



# AEA DIGEST

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Association for Education and Ageing

Issue no 21

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## **FROM THE CHAIR.....**

*Jo Walker*

Dear Friends,

### **Funding success**

2007 is indeed shaping up to be an exciting year for the Association. I am delighted to announce that we have been successful in our bid to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) for some funding to help develop AEA. The grant will become active early in 2008.

This achievement comes as a result of a year long process, working together to improve our 'capacity' as an organisation and producing a strategic plan that showed vision and commitment. We have been greatly helped in this by Contact Consulting, whom EFF enabled us to engage with an earlier amount of funding. We are grateful to them both.

The new grant, which will be drawn down over this financial year and the two following, is to cover some part-

time assistance in project development and management; a literature review; and a communication strategy, which includes development of this current Digest, a new Journal and an improved website. There will also be further older learner consultation events around the country, building on our past successes with these in Bournemouth. We will organise a UK conference for AEA in 2008, followed by an international one in 2009.

### **New members**

Several new members have joined as a result of our participation in the Legacy of Learning conference in Glasgow in May, and we continue to spread the word through such meetings. If you are attending a relevant event, and would be willing to take some membership material, do be in touch with Carol Allen. We have an electronic version as well as printed leaflets. In September we were pleased to appoint Ron Speight as a new member of our Executive Committee, in the role of Hon.

Treasurer. Ron is a recently retired accountant and lives in Coventry.

### **Educational Gerontology**

The academic study of later life learning is a bit of a minority sport in the world of research and conferences, and we are always looking for opportunities to promote it, especially within fields where we feel the life-long learning dimension is relevant. We are pleased, therefore, to have been asked to organise a symposium on educational gerontology within the annual conference of the British Society of Gerontology, taking

place in September 2008. We will issue a call for offers of papers shortly, from which we will construct a session dedicated to learning in later life. Also, for budding authors and researchers out there, look out for developments concerning a new journal, which we hope to be able to announce in the new year. So it looks like 2008 will be exciting too!

All good wishes for the autumn term and seasonal greetings.

*And looking even further ahead.....*

## **Sixth International Conference on Adult Education – CONFINTEA VI**

As has been the tradition created by previous CONFINTEA conferences, the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), which will be hosted by Brazil in 2009, will provide an important platform for policy dialogue and advocacy on adult learning and non-formal education at global level, involving UNESCO Member States, United Nations agencies, multi-and bi-lateral cooperation agencies, organisations from civil society, the private sector and learners from all world regions. For more information go to <http://www.unesco.org/uil/en/focus/confintea.htm>

*There is also a special issue of the electronic newsletter of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)- August 2007 devoted to CONFITEA VI*

<http://www.unesco.org/uil/en/UILPDF/focus/confintea/ConfinteaSpecial.pdf>

*AEA member David Crossan has worked for many years with older learners. In this challenging piece he meditates on **Vanishing Students: The Invisible Threat***

A recent NIACE Conference “Democratising Democracy: A new social purpose in adult education” (Cambridge September 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) gave many participants the chance to reflect on the loss to Adult Education of many courses that helped to improve people’s quality of life, challenge the political consensus and provide alternatives to the social hegemony. Some participants nostalgically looked back to an apparent golden age. An age when the community educator was encouraged to “let a thousand flowers bloom”, and the world seemed open and receptive to new ideas. This was not the case for those of us who worked with older people. Apart from a brief respectability, the work has had to be done on a shoestring relying on other people’s leftover budgets. For an all too brief period aspects of the work were funded through the Learning and Skills Council and it appeared that for once Education, Social Services, Housing and Health Providers could work together to promote greater social action, personal independence and increased democratic involvement.

