



‘Enlightening and  
sensitive, it reaches the soul.  
A rare book indeed.’

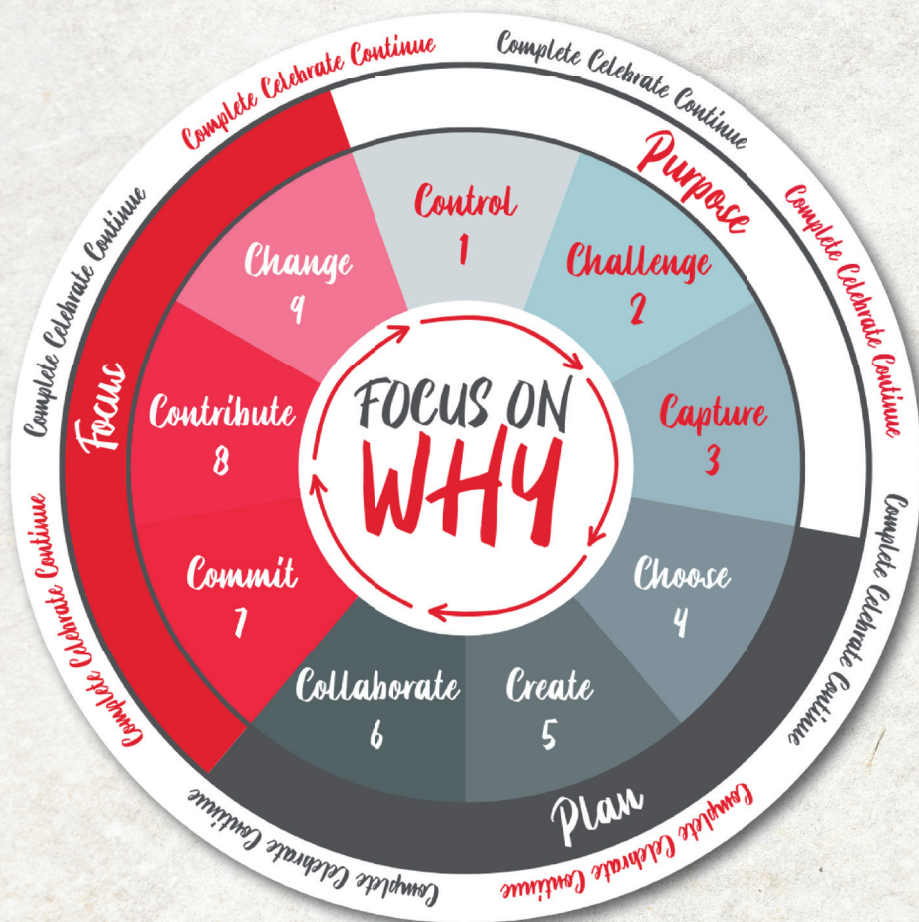
Dr Lynda Shaw –  
behavioural neuroscientist,  
genius mentor and author

# FOCUS ON WHY

Create a purposeful way of life

Amy Rowlinson  
with George Fleming Kerr

# The Focus on Why Framework



As you progress through the nine steps on your journey to self-discovery, use the Focus on Why Framework as your guide to creating a purposeful way of life.

I already know this is a book that I will revisit often as a companion and guide. It provides both a framework and a narrative that inspires the reader to discover who they really are and, more importantly, why they must find that out and put it into action.

**Jane Gunn – The Barefoot Mediator and author, *The Mole and the Mountain***

Absolutely loved this book. The combination of autobiography, biography and insightful personal development makes it a recipe for success. Captivating, educational and entertaining, this book is a trifecta of great reading. Its unique format will spur your personal growth no matter what your age. The author's viewpoints, combined with her grandfather's prisoner of war experiences, create a superb and compelling read. I read it in one sitting and then went back to study it again.

**Tim Durkin – healthcare leadership expert**

In an age where storytelling is a vital skill, *Focus on Why* shines as a beautiful example of this art, steeped in wisdom and insight.

Amy masterfully weaves her purpose framework into her narrative, making the lessons and questions land deeply and resonate with the reader. There is a delightful cleverness in how she integrates these elements organically, avoiding any sense of clunkiness or predictability.

This charming tale of her own personal family history will stay with you long after you've turned the last page. It's a book that doesn't just tell a story but also has the power to change lives, offering profound reflections and practical guidance. *Focus on Why* is more than just a read; it's an experience that promises to transform your perspective and ignite your purpose.

**Helen Chorley – angel investor, board advisor and keynote speaker**

Wow! Just wow! Have you ever read a book that gives you goosebumps and makes you cry – more than once? This book has done this and so much more. I love how Amy Rowlinson has intertwined her life, her grandfather's life and her podcast with her nine-step framework to truly help me focus on my life's purpose, to stop talking about it and take action on it.

Having read this book, I realise I've been stuck in the 'plan' stage because I never knew the impact of going through the 'purpose' stage or the value of the 'focus' stage. Every day I am closer to my death day and this book has made me realise that I have been talking about my life purpose for the last ten years. And whilst I have had coaches and made plans, I have always let life's circumstances get in the way and stop me. By knowing the controllables, I am now going to stop these life circumstances taking control of my life and instead plan my life of purpose with Mark, my husband. He has also had big plans, but never had the big vision of how to get there. Using this book and its framework, together we will do this.

**Vicky O'Farrell – people expert and CEO and founder, Queen of Behaviours**

This is a beautiful gift, a golden opportunity for you to look at your current reality in relation to your values and purpose. If these are not aligned then Amy provides suggestions and solutions to change that so you can feel connected to your purpose and therefore to yourself. The book takes you on a journey through Amy and George's stories of purpose, both of which are extraordinary and moving. I can't recommend this book highly enough. It will be with you for life.

**Charlotte Jones – nutritionist, physiotherapist, author and lecturer**



In what is the most unique book I've ever had the privilege of reading, George's wisdom is both simple and powerful, making it truly effective. Amy has continued to use this wisdom to grow, evolve and develop a passionate curiosity, dedicating herself to creating a planned and meaningful life.

Amy's profound insights and actionable advice offer a refreshing perspective that purpose isn't something we find externally but something we create and feel from within.

This book isn't just about finding your why; it's about crafting a life filled with meaning and intentionality, aligning actions with values for genuine fulfilment.

*Focus on Why* is a compelling and warm invitation to step out of the fog of mere existence and into a life of vibrant purpose. Amy's own journey, shared with raw honesty and rich storytelling, creates a personal connection that resonates deeply, making this book not just a read, but an experience of transformation.

