom (it was very difficult to limit myself to only three quotes):

"To say that life is to be enjoyed (just enjoyed) is like saying that mountains should only have summits, or that all colours should be purple, or that all plays should be by Shakespeare."

... "if you pursue personal happiness as your primary goal, you'll miss out on the deeper satisfactions that flow from living a loving, compassionate, other-centred life."



“...it is not *only* a material world: it’s also a spiritual world: a world of love and hate, passions and desires, ideas and convictions, good intentions and broken dreams: a world where a rich and fulfilling life depends more on the quality of our personal relationships than the quality of our material possessions; a world where we spend a lifetime discovering what it means to be human, a world where, in the end, peace of mind has incalculably more value for us than ‘30 pieces of silver’.

Having done my work and created my personal manifesto, (and step number 5 from our book, *The Releasing Step*, involved me freeing myself from the addictive mask of alcohol), I am now able, albeit humanly and imperfectly, to live my life each day, more fully embracing the paradox of life without seeking to adopt masks to ‘curate’ the self I present. Vulnerable, flawed, human, I stand revealed.

The reward, the peace of mind I have gained is indeed incalculable. I would however, like Hugh Mackay to have the final word: “To live in ignorance of who we really are is to live a kind of half-life, and who wants that?”