These benefits were all quickly forgotten when a new, more fiscally challenged regime was imposed at the turn of the century. A new Utilitarianism was introduced and although the old slogans of Life Long Learning and Listening to the Learner were never officially revoked they were conveniently dropped by the department of Education and

Skills. There was a new focus on a hard nosed education with the emphasis on education for qualification and skills. The carrot was that with better qualification and greater skills people would get better jobs and earn more money. The new mantra was “Learn to Earn”. Learning was brutalised and education, instead of leading to new openings and greater opportunity was reduced to a tool of the state, designed to provide the new factory fodder, centred on the “screen-agers” brought up on a curriculum of ICT and gadgets. Although apparently committed to developing a highly skilled workforce, even a superficial scan of the new vocationalism indicates the need is not for greater skills but for employees confident to press buttons and comfortable sitting in front of screens and reading from scripts. The ability to cope with difficulties and the experience of dealing independently with problems are both being replaced by the programmed responses of increasingly poorly paid machine servants. These servants are supervised by a cadre of highly paid managers, bankers and financial fixers. It is these fixers who are the people who talk of GDP, productivity and the need to protect jobs by keeping wages low as they are paid huge salaries with additional bonuses and share schemes while producing nothing themselves.

Successive governments pour millions of pounds into education with little discernible improvement in standards, despite the ridiculously high pass rates of sixteen and eighteen year olds. More money goes into the system, although the birth rate keeps falling, at the same time as the country has a pension crisis,

which if the figures are correct can only get worse. Older people look forward to having to work longer years. Women's pensions are brought in line with men, the Age Discrimination Act allows you to carry on working beyond your 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. But how long before it denies people a right to a pension at 65?

As the demographic divide grows wider and the country needs an older workforce, these are the very group of people who are quietly ignored. A few employers will encourage older workers to update their skills, but more often than not if an older person goes on a training course it will be based on preparing for retirement. It is indicative of the government's thinking that people over the age of 54 are ineligible for grants to enter Higher Education. Even the funding that remains for LSC endorsed courses is limited to provision only up to Level 2 – hardly enough to be described as a top level qualification. In an increasingly globalised market with its emphasis on communications a minister saw fit to explain that the government is not there to provide language classes to improve people's leisure time!

The introduction of the Age Discrimination Act has had a noticeably adverse effect on older people and Adult Education, in that even in those areas where a reasonable Adult Education curriculum still exists, the Act was interpreted by many providers to mean that it was no longer possible to offer reduced fees to older learners. Not surprisingly over two million older learners have vanished from the system. They may not be taking part in learning funded through the LSC but I would be willing to bet that many of them have found alternative forms, which are not

subject to the vagaries of political whim, the strictures of examining bodies or the bureaucracy and insistence on the maintenance of minimum class numbers demanded by local authority providers. However the Age Discrimination Act need not be seen as a retrograde step for older learners. It has forced them many of them to learn what they want, when they want to and how they want. They may have vanished from the screens of the LSC and the qualification councils, but in doing so they become an invisible threat operating at many levels within society. This means that they are taking control of their learning but without the need for a compulsory Individual Learner Account.

It may not be called "Learning" but the demand by the Audit Commission and the expectations of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment that the Authorities show they have consulted with those they govern means that citizen's forums have to be established and people have to know their rights and how to assert themselves. The same is true of Housing Associations and other public service providers. Here real education for social action can manifest itself. The tutors in such forums can work with people to develop their skills, bring out their inherent abilities, show them their strengths and give them the confidence to demand that they are not ignored.

At a time when both the extreme left and right are working to undermine democracy and many younger people express only apathy and cynicism towards the democratic process, politicians of all persuasions need to be engaging with their older constituents. It is in the interests of all of us to

encourage them to remain motivated and feel that their views and opinions are listened to, respected and acted upon. In the short term some individual politicians may well need to look at the demographic make up of their own constituencies to see if they dare to ignore the grey vote.

Further consequences of losing older learners can be foreseen as they impact on Social Service and Primary Care Trusts budgets. If older people are lost to the system, rather than acting as a positive force contributing to the services, they are likely to become consumers of services and increasingly dependant with the subsequent cost implications to already challenged budgets.