If you're ready to stop searching and start living with intention, *Focus on Why* is the roadmap you've been waiting for. I feel beyond privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from these lessons and this intensely lived experience.

It is a breathtakingly powerful read and I truly appreciate the gift Amy has given me.

**Kim-Adele Randall – CEO, Authentic Achievements**

Sinek said start with it, Rowlinson says focus on it! This great book helps you challenge the status quo, define your purpose and focus on your why – all three things that are currently lacking in society today. Told through the brilliant story of George F Kerr, rekindled from his scrapbook, *Focus on Why* is not only a befitting tribute but a brilliantly simple framework to map your own journey through life. Stop existing, start living, and 'tap into the tingle'. Get *Focus on Why*!

**Wing Commander Marcus Dimpleby, RAF (retd) – MD and founder, Effective Direction™**



# FOCUS ON WHY

Create a purposeful way of life

Amy Rowlinson  
with George Fleming Kerr

**Focus on Why**

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My gratitude goes to those who've shaped my life:  
My grandfather's stepmother, Amie – gentle guidance  
My grandparents, Ruth and George – unconditional love and curiosity  
My parents, Catharine and Tony – creativity, adventure and independence  
My husband, Jon – unwavering support, love and patience  
My children, Holly and Eddie – inspiration, joy and possibility





**25 March 1945**

This record has dragged its weary course across Europe and the Greater German Reich, through the gates of the prison and into the cell itself, to the bunk in a corner there – the very centre and soul of prison life. Any account of this life will be interesting for as much as it treats not of the prison but the mind and the spirit held there.

# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Foreword                                 | xiii      |
| Introduction                             | 1         |
| From Beyond the Grave                    | 7         |
| Focus on Why Framework                   | 20        |
| <b>PART I: PURPOSE</b>                   | <b>23</b> |
| <hr/>                                    |           |
| <b>Step 1: Control</b>                   | <b>25</b> |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i> |           |
| ✦ Journaling                             | 36        |
| ✦ Commonplace Scrapbook                  | 36        |
| ✦ Focus on... Meaningful Definitions     | 37        |
| ✦ Gratitude and Small Wins               | 37        |
| <br>                                     |           |
| <b>Step 2: Challenge</b>                 | <b>39</b> |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i> |           |
| ✦ Status Quo Reality Check               | 53        |
| ✦ Key Observations                       | 53        |
| ✦ Overcome Challenges                    | 53        |
| ✦ Uniqueness                             | 54        |
| <br>                                     |           |
| <b>Step 3: Capture</b>                   | <b>55</b> |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i> |           |
| ✦ Core Needs, Feelings and Values        | 68        |
| ✦ Life Map                               | 68        |
| ✦ Follow the Fun                         | 69        |
| ✦ Purposeful Moments                     | 69        |
| ✦ Draft Your Purpose and Your Why        | 71        |

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <b>PART 2: PLAN</b>                      | <b>73</b>      |
| <b>Step 4: Choose</b>                    | <b>75</b>      |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i> |                |
| ✦ Desire Path                            | 86             |
| ✦ Mindfulness Meditation                 | 86             |
| ✦ Now's the Time!                        | 86             |
| ✦ Euthymia and Eudaimonia                | 87             |
| <br><b>Step 5: Create</b>                | <br><b>89</b>  |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i> |                |
| ✦ Meaningful Beauty                      | 102            |
| ✦ No Limitations                         | 102            |
| ✦ Letter from Beyond                     | 103            |
| ✦ Alpha Wave Activation                  | 103            |
| <br><b>Step 6: Collaborate</b>           | <br><b>105</b> |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i> |                |
| ✦ Meaningful Planning                    | 117            |
| ✦ You or Who?                            | 117            |
| ✦ Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!       | 117            |
| ✦ Liberate Your Mind                     | 117            |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>PART 3: FOCUS</b>                           | <b>121</b> |
| <b>Step 7: Commit</b>                          | <b>123</b> |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i>       |            |
| ✈ Purpose-Driven Audit                         | 136        |
| ✈ Somebody Really Should Do Something About... | 136        |
| ✈ Positive Intentions                          | 136        |
| ✈ Half the Difference                          | 137        |
| <b>Step 8: Contribute</b>                      | <b>139</b> |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i>       |            |
| ✈ Your Greatest Gift                           | 153        |
| ✈ What Really Matters                          | 153        |
| ✈ Positive Impacts                             | 153        |
| ✈ Tap into the Tingle                          | 154        |
| <b>Step 9: Change</b>                          | <b>155</b> |
| <i>Reflection with Action Exercises:</i>       |            |
| ✈ Gift of Forgiveness                          | 165        |
| ✈ Transformative Steps                         | 165        |
| ✈ Life Purpose Rules                           | 165        |
| ✈ Friendship                                   | 165        |
| Conclusion                                     | 169        |
| From Beyond the Wire                           | 173        |
| References                                     | 179        |
| Acknowledgements                               | 183        |
| About the Authors                              | 185        |



# Foreword

Last December I looked at my small grandchildren and wondered what the world would be like when they are my age. I became very upset and began asking myself, ‘What does the world need and what can I do about it?’

The answer I came up with is that the world needs genius ideas. I’m a neuroscientist and a good communicator but I’m not a genius. Then it struck me... and my purpose was born.

I’m meant to work with geniuses and the most unsuspecting people to help tease out their genius ideas and communicate them to gain support, funding and investment in the STEM industries. This is how I can help the next generation.

I’ve known Amy Rowlinson for some time now through work and friendship, and it’s her relentless belief in purpose that sowed the seed for me to make more of my own life and use my skills and talents for the greater good, and it feels incredible. Work doesn’t feel like work. That’s the point – feelings. Amy taught me that purpose feels as though you have ‘come home’, that all the jigsaw pieces fit together, and if you read this book, you’ll understand what I mean.

*Focus on Why* is full of extracts from a man’s WW2 prisoner of war journals and letters interwoven with Amy’s life today, both of which focus on purpose. The fact that this man is Amy’s grandfather makes for a glorious adventure for the reader whilst all the time learning about her nine-step framework to help you to create a life of purpose and fulfilment.

Imagine what it must feel like to write a book with your deceased grandfather. This has blown me away. It’s rare that I’m completely captivated by a book. This means that *Focus on Why* is a rare book

indeed. It is enlightening, sensitive and historical and it reaches the soul. The reader is enveloped in two worlds separated by time but entwined by love and common purpose.

