



## **Manifesto Musing**

### Societal Cohesion and Meaning Making

*I allow myself the right to construct the meanings by which I live* — Sue's personal manifesto.

To some, this statement might be alarming. What do I mean? Am I seriously suggesting we open the floodgates to everyone – including the ‘crackpots’, the seriously misguided and the narcissists – to construct and act upon their beliefs? Won't that mean the breakdown of society as we know it? Aren't I really condoning rampant individualism?

Well, no, I don't see it that way. The desire, no, the need, to construct meaning is a part of the human experience that is fundamental to being human. Life continues despite any individual's wants and needs, but we who are living that life, want and need it to have purpose and meaning.

An *examined* life is one in which we reflect upon life's events and even better, if possible, intentionally choose how we respond to life's events as they affect us. If we have our personal manifesto, we will know who we are, what we stand for, what we care about, what we need to be released from, who we are connected to and the contribution we wish to make. We have our lode star towards which we journey no matter what life serves up.

What I am extolling therefore, is the agency to make of life what I will. I assure you, with my personal manifesto, I am grounded in my meaning-making by an awareness of my strengths – my goodness as Charlotte Ostermann attests – and my values. I am not giving myself permission to act outside my moral code. Indeed, I most firmly intend to honour it in all my dealings.

What do I mean then by “constructing the meaning by which I live?” I mean that this Senior, who from her first years was bequeathed religion, the patriarchy and family values, has learnt how to take each legacy in turn and ask the question, “How does this measure up against my personal manifesto?” or alternatively, “Does this serve the very best version of ‘me’ that I can muster?”

Rather than a blanket acceptance of all that I have been given – and I am grateful for it – I now assess that legacy in relation to the life I have revealed in my manifesto, and the fulfilment of which is vital to me. My critical mind discerns what is best for me, and that includes considering what is the nature of my contribution to my community *of which I am one* (Sue's personal manifesto). I do not make a decision in a vacuum, but mindfully in this context.

I am a firm believer in the importance of social cohesion, and endorse Hugh Mackay's conclusion that ‘Social cohesion, grounded in compassion and mutual respect, is the key to true greatness of any society.’ (Australia *Reimagined*). Constructing my meaning enables me to bring my best to my community, not my worst. Adoption of unexamined ‘truths’ is not the way to healthy social



cohesion. Society is under no threat; indeed, it benefits, from all of us 'being' and showing up as our best selves.

Rather than unleashing the afore mentioned 'chaos', my approach to meaning making, enables me to be truly authentic in my life's contribution and as such, along with you, strengthen societal cohesion.