Finally, we should consider a further challenge to the economy implicit in ignoring older people. For too long many governments have chosen to describe them as “economically inactive” because many of them were no longer working. That view has been successfully invalidated. All older people still contribute to the economy as consumers, many still pay tax, many more have assets and investments and thousands contribute through their investment of time, energy and skills as

volunteers. The shortage of younger workers means that older people are increasingly being encouraged to continue in employment. Employers need to look at the needs of employees and find innovative ways to motivate older workers. They need to realise that they have skills far beyond the system and the process that they are currently operating and use them to mentor younger employees. Older workers will have to be trained to identify and realise their potential in order to ensure the best returns for all concerned. New work patterns will need to be established to take account of the needs of the more mature workforce and therefore enable it to continue to contribute to the economy, the growth of an age diverse society and a culturally inclusive and tolerant social order.

It is never too late to learn. If we act now, we can include older people through their learning in all aspects of life, to the benefit of everyone. If however we continue to ignore older people and sow the wind by failing to grasp the importance of older learning, it is probable the next generation will reap the whirlwind of ignorance. (ref. Hosea Chapter 8 v. 7)

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*Anne Jamieson is Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Adult Education, Birkbeck College, University of London, where she has delivered courses for adult learners for over 15 years. She reports here on a disturbing development in her educational field - **Older adults in Higher Education - The latest threat.***

As a Birkbeck lecturer I have had the opportunity to research into the motivations for study among adults of all ages. Formal study is but one aspect of learning, and Higher Education study is of course only one form of formal study. Yet for some it is clearly extremely important. At Birkbeck we have been offering a range of Extra-Mural courses, some leading to Certificates and

Diplomas, others being free standing courses attended by people for a variety of reasons. Our Benefits of Part-Time Study is now near its completion, and anyone interested can find details of the study, reports and publications on our web site <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/benefits/>.

**Should people only have one bite of the cherry? The government's latest idea.**

A recent announcement by the Minister for Innovation, Universities and Skills and funding agency marks a serious change in Higher Education provision for adult learners. Anyone who has already got a degree (however long ago) will no longer be funded by the public purse to undertake study, at the same or 'lower' level. Over half of our Extra-Mural students have already got a degree. Our research shows that many of

them are at mid-life and want to re-skill to expand their employment opportunities. Many others are retired, and they see our courses as a way of bringing meaning to life in retirement. Some report that it helps their mental health, and that it helps them cope with bereavement and other life challenges.

Is it right that these people should be excluded from Higher Education courses just because they have a degree, which they might have obtained 30-40 years ago? Well, the government thinks so. We can all support the government's Widening Participation goal, trying to reach those who have never had the experience before. But does it have to be at the exclusion of those who have already had the experience, but who are keen to give up time and devote themselves to further study?

## **New course announcement**

### **Supporting and enhancing mature learning (50+)**

The University of London Institute of Education is offering a new short course

### ***Issues in Educating and Training Mature Adults (50+)***

***January to March 2008***

This will explore the social and individual backgrounds to older learning, considering leisure education, professional re-training, as well as academic study. The course is an acknowledgement that the older population is playing an increasingly important role in society, and is also thriving in educational settings. Teachers and others involved in education will find it richly informative about the factors relevant to the learning of this rapidly growing cohort.

For further details see next page (7)



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London

**Lifelong Education and International Development [LEID]  
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20 Bedford Way  
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*Anita Pincas of the LEID gives further details on the **Issues in Educating and Training Mature Adults (50+)** course.*

The studies will be based on existing literature in the field of mature learning, as well as on our own research into the experiences, approaches and learning philosophy of 650 registered students over 50 - many in their 60s – that constitute 10% of all our learners.

Although *Issues in Educating and Training Mature Adults (50+)* is at master's level, it can be followed independently as a stand-alone course. It lasts for one term from January to March 2008

### **Attendance**

This module consists of two weekend workshops on *Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 January 2008, and Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 March 2008*. There will be structured collaborative email work between weekends. The mode of delivery will be participatory, so that a wide range of viewpoints and experiences can be included.