Amy also has an extremely successful podcast called *Focus on WHY* that has been going strong since 2020. She has a talent for getting the most out of her guests in a way that is encouraging and sometimes even unexpected. If you haven't encountered it yet, seek it out and see what you think. It's helpful to listen to other people speak about purpose.

So are you ready to dive into this well-researched and unique book? To read something that's so worthwhile? To feel better about yourself and perhaps find something to focus on that has greater meaning? To help alleviate some of the anxieties of uncertainty and much more? Then this is a book of insights and learnings whilst also being a thing of beauty which will have you transfixed.

I honestly believe Amy's work is going to help more people than she can ever imagine.

Thank you, Amy.

**Dr Lynda Shaw, behavioural neuroscientist, genius mentor and author,**  
*Your Brain Is Boss and Beat the Bullies: Use Your Brain*

# Introduction

## Challenge the Status Quo

**D**oes your life lack purpose and direction? Are you feeling unfulfilled in life and work? Do you long to make a difference but feel overwhelmed by daily demands? In striving for that ‘perfect’ life, are you sacrificing your health to the point of burnout? Or are you sleep-walking, drifting aimlessly and mindlessly scrolling on social media or binge-watching TV?

Rest assured that if any of these resonate with you, you’re not alone. In today’s fast-paced, materialistic world, there’s huge pressure to seek instant gratification, accumulate bigger, better, shinier possessions and strike that perfect work–life balance.

So if you’re stressed, frustrated, confused or facing uncertainty, it’s time to challenge the status quo, spark a re-evaluation of your past and future, and take personal responsibility to live authentically. It’s for you to choose what happens next. Welcome to the purpose party!

## Focus on Why

**F**or some, searching for purpose is an overcomplicated, elusive, seemingly impossible pursuit, and as a coach I witness the anxiety people experience when they haven’t been able to find or define their purpose. Unable to answer the questions ‘Who am I, what is my purpose, and what am I supposed to be doing with my life?’, panic sets in, building into an existential crisis. When they see clarity of purpose in others, I often hear them ask, frustrated, ‘Well, how do I find my why?’

If you’re trying to find your why, please stop searching! The truth is

## Focus on Why

you don't find your why by looking for it **externally**; you **create** and **feel** it from **within** and this is often where the confusion lies. Your **why** and **purpose** are not the same, but they are interconnected.

**Purpose** is the overarching intention that guides your direction in life, and it's whatever you choose it to be. It's as simple as that.

Your **why** is the emotional significance you assign to your purpose.

Serving as your biggest intrinsic motivator, your why provides you with the commitment and focus needed to achieve all intentions aligned with your purpose.

The why emerges from **reflection**, while purpose is created through subsequent **action**. Through the process of reflection, you gain clarity and valuable insights into your inner world, interpreting and uncovering the meaning of your experiences and understanding your next steps. Reflection helps you identify patterns, overcome limiting beliefs or behaviours, and explore biases, strengths and areas for growth, all while helping align your actions with your values and aspirations.

Continually reflect on your actions and adjust your course as needed to develop resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges. Intentional action is vital for achieving goals and living a fulfilling life. Your future success is therefore dependent on the actions you take after reflecting, as without action, your dreams will remain dreams.

Without a defined understanding of meaning and purpose, you might find yourself merely reacting to events rather than recognising how they each hold a meaningful significance that contributes to guiding your intentional actions and achieving fulfilment. When you couple reflection with action, that's when true growth occurs. This incredible transformation is achieved through the exploratory method I call Reflection with Action.

Fuelled by deep, purposeful reflection, your actions become a catalyst for positive change, igniting powerful ripple effects that extend far beyond your immediate influence to create lasting impact. Focus on developing your internal understanding of how to respond effectively through the practice of Reflection with Action rather than searching for an external why.



Living with purpose isn't a singular goal to achieve; instead it enables you to derive value and meaning from multiple sources as you transition through each stage of life. Purpose requires ongoing reassessment. What once provided fulfilment or significance at age 20 may not still resonate when you're 30, 50 or 70. Acknowledging this shift enables you to plan and adapt your own flourishing lifestyle as your purpose evolves. Embracing this responsibility to continuously focus on your why and understand what holds meaning for you initiates a lifelong exploration of self-discovery and growth involving three elements: a purpose, a plan and a focus on why. Accordingly, this book is divided into three parts, which together form the necessary framework to create a purposeful way of life.

Acceptance of your mortality is key to understanding your life's purpose. Pausing to think about your identity, actions and motivations can reveal the truth about your current self and your future trajectory. As you face many choices and decisions, view them as opportunities for new beginnings, knowing that you can always change direction and make decisions that shape your future. Focusing on your why defines your lifestyle, driven by what inspires, motivates and guides you.

Regardless of circumstances, you are responsible for creating and crafting your purposeful life by choosing moments that are fulfilling rather than simply filling in the moments – this is the difference between living and existing.

When you're busy spinning plates, it's difficult to get a true reflection on your life. If you're in the frame, you're not able to see the big picture. Sometimes it takes someone else to hold up a mirror or requires stepping out of the frame to provide clarity on your surroundings and identity. More importantly, it reveals opportunities for action.

## Living or Existing

Over the years, my husband Jon and I had drifted off course from our original vision. Partly living, partly existing, juggling a busy family life with stressful, unfulfilling work, regularly getting home late exhausted, we'd miss out on precious time with our children, Holly and Eddie. Time we'd never get back.

One night in the summer of 2016, it struck me that we'd been merely filling in the moments for years. We'd been caught up in the waves of London city life, riding the daily commuting surf alongside many others, not stopping to question decisions, just moving with the flow of the tide, winding down in the evenings, drinking alcohol, numbing our lives even further. But somehow, on this one evening, things were different.

If you'd been there, as Jon walked in from a long day's work, you'd have seen that something in him had shifted, perhaps even departed. He'd become a lifeless shadow of a man, lost in a thick fog, at the point of burnout – greyed out, ashen. This was Jon, but I barely recognised him. The stress of his job was taking its toll on his health. Our lifestyle had to change. Now.

How had I not spotted it sooner? I felt awful recalling that one of his work colleagues had tried to warn me a few months back of his concern for Jon, but I'd simply shrugged it off. Surrounded by people all burning the candle at both ends, we were no different from our friends and colleagues. This was just what had to be done. It was the norm to work this way, the compromise you made living in London.

As a working mum, I'd been led to believe it was possible to be, do and have it all. We'd been trying to strike the balance that others appeared to have and we'd been pulling it off too. But had we really? Looking closer, it appeared we hadn't. Both at differing points of burnout, to continue like this was simply not sustainable. It wasn't just Jon who'd been existing in such a thick fog. I too had been blinded to our situation. However, it was Jon who was really struggling, barely treading water, and I felt an intense drive to do something to save him, to save us, but in a sustainable way that would prevent us both from drowning!

