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**It has completely
changed my
perspective on life
for the better.**

mindset, things began to change. She and her mother reconnected. Grigg stopped skipping school, her grades shot up and she made new friends.

Her mother got herself back on track, obtaining TAFE qualifications and a job in aged care. “Youth Opportunities got me back my relationship with my mum, which I’ll be forever grateful for,” she says. “Mum came to my graduation and I saw that sense of pride in her so that was amazing.

“The program helped me get back my love for myself and I pulled my finger out and put more effort into school. It made me realise what I was capable of.”

Her mother passed away just a month after Grigg graduated from the program, when she was still just 15. It was another blow but Grigg was relieved that she had been able to repair that relationship before her mother died.

Everything she does now she feels is honouring her mother’s memory. Grigg says her work gives her the ability to empower students who are also lacking control in their lives: “I think that when I talk to them, they definitely get that sense that OK, this is not just someone else telling me what to do, she lived this. It is powerful.”

Adelaide businessman Peter Marshman established Youth Opportunities 23 years ago and has received the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to youth. The concept started after he ran

similar training programs for 150 young people he hired for commission-only door to door canvassing in his home improvement business.

Marshman says many of these people had dropped out of the education system and lacked motivation for anything more. He wanted to see them succeed and this training gave them the tools to do that.

Then Education Minister Malcolm Buckby heard about the program and approached Marshman to help change the culture of a couple of schools in Adelaide’s northern suburbs.

“If you see a young person run over by a bus out on the street everyone would stop and do something about it. These are kids who are being run over by the bus of their circumstances,” Marshman says.

Former board member Melanie Champion de Crespigny and her husband Robert, hold an annual “Stars in the Garden” fundraiser for Youth Opportunities. Last year, the event raised more than \$500,000.

Champion de Crespigny, who was also awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for services to youth, says she has heard many stories from young people about how the organisation has changed their lives but one stands out. “One of our Youth Opportunities’ cars was parked at Glenelg. The staff member returned to find an anonymous note on the windscreen. It read: ‘I did Youth Opportunities 10 years ago and it saved my life. Thank you very much’.”

Kit Saisaard and his trainer Courtney Grigg, a former Youth Opportunities graduate, at the University of Adelaide.

OPINION



Chickens, trees and the circle of life

Ian Henschke

Our teenage daughter Claudia was heartbroken the weekend before last. On Saturday at sunset she went to the chicken run down by the back fence to lock the birds away safely for the night. She called me down, and I saw from the tears in her eyes something was horribly wrong.

She’d noticed her favourite, a Sussex called Pufflet, was breathing heavily. It’s said this breed was brought to Britain by the Romans. I believe it too because they’re imperious creatures. The Sussex is a big bird with black and white markings. It has a ring of feathers forming a fancy collar around the lower neck and breast.

I told Claudia to give her chook a big hug and expect the worst. We watched her get on her perch for the last time. The other standard hens she shared her hen house with were still laying eggs. Pufflet had stopped long ago. Even so, she was lovingly cared for and deeply valued as the queen of the flock.

The next morning we found her lying lifeless on the floor of the coop. Claudia asked me to take a couple of feathers as keepsakes and then bury her. Almost a year ago Pufflet had survived a vicious fox attack. That day we woke to the horror of it all. Four hens had been savaged to death but the murderous fox must have been spooked in the middle of the slaughter. Pufflet had been badly bitten in the neck. We found her hanging on by a thread, bloodied and bruised, catatonic at the back of the cage.

We took her to the vet. She was given enough attention and antibiotics to somehow see another day. Her Sussex sister Rickie wasn’t as lucky and neither were the bantams Sooty and Salt, and standard breed Pumpkin. All were laid to rest in different parts of the yard.

Regular readers will know chooks have been a big part of our family for more than a decade. I first wrote about them when Goldie died. It was one of the most popular columns I’ve written. It explained how Claudia had learnt a life lesson. She’d seen Goldie hatch at her kindergarten, taken her home, watched her grow and, finally, years later, watch her die. We buried her in the garden and put a banana plant on her grave. Every autumn we feast on the fruit and remember her.

But this latest death was different. Watching Pufflet struggling to breathe reminded us of the wider health crisis. After I carried her from the cage I cleaned it out and put in fresh straw, food and water. We hoped the other chickens were going to be all right. We also pondered on the impact of the fox attack last year and wondered if it played a part in her early death. She should have lived longer.

I buried her beneath the blood orange tree, alongside our first, and much loved, Sussex, Clawry. She lived a long life, and although it was sad when Clawry died it was expected and natural. Digging graves in the garden tends to focus the mind on one’s own mortality. I started thinking about why life is important. Every moment is precious, no matter who you are and how long you have lived.

The next morning, hearing the news about the growing death toll and COVID-19 infections across the border made me continue my musings on the vicissitudes of life. My meditations were shattered by the sound of a chainsaw. I walked to the end of our street and saw a cluster of trucks, cranes and men in “high vis” hacking down three massive English elms.

They were next to the war memorial, at the end of an avenue planted a century ago. Each one is an arboreal gravestone, a living tribute to a fallen World War I soldier. But now they’re being systematically felled under a “master” plan. Apparently some limbs have fallen, raising concerns. So the trees were examined by the council arborist for signs of senescence.

It was feared the trunks of these three trees were hollow and, in the interests of health and safety, they had to go. After the tree murderer, sorry arborist, moved on I could see some hollowing in two of the stumps but the third was as solid as could be. Why can’t they wait until a tree dies before cutting it down? They were old, but still alive.

Note to local council: Let the elms live, (despite their hypothetical dangers) and fix the real and deadly problem of the foxes.