Enquiries and questions should be directed to :

Anita Pincas [a.pincas@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:a.pincas@ioe.ac.uk) (or telephone: 0207 612 6522)  
Course Leader,  
Senior Lecturer, Lifelong Education and International Development.

More information can found on this website:

[http://ioewebsserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=882&882\\_1=830&var1=3&var2=MAMODIETMA](http://ioewebsserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=882&882_1=830&var1=3&var2=MAMODIETMA)

*As part of her preparations for the above course Anita Pincas has been reading “**Understanding the Brain: The Birth of a Learning Science**”, which gives a detailed overview of the most recent research into how the brain works and contains some reassuring*

*research results with regard to older brain functions.*

The book is published by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development - an international conglomerate concerned with social challenges such as ageing populations. This new report is written

for the non-specialist, and includes clear explanations of how new scanning devices are steadily increasing our understanding of brain functions. For those with an interest in the older generation, it provides welcome indications that we gain as well as lose during the ageing process, so that on balance the picture is a positive one.

The writers urge us not to accept the popular myth that we are doomed because the brain loses 100000 neurons a day (or more if smoking and drinking). New technologies have shown that, though there is a decrease in large neurons (brain cells) of the cerebral cortex, it is balanced by the increase the number of small neurons. Also, though the number of synapses (connections between brain cells) reduces over time, this does not lead to lower ability because other connections are reinforced in the course of our lifetimes.

There is also evidence that while everyone has some decline in brain function [starting at age 20], the healthier parts of the brain can and do compensate. A person who is already skilled and experienced in doing something, can use the parts of the brain that are involved with that competence to deal with new or more difficult tasks, despite deterioration of other parts of the brain. There is also evidence that damaged adult brains may recover more easily than was previously believed, for instance after language has been partly lost due to a stroke. A more specific study, examining the effects of ageing

on creativity among Japanese adults from 20 to 83 found no age differences in originality of thinking.

In general, there is increasing data to demonstrate that fitness and continuing to learn can both slow decline and also lead to improvements well into old age. Being fit helps good spatial orientation, inductive reasoning and complex task-switching activities like driving. Some types of learning therapy that have been monitored in Japan suggest that elderly people with senile dementia can continue to learn and stay mentally well if given daily mental exercises such as reading aloud and simple arithmetic, which have shown positive effects even in early stage Alzheimer's.

The book thus offers a quite optimistic scenario. But we should note that it strongly emphasizes not only the need for continued learning but the equal importance of maintaining social roles, employment, and a sense of self worth. These may be difficult challenges for a retirement home society.

I have only reported briefly on those parts of the book that deal with mature learning research, but the book is ideal for anyone wishing to understand more about cognitive and brain science, imaging techniques, and other advances in neuroscience generally.

It can be obtained from <http://www.OECDbookshop.org> price £17 in pdf format, £25 paperback



*We live in an age where people can be very sensitive about the terminology used to describe them. Which is as true of older people as any other group at least in America, according to this piece I found recently in **The Christian Science Monitor**. It warns the rest of the world **Whatever you do, don't say elderly***

As the first wave of the huge boomer generation marches toward retirement, a linguistic question looms large: What should we call those in their middle and later years? Baby boomers? Older people? Senior citizens? Elders? That's the question facing journalists, who write about retirement and aging. But the issue goes beyond the language those in the media use. The words we all choose to describe people in midlife and beyond – ourselves and others – help to define and shape attitudes about the later years, both positive and negative.

To gauge the opinions and preferences of reporters and editors, Paul Kleyman, national coordinator of the Journalists Exchange on Aging, devised a survey on style. Nearly 100 participants responded from a network of 900 journalists in all media, who cover issues in aging at least



part time. Their top choice for a neutral and flexible general term to describe those in later life is “older,” used to modify people, adults, individuals, or Americans. The second most widely accepted group description for older people is “seniors,” though journalists caution that it is not to be used to describe those younger than 65. But users beware. Boomers is fine, according to many survey participants, but not baby boomers. (“They’re not babies anymore,” one respondent said.). Seniors is acceptable, but senior citizens shows up on the list of “mostly disliked” terms. “I don’t have a problem with senior after the age of 70 or to get the senior discount when I’m 55,” one columnist wrote.