I knew we needed to change our lifestyle and adopt a new way of life. Seeing our reality made me take responsibility for our future; I couldn't contemplate living the rest of my life without Jon by my side. The path we'd taken wasn't the right one. We had to choose a new path. This was the moment I took control, switched off autopilot, stopped existing and started living.

I resigned from my job to focus all my energy on planning a change in our lifestyle. Despite having a clear why and purpose, I lacked clarity on the plan but trusted I'd figure it out. As it happened, the universe began to work its magic sooner than anticipated. On my train journey home, I spotted an ad in the London freesheet *Metro* for a property auctions seminar on 9 September 2016. Intrigued, I attended it and subsequently enrolled in a year-long property investment training course. This marked the beginning of a new path to explore.

On 30 September 2016, armed with my why, purpose and a clear plan for change, I focused on building a business that would liberate Jon from a stressful, unfulfilling job in the City. Setting a target date for his departure for three years hence, although distant, provided Jon with hope. Seeing an end in sight, a weight lifted and his health started to improve.

## A New Way of Life

So, what happened three years later, on 30 September 2019? Did my unwavering focus, determination and commitment to the purpose-driven plan pay off? Yes, it worked. Just three days after my planned target, Jon exited his job. Through the new property business I'd established, I'd crafted a new sustainable lifestyle for our family. While it didn't entirely replace Jon's income, upon reviewing our financial situation in detail, we realised we didn't require as much as we'd been pursuing all those years.

If you're curious about Jon's current status, he's doing really well. However, you might have trouble tracking him down, as he now prioritises what truly matters to him: family, health, charity, community and sport. He's also assumed responsibility for managing the running of the property business, enabling me to concentrate on coaching and podcasting.

On reflection, we'd lost control and focus, and needed to realign with the plan we'd made over 20 years ago in our early twenties. While our values had remained mostly unchanged, we'd neglected some and been living in conflict with others. Having lost sight of what really

mattered to us, we'd been swept up into living out other people's dreams, expectations and intentions.

Jon's declining health had acted as the catalyst propelling us into living with intention and purpose, urging us to reassess priorities, clarify our values, be of greater service to others, leave a legacy and invest in our personal growth. Ultimately, it offered us a wonderful new perspective on life.

There had been no focus on purpose. We'd been existing, not truly living. When we realigned our work with our values to build a new lifestyle, everything else started to fall into place. With a purpose, a plan and a clear why, we brought more meaning into our life, which prevented us from simply filling in the moments to instead create fulfilling moments. Having switched off the autopilot, Jon and I now spend our days as we choose, with intentional action. As proud midlife beginners, from this rejuvenated, enlightened perspective, we adopted the phrase 'It's never too late to...'

For me, 'It's never too late to...' meant I was determined to fulfil a long-standing desire to write a book. Seeking guidance from various coaches, I embarked on a creative writing session in January 2022. In that session, I visualised my maternal grandfather, George, sharing captivating wartime stories with me by the fireside – a cherished childhood memory. The concept was that these stories would contain hidden life lessons that would help the reader navigate their future with purposeful intention. With this inspired vision, I began writing 'The Book'.

However, grappling with writer's block two months later, I enlisted the help of another coach to overcome the limiting belief that I lacked the ability to do justice to our story and meet George's exacting standards as a professional playwright and novelist, despite him no longer being alive to judge me.

Through a mindset coaching session, I engaged in an imaginary dialogue with George. Encouraged by his supportive words, this session helped me recognise that my podcasting work was essentially a continuation of George's career in broadcasting, and that writing 'The Book' was a natural progression. With renewed confidence, I resumed writing.

# From Beyond the Grave

## Goodbye, Ruth

We'd been planning a garden celebration for my grandmother's 90th birthday in June. Sadly, it was not to be. She had collapsed and been taken to hospital. When I arrived at her bedside, hearing me speak, she roused herself for a brief conversation. Nothing could have prepared me for this moment. What do you say to someone who's been so important to you for so many years? Tears expressed what my words could not. I explained that I'd be back with Mum soon. We blew each other kisses and she closed her eyes.

My grandmother and I shared a special bond, more like friends – so much so I called her by her first name, Ruth. She was a true artist of many crafts: watercolour, embroidery and knitting. With love, she hosted, entertained and created stunning gardens for many to enjoy. My earliest memory is of us, hand in hand, slowly making our way back down the narrow lane to her thatched cottage from the village shop. We'd pause to admire the beautiful country garden flowers and Ruth would crouch down by my side to patiently teach me each of their names.

Her eyes were closed, but feeling her grip and sensing she could still hear us, my mum, brother and I sang to her and shared memories of the wonderful moments we'd spent together. We thanked her for all the love she'd given us, shared how much joy she'd brought to the world, and acknowledged our gratitude for how she'd always been there for anyone who needed her. It was heartbreaking yet beautiful and I'm so grateful to have been there, right by her side when, hand in hand, we said our final goodbye.

## George (Precious)

Several months later, in December 2022, my mother and I were going through Ruth's various possessions. She hadn't kept much from her almost 90 years of life: a shelf or two of novels and books about birds, gardening and artists; a collection of photographs; her own beautiful artwork; some pieces of jewellery; a few bundles of knitting wool; and an old, battered box with 'George (Precious)' written on the side in my grandmother's writing. This box had been hidden for decades. I carefully unpacked the items, feeling as though I'd just stumbled upon the most valuable treasure ever.

Inside, I found a notebook with 11 handwritten short stories dated February 1943–May 1944, photographs taken inside prisoner of war (POW) camps, a military identity card, a prison number inscribed on a metal tag, and a bundle of letters and telegrams. Then, from deep inside the box, I unearthed a notebook that my grandfather, George Fleming Kerr, had kept as a POW during World War Two (WW2). On the cover, it read: *Commonplace Scrapbook September '39–April '45* and on the inside cover, 'Being notes, reminiscences, impressions, criticism, commentary and work in progress or unfinished made at Eichstätt, Tittmoning, Laufen in Bavaria and Warburg in Westphalia'.

As I flicked through the pages of tiny ink handwriting, it fell open at this entry:

### **30 September 1942**

Proposal to write 'Way of Life' to meet the need for a planned life, to meet every circumstance of life, every facet of living.