“Elderly” is the word that grates the most. Elderly used as an adjective is acceptable, but the phrase “the elderly” comes under criticism for “its impersonal and stigmatizing manner” of grouping older people together with images of frailty and decline. “Elders,” on the other hand, can convey respect. To describe those at the younger end of the spectrum, middle-aged and midlife make the list of preferred synonyms. Age-specific references such as “those

over 50” or “people 65 and up” also win approval among the journalists.

It’s not just generational labels – nouns – that can convey negative images. Pesky little words, such as “still,” as in, “still driving” or “still jogging,” imply that these activities are something out of the ordinary, defying the norm. Then there are the adjectives that are meant to sound complimentary but actually boomerang. Think of spry, perky, chipper, feisty, sweet, little, and grandmotherly.

For one journalist responding to the survey, the cloying phrase “100 years young” represents the worst possible cliché about aging. Even joking references to a “senior moment” can subtly suggest that the simple forgetfulness that can happen to anyone at any stage of life is somehow tied to aging. And don’t forget other stereotyping language that includes words such as geezers and oldsters.

Part of the challenge for everyone in choosing the right words involves the huge age span in America’s graying population. It begins around 50 – the qualifying age to join AARP – and stretches to 100 or more. One marketing group in New York divides consumers into two groups – baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, and matures, born before 1946. Yet some journalists in the survey criticized “mature” as one of those words so deliberately, self-consciously “correct” – striving for linguistic neutrality – that they can seem silly.

The search for better words goes on. At AARP The Magazine, staff members

favour a more playful approach to language. “We use the word grown-ups a lot,” says editor Steven Slon. A feature called “Movies for Grownups” already exists, and editors are considering “Music for Grownups.”

Mr. Slon thinks boomers may adopt words such as geezer with a measure of irony – “as long as you get the joke.” He also notes that the British tend to have “a zanier sense of humor,” using words such as “wrinklies.” But an official in the Department of Health in Britain has attacked the “demeaning and negative slang” that feeds a culture of ageism. As one example, he wants to ban doctors from referring to older patients as “crinklies” and “bed blockers.”

So sensitive are some boomers about the images words convey that they don’t even want to be called Grandma and Grandpa. They prefer something cooler and hipper, befitting their own more youthful status. Some are opting for Nana, Poppy, even Nina.

Sales clerks and waiters can also sound patronizing when they refer to older customers, usually women, as “dear.” Words matter. Whatever the choice of language, conveying a sense of dignity – which is sometimes hard for people to come by in their later years – represents a worthy goal. As Slon says, offering a good reminder not only to journalists but to everyone, those who are older “don’t want to be marginalized and put off in a category of people who simply get discounts but are not to be taken seriously.”

*Apologies to those of you who have already received this information by e-mail. Our colleagues at NIACE are currently setting up a **Major strategic review into lifelong learning**, and are keen to enlist the co-operation of everyone with an interest in the matter. And that of course includes You! Their Policy and Communications Officer **Helen Prew** writes:*

Dear Colleagues

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has agreed to establish and support an independent commission of inquiry to undertake a major strategic review of lifelong learning. Over the next 18 months, partners from government, business, academia, trade unions, public services, providers and the voluntary and community sector will come together in a process intended to identify the following:

- best practice in the UK and internationally across each of the key arenas in which adult learning makes a significant contribution
- the values, principles and practical steps needed to give life to life-long and life-wide learning for all communities of the UK
- a broad consensus for the future direction of lifelong learning policy in the UK. Professor Sir David Watson has accepted an invitation from the Board of NIACE to chair the independent commission.

This briefing, which is available at <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/inquirybriefing1.doc> is the

first of a series intended to inform those with an interest in the inquiry about the progress of the commission and to highlight opportunities to contribute to the debate about the future for lifelong learning in the UK.