Stunned, I was taken aback. A planned life? How extraordinary to read these words, given that purposeful, planned living is exactly what I talk about every day as the focus of my coaching work. 'Have a Purpose. Have a Plan. Focus on Why' is how I end every single podcast episode. My mind was racing, overwhelmed by the potential significance of this scrapbook's discovery.

As with my grandmother, Ruth, I'd also called George by his first

name. My earliest memories are of the times I spent with both of them. With unconditional love, each taught me different things about life. A Stoic, socialist, pacifist, philosopher, existentialist, humanist and vegetarian, George was witty with an incisive mind and wide interests. He always put a positive spin on life, stating that the future would be 'lovely', that life was 'graceful'.

Together we'd watch Shakespeare plays and read books, critiquing them afterwards. From a very young age, George taught me not to accept things at face value but to enquire further, how to really listen, understand what interested people, and how to ask great questions. In the shade of the apple trees, we'd spend hours discussing the meaning of life, his time in Australia or just listening to birdsong. In all my time with George, never once did he fail to meet my curiosity for life.

My grandparents shaped my formative years, particularly teaching me how to appreciate and recognise the beauty found in nature, art and literature. But it was George who taught me how to love maths and science in equal measure, and who encouraged me to reflect on what I'd just read or learned to see how it could be applied in my own life. An early adopter of technology, he bought me a word processor, an extravagant gift that he referred to as 'an essential weapon'.

During my teenage years, I lived with my grandparents, and George, having attended my school parents' evenings, would offer reflections with recommended actions to help enhance my performance. I'd only just finished my linguistics degree when his life came to an end in 1996. Coincidentally, I was 21, the same age as George had been when he'd begun writing his Commonplace Scrapbook.

## Series of Coincidences

Just 11 months after conceiving the idea to write 'The Book', by incorporating extracts from George's Commonplace Scrapbook, I'd finally obtained the missing jigsaw piece I needed for our collaboration to succeed. George's presence had been his greatest gift to me. His early influence shaped me and directed my path. I wish he were alive now so we could talk more about the meaning and purpose of life. How

different this book would've been with his physical, conscious input and what a wonderful guest he would've been on my podcast. Sadly, it wasn't to be. Or was it?

Still sifting through my grandmother's possessions from her loft and looking for one of George's manuscripts, on 15 April 2023, coincidentally on what would've been his 105th birthday, my mum and I found a microcassette tape in an envelope labelled 'Amy & George 1990'. Pressing play, it was me, aged 15, interviewing George, aged 72, about his experiences as a POW. I was speechless. Tears of joy ran down my face. I couldn't believe it. This was serendipity at play. I'd been searching for one thing and found yet another treasure.

Picture the scene: Ruth is in the kitchen prepping dinner, George and I are in the lounge of their house in Stratford-upon-Avon. The quality of a home recording made more than three decades ago isn't great; however, if you listen to the podcast *Focus on WHY* (referred to as FOW going forward), episode 350, 'Chronicles of Captivity', you can clearly hear what we're saying. Here's an extract from that conversation:

AMY: You were a prisoner of war for five years in Germany. How has that affected you and your attitudes towards Germans?

GEORGE: I came out feeling pretty tolerant, really. Because I think a prisoner of war is a fairly balanced character.

AMY: And when you were in a POW camp, did other people have the same opinions as you?

GEORGE: They were very conventional opinions people have because we were in an officers' camp, and an officer's duty, according to king's or queen's regulations, is to escape. But that was my last thought because I thought that extremely perilous and might endanger my life. And I didn't think I owed my country that kind of sacrifice. So I'm a fairly unheroic soldier. But then if you have conscription, which is compulsory enlisting, then you're going to get people like me.

AMY: Were there many people like you or did most people want to escape?



GEORGE: A great number of people wanted to escape, because they had left their newly married wives back in England, and mostly they wanted to get through the wire.

AMY: And you weren't married?

GEORGE: I wasn't married, and I didn't have that kind of...

AMY: Responsibility?

GEORGE: Or envy or jealousy or suspicion.

AMY: How old were you?

George: About 20.

AMY: So, you were very young. So, you weren't quite sure what was going on?

GEORGE: No, not at all. At 20, do you know anything? You just play it by ear.

AMY: So, if you didn't escape, does this mean that you betrayed your country?

GEORGE: Some people will think so, yes. I don't. I think you must have your own judgement and assessment of circumstances. For instance, the Germans, whose great motto was 'Befehl ist Befehl', 'orders are orders', they tended to obey any order they were given, hence the atrocities. And when they were called up for war crimes after the war, their defence was, 'I was told to do it. I couldn't disobey an order.' But I think people must be in a position to disobey an order if they think it's an unlawful order or an idiotic order. And I thought that it was idiotic for me to be ordered to climb through several thicknesses of barbed wire with a searchlight on me and machine guns trained on me. It was a silly order.

AMY: So, you're not patriotic in any way?

GEORGE: In any way? Of course I am. My roots are in Great Britain, but I'm not patriotic to the point of folly. It was Dr Johnson, I think, who said that 'patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel' and I tend to agree with that.

AMY: How were you treated? Were you treated badly?

GEORGE: Well, we never knew what was going to happen. They tended to take hostages. They tended to do certain purges

and shoot people. They tended to parade you at three in the morning and you wondered why. Then they marched you off to another place altogether, a barn, and put you in it; you didn't know if you were going to be shot there. In fact, it was retaliation for something that had been done to German prisoners in Jersey and the Channel Islands. And so, you never knew which way they were going to bite or jump, and that was for five years, so you'd get a bit tense really. You didn't know how long it was going to last but you had written home to your family saying, 'I'll see you in Canada if necessary. Don't wait for me in Great Britain if we are invaded,' and so on. I also reassured my family. I said, 'Don't worry, I shan't try to escape.' That meant that I would get back alive at least but join them elsewhere if they felt that they were in danger in the country.

RUTH: Most of your friends who tried to escape were shot.

GEORGE: Oh, yes.

AMY: Did you get letters back from them [family]?

GEORGE: Oh yes, they came back. They were all censored, of course, but we got letters. We were only allowed to write a letter a month, I think it was, or a letter a fortnight. But it was a fairly interesting monastic life for me at that age. It was like a university because they had a small library. Eventually they got a bigger library from the Swiss Red Cross. Then you could study anything really and I did an external London BA and I learned and passed exams in Spanish and French. I learned to play the flute. I learned to dabble at water-painting. I did a lot of writing and did a lot of reading. I did acting and it was a very rounded life. I played cricket when we had a ball. Rounded, yeah.

AMY: It was OK, really?

GEORGE: Well, no, people still died from suicide. I thought it was OK. I also knew these were the happiest days of your life, but I was certainly not in the majority on that. I mean they thought I was daft.

AMY: Who thought you were daft?

GEORGE: Well, I was unmarried. The other prisoners, especially the married ones, I suppose, would keep getting 'Dear John' letters from their wives, you see. 'I've met this Polish officer', and I hadn't got that problem. I liked it. It was like a university. But of course, I was hungry, it was cold and it was miserable. You had no friends apart from in prison. But the thing you noticed was, and I spent five years there, I only saw one fight in my life.

AMY: Really?

GEORGE: In all that time. You learned to live. I can live with anybody at close quarters. You notice their idiosyncrasies and funny habits and so on. And you may hate them, but you control it.

AMY: So, you think everyone should have five years in prison, then?

GEORGE: I think it wouldn't be bad that, monastic, yeah, especially if there's a library, but of course it doesn't suit people who are not academic.

AMY: How did you get the flute?

GEORGE: Well, it came from the Red Cross.

AMY: Do you play now?

GEORGE: No, I've never played since. I wasn't any good. I took lessons from a boy who learned from Marcel Moyse, who was a great flautist, but it was just a way of passing time I suppose. But more importantly, I wrote too in there. I knew what I was going to do all the time.

Listening back to this recording, and knowing that after the war George went on to spend a lifetime writing, I was particularly struck by these words: 'I knew what I was going to do all the time.' Even though he said he didn't 'know anything' aged 20, he'd learned how to live, understood what he could control and spoke of his understanding of destiny and the meaning of life. He'd had a purpose, a plan and a clarity of focus throughout his POW years and beyond.

However, ‘I knew what I was going to do all the time’ held another meaning for me. I too had also known what I was going to do! Discovering the scrapbook and tape felt as if the universe was aligning to support the creation of ‘The Book’, guided by my beloved grandfather. This series of extraordinary, serendipitous coincidences felt like a reunion with George in a beautiful and unexpected way. Despite his physical absence, his presence remained and I wondered after all these years what more he could teach me about life from beyond the grave. A lesson about the nature of coincidence itself, perhaps?

In August 2023, I received an email from a PhD student studying Australian television plays (1956–1970) who’d identified George as a key figure. Having read one of my blogs about George, he’d tracked me down to generously share an extensive collection of his scripts, one of which was a play for Australian TV called *She’ll Be Right* about a POW struggling with survivor’s guilt. He’d also written this in French as a radio play, which was selected as Australia’s entry for the 1961 Prix Italia.

Is it a coincidence that more than half a century later someone on the other side of the world should also be writing about George at exactly the same time as me? Wondering what George would think about this series of coincidences, I realised we’d already discussed this topic 30 years ago while I was still at university.

***Extract from George’s letter to me dated 10 November 1993***

We tend to react at the astonishing fact of a ‘coincidence’. But surely what would be really remarkable would be if – considering the millions and millions of possible combinations of events – if there were NEVER any such coincidences.

A series of meaningful coincidences that seem to defy logical explanation and hint at deeper interconnectedness between events and inner lives is what Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung termed synchronicity. When synchronicity and serendipity converge, the universe aligns perfectly to bring about an outcome in a way you might never have anticipated, creating magical moments of insight, discovery and life-changing opportunities.

Perhaps now you can appreciate how discovering George's Commonplace Scrapbook inspired and propelled forward my purpose-focused journey to write 'The Book', as he holds a special place in my heart and soul, continuing to guide me from beyond.

## Chronicles of Captivity

**B**efore proceeding, I need to share some important disclaimers. I'm not a qualified psychologist, neuroscientist, organisational behaviour specialist or a war historian and neither is this book about a WW2 hero. For if it were, I would've written about my paternal grandfather, Major General Walter Morland Hutton, CB, CBE, DSO, MC, MA, known to one and all as 'Fearless Jim'.

In *Tanks Across the Desert – The War Diary of Jake Wardrop* (Forty 1981), Fearless Jim is described as 'one of the greatest guys who ever joined the Army. He was always well up in his tank giving orders on the wireless in a nice, pleasant voice, just like the announcer reading the news. The lads would have done anything for him and gone anywhere with him – if he had said we were going to make a frontal attack on the gates of hell, they would have been off like a shot.'

Therefore I am the much-loved granddaughter of both an outstanding professional soldier and an ordinary conscript; one spoke directly with Churchill, the other spoke of him. One was injured several times, yet always returned to the front line; the other was not keen to fight at all, and was captured early on. Yet it's because of the action of a 'fairly unheroic soldier' that this particular book has been shaped. If George hadn't spent years in captivity compiling his scrapbook, I wouldn't be able to tell you his story of courage, autonomy and strength of purpose.

With those disclaimers declared, as a qualified coach, experienced podcast host and as George's granddaughter, my expertise lies in sharing what I, and many others, have gained through years of personal experience: the difference between living with and without purpose.

Having left Merchant Taylors' School in Crosby in 1935, George pursued a career in accountancy to please his father. In 1940, aged just 22, he began his five years of captivity as a POW never knowing

for certain what would happen, if the next moment might be his last, and armed only with his school education, an inquisitive mind and a developing appreciation for the arts. However, it was this period of confinement that ultimately taught George how to set himself free from a 'Way of Life' he'd previously felt destined to live. He used his period of imprisonment to grow. Learning and crafting his purpose, he broadened his mind and horizon through reading and writing extensively, finding great solace from within the world of literature, nature and music.

Two years later, in 1942, aged 37, Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor E Frankl began his three years of captivity in the Nazi concentration camps having had his ready-to-publish manuscript confiscated. In *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959), Frankl stated that 'those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfil were most apt to survive' and attributed his ability to 'survive the rigours of the camps' to his 'deep desire to write this manuscript anew'. Drawing from his professional insights, experiences and academic knowledge, Frankl may have lost his manuscript but he'd retained a profound understanding of the significance of purpose and the distinction between what he could and couldn't control.

I want to stress that I'm not in any way equating Frankl's captivity in the concentration camps to George's as a POW. They're not comparable. However, there are parallels between how Frankl and George dealt with their respective circumstances as both men documented their experiences spent in captivity; Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning*, George in his Commonplace Scrapbook.

Both recorded the meanings behind their observations to provide clear insights as to how they activated their own mental liberation. Throughout their differing personal narratives of survival, it's clear they shared the mindset that as an individual it's your responsibility to shape your own meaning of life. That while life tests you, you have a choice in how you respond. This choice of how to respond is what I refer to in my coaching work and podcasts as Reflection with Action. The action you take that follows your reflection is critical in achieving a life rich in meaning, fulfilment and purpose.

## A Later Chronicler

By calling it a Commonplace Scrapbook, George blended both the style of a journal with that of a commonplace book in which you capture information from a variety of sources that informs your view of the world. Including moments of inspirational wisdom and writings from philosophers, poets, authors, even emperors, woven alongside his own thoughts and reflections, his collection marks the beginnings of him crafting and honing his writing skills in preparation for his future career. In essence, he shares his innermost thoughts and reflections on life while living in captivity in his early twenties. You can see the makings of the man he was to become, and the man I would come to know many decades later.

Spanning a six-year period, George's Commonplace Scrapbook begins in the safety of his home in Southport, England, listening to an unimaginable war unfold on the radio. He documents his feelings about becoming a conscripted soldier, his doubts heading into war, travelling towards the front, evading capture and his surrender. Then having been marched across France into Germany, he writes of his time held captive as a POW for five years in four different camps. He often refers to his two brothers, also displaced by the war to other parts of the world, and shares memories of their time as a family.

His scrapbook wasn't intended for publication in its original form. After all, it was just his own personal and profound observations, reflections, musings, dreams, truths, doubts and fears. However, George may have used his scrapbook as a source reference because after the war, with permission to go on indefinite leave under the category 'unposted', George accepted a job offer for the 1946 film *The Captive Heart*, starring Michael Redgrave, as 'technical-cum-atmospheric adviser-cum-extra'. He was instrumental in ensuring the film's accuracy in depicting POW life, and even had a few spoken lines.

The scrapbook also likely aided in writing his two plays based on WW2: *A Month of Sundays*, which was screened on the BBC in 1952, and *She'll Be Right* (1961), screened on Australian TV. Each play is a reminiscence and a noble lament for the millions who lost their lives during

the war. Both feature George's own prison number 1536, personal family names for characters and his own insights, habits and virtues are reflected in the dialogue. Characters portray emotions experienced by the POWs: envy, jealousy, suspicion, melancholy, depression, hope, guilt, desire, as well as values of duty, responsibility, fairness, equality and a fear of death.

*A Month of Sundays* centred around themes of freedom, food, and trust: the perils involved in attempting to escape, the need to receive a parcel containing a crucial part to fix their hidden 'canary' (code for wireless), their desperate hunger, and the wariness of new POWs possibly being German spies. George shared how trust had to be earned over time. The title, *A Month of Sundays* (meaning an extremely long time), is a great metaphor for not being able to escape an interminable situation.

***Extract from an article George wrote***

In the play, Calthrop, Burdett and Parkinson are essentially unheroic figures; in real life they were what we were pleased to call 'good prisoners' – not good in the sense that they gave the Germans a great deal of trouble by persistent escape attempts, but good because they had learned to live for years at almost point-blank range with half a dozen others. They had managed somehow to preserve their balance and seemed likely to emerge from behind the wire with their sanity intact and their sense of humour, if anything, improved. Sometimes, of course, their humour failed them and their neighbours seemed intolerably near. This nearness, and how the prisoners tried to make it tolerable, is the subject of the play.

On our return home, we prisoners were astonished to find that people were sorry for us. For our part, we felt only relief; it had been a long sentence and we had survived. We knew that others had met lonely deaths on the wire or in the country lying between the 'kriege' [POW] and home. Although *A Month of Sundays* tells of those who survived, it remembers the few who did not.

Although he used the scrapbook for his own benefit, I also believe it had been kept safe all these years so that, together, you and I could learn, understand and question what can be achieved through living a



life of purpose, whatever our circumstances. In his scrapbook entry on 25 March 1945, writing as if directly addressing an audience, George makes specific reference to a ‘later chronicler’.

Such was the past which these places could remember, a past of which little evidence was left in the valley along the plain. Now and for five years, the Kriegsgefangenenlager [*POW camp*] was to stand there, a building we were to regard as our home. Doubtless it too would contribute something to history, but a later chronicler must speak of this. Doubtless by then the camps would have disappeared; but the rivers would be running yet and the blizzard blowing at Dössel. Let us go in then, out of the blizzard. Let us look at some of these prison camps.

The scrapbook then held one further purpose: to lead me to become the ‘later chronicler’ who ‘must speak of this’ as no one else has read this scrapbook. It has to be me. After all these years, my grandfather is speaking to me again.

## The Book’s Purpose

So, through intergenerational collaboration, my grandfather’s scrapbook, together with my Focus on Why Framework, becomes our combined legacy to form *Focus on Why: Create a purposeful way of life*. In sharing George’s abridged chronicles of captivity during 20th-century war-torn Europe, you’ll witness his physical and existential journey of life and death, freedom and captivity, and destiny and purpose.

This book will empower you to craft your own purposeful life through this blend of my grandfather’s scrapbook with wisdom shared from podcasting conversations and my personal experiences and insights as a coach.

The Focus on Why Framework is designed to challenge the authenticity of your current lifestyle, and provides practical, creative Reflection with Action exercises to reinforce learnings from each of the nine steps.

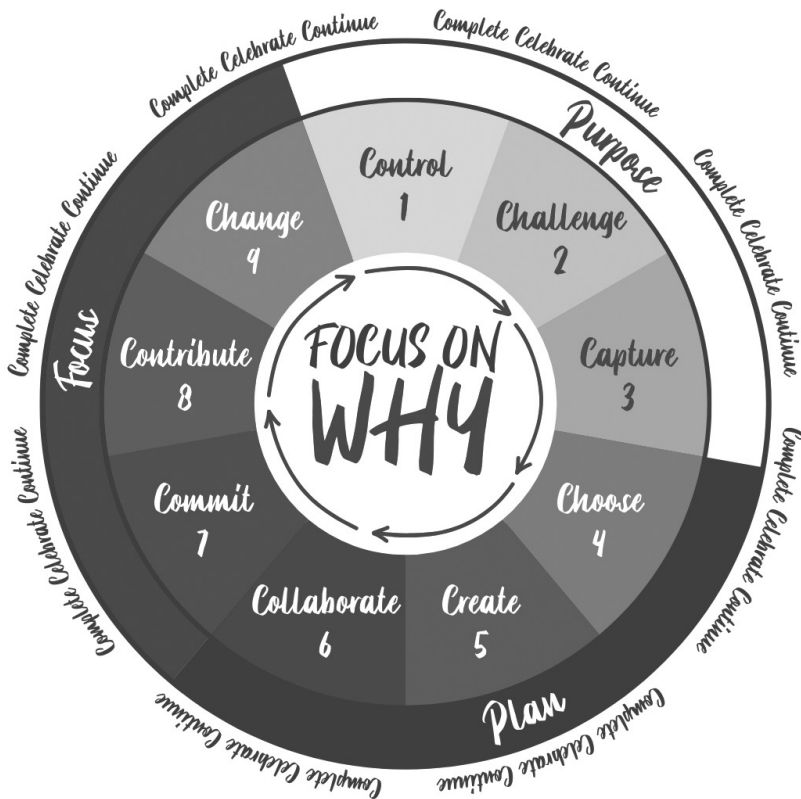
As you navigate the many challenges and transitions of life, you may

## Focus on Why

find this book becomes a lifelong companion. Prepare to venture on a journey of self-discovery, encountering timeless, universal yet deeply personal themes essential to modern-day living with an emphasis on love and compassion for humanity. What purpose do you envision for yourself? What impact and legacy do you aim to create?

Regardless of where you find yourself in life, the Focus on Why Framework transcends age, life stage or circumstance to offer a roadmap through each of life's transitions to create a sustainable, purposeful lifestyle.

## The Focus on Why Framework: Purpose, Plan and Focus



**T**here are three parts to the Framework: Purpose, Plan and Focus.

**Part 1: Purpose** – comprising three actionable steps – **Control, Challenge and Capture** – centres on your perception and understanding of the world. Serving as your guiding light, infusing clarity, passion and authenticity into your actions, purpose offers deliberate direction and significance to your intentions, empowering you to create a positive impact, contribute meaningfully and experience fulfilment.

#### **Have a Purpose**

**Step 1: Control the controllables**

**Step 2: Challenge the status quo**

**Step 3: Capture what matters**

**Part 2: Plan** – comprising three actionable steps – **Choose, Create and Collaborate** – revolves around your decision making and action taking. A well-structured plan provides the necessary route to achieve your purpose-driven aspirations, breaking down your intentions into manageable milestones.

#### **Have a Plan**

**Step 4: Choose your actions**

**Step 5: Create and craft a plan**

**Step 6: Collaborate to amplify impact**

**Part 3: Focus** – comprising three actionable steps – **Commit, Contribute and Change** – centres on your commitment to a chosen path. As your life evolves and changes, so does your purpose, shaping your intentional and purposeful journey.

#### **Focus on Why**

**Step 7: Commit wholeheartedly with unwavering focus**

**Step 8: Contribute to create positive ripple effects**

**Step 9: Change with your evolving purpose**

## Focus on Why

Use the framework to craft your own unique life of purpose with a focus on what really matters. Work through each of the steps in order from 1 to 9. As you progress through them, be prepared to allocate dedicated time for the Reflection with Action exercises, which are designed to facilitate growth, self-awareness and habit formation. After completing them, embrace the Celebrate and Continue exercises to acknowledge all your achievements and any lessons learned. This self-assessment promotes self-approval and self-appraisal. Once completed, move on to the next step.

Are you ready to start a unique adventure? Then your journey begins here.



1940

March 29<sup>th</sup> Today I saw the sky  
a fairy tale, a painted fantasy.  
Yes, I suppose so. And it has these faults too.  
ridiculously optimistic.

At any rate it is just what I  
time, I

PRISONER OF WAR POST  
KRIEGSGEFANGENENPOST  
AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION

Offlag VII B  
Gepfiff



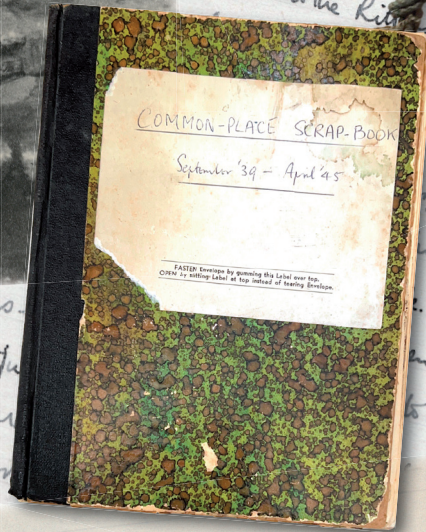
RANK & NAME: Lieut. George Fleming Kerr, ( army )  
BRITISH PRISONER OF WAR

PRISONER OF WAR No.: 1533 ( VII C )

CAMP NAME & No.: 3 Battalion,  
Offlag VI B  
COUNTRY: GERMANY



upstairs to the Rith... David Ross passed...  
k, and his eyes very blue...  
much of the glory of this...  
Baal, I knew David Ross...  
nts sounded, my heart s...  
I could only repeat on...  
These damnable old...  
to the gaol he passed Clong...  
time and as he passed...  
promptly, a brilliant



as...  
German hope...  
raised his a...  
He felt the par...

September 30<sup>th</sup>

Proposal to write 'way of life' to meet the need for a planned life,  
to meet every circumstance of life, every facet of living





Are you feeling lost or lacking in purpose? Is your work unfulfilling? Perhaps you're merely existing instead of truly living and thriving.



By challenging your status quo and rethinking what matters most to you, *Focus on Why* demonstrates how, even in the most testing of circumstances, you can courageously break free from what holds you back to craft a life that's filled with intention, opportunity and adventure.

When experienced purpose coach Amy Rowlinson stumbled upon her late grandfather George F Kerr's moving account of five years in captivity during World War Two, she unearthed a poignant narrative that strikingly echoed her own perspectives on living with purpose.



In this unique life purpose guide Amy skilfully combines the wisdom found in her grandfather's scrapbook with other inspirational stories gleaned from hundreds of interviews with guests from her podcast.

These compelling and motivational insights, together with her proven nine-step framework, will show you how to create a sustainable, fulfilling and purposeful way of life. Your legacy is not just what you leave behind but how you choose to live each day.

Exploring life's timeless, deeply personal themes and delving into the essence of vulnerability, imperfection and authenticity, this uplifting guide stands apart from the rest. Honest and heartfelt, it invites you to confront your past, embrace your present and shape your future. Prepare to go on a transformative journey of purpose-focused self-discovery.

**'Breathtakingly powerful. Step out of the fog of mere existence and into a life of vibrant purpose.'**

Kim-Adele Randall – CEO, Authentic Achievements

**'A brilliantly simple framework to map your own journey through life.'**

Wing Commander Marcus Dimbleby, RAF (ret'd) –  
MD and founder, Effective Direction™

**amyrowlinson.com**

**eBOOK and  
AUDIOBOOK**  
also available



Designed by Nick Redeyoff