As part of this work, the Commission of Inquiry will be issuing a number of calls for evidence on particular themes. At present we are calling for evidence on **learning in the workplace**. Interested individuals and organisations are invited to submit written evidence to the Commission. The closing date for evidence is **27 November 2007**.

In particular, the Commission invites evidence on the following areas:

- Future skills needs in the workplace
- Work organisation and leadership
- Funding and regulation of learning in the workplace
- Variations within the above categories by region, sector and age

In addition we welcome evidence on any area relevant to the work of the Inquiry. This evidence can be submitted at any stage, however please indicate that it is not linked to a particular call.

Further information about the Commission of Inquiry is available from [www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry](http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry). Evidence should be submitted to [lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org](mailto:lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org). More information in submitting evidence is available from [www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/Evidence-work.htm](http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/Evidence-work.htm)

This is a public call for evidence. Recipients of this notice are encouraged to draw it to the attention of others who may wish to submit evidence to the Inquiry.



## ***AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION***

*It sounds like AEA's bookworm Alex Withnall has spent most of her summer reading. As part of her involvement in the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme Alex is also currently writing a book 'Improving Later life Learning' to be published by Routledge in 2008. For **What I read on my holidays** however, Alex chose an interesting mixture of contemporary novels.*

Apart from the opportunity to rest and recuperate, holidays always offer a welcome chance to catch up on some light reading. And while lazy days by the pool may already be a distant memory, some of the books I read this summer will stay with me for a long time to come. I was particularly struck by how often older people have come to feature in recent novels and how the ups and downs of intergenerational relationships frequently form a popular theme. For example, in *The Walled Garden* (Picador, 2000), the Irish writer Catherine Dunn subtly explores the reactions of siblings Beth and James to the senility and coming death of their mother Alice. Along the way, we learn much about Alice's early life, her struggle with memory loss and her efforts to bridge the gap of misunderstanding that has always existed between her and Beth through a

series of letters that Beth finds while keeping a vigil by her mother's bedside. Perhaps not the most exciting read of the summer but Alice's descent into frailty is beautifully observed and the contrast between Beth's life in London and James's own family struggles in Dublin and their different relationships with their mother come through strongly.

Rosie Thomas is already well established as a writer but *Iris and Ruby* (Harper Collins, 2006) is probably her strongest work to date. The novel explores the relationship between the frail and vulnerable 82-year old Iris still living in her claustrophobic and stifling old house in Cairo and her rebellious teenage granddaughter Ruby who has run away from home in London and turns up unexpectedly on her doorstep. I have to say that I found Ruby to be utterly tiresome and really not very credible as a character; the strength of the book is the author's ability to play with time and the wonderfully evocative account of Iris's life in Cairo during the war when she was involved in a passionate and ultimately doomed love affair. The other theme of the book is the growing bond that forms between the two women as Ruby learns of Iris's past culminating in a desperately dangerous desert adventure that sees Ruby partly redeem herself. The sights and sounds of Cairo past and present, especially the

ferocious heat, noise and constantly changing colours provide a vivid backdrop as the story unfolds.

Maggie O' Farrell's *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox* (Headline Review, 2006) has already received considerable acclaim. Set in Edinburgh, it features another Iris, this time a young woman who suddenly discovers she has a great-aunt who has been in a psychiatric unit for years and who is about to be released. Yet no-one seems to have any knowledge of this relative – what had she done that she was incarcerated for so long? Once again, the author plays a clever game with time taking us back into Esme's early family life whilst in the present, we follow Iris's fraught relationships first with her married lover and then with her step-brother as she

tries to unravel Esme's mysterious past. The action moves at a pace to an unexpected and shocking conclusion but once again, the growing relationship between a mysterious old lady and her younger relative provides an interesting sub-text to the book.

Finally, the most gripping book of my summer read has to be Margaret Forster's *Diary of an Ordinary Woman* (Vintage, 2004). A thinly disguised women's history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, I guarantee you'll still be reading well into the early hours. More next time about this literary *tour de force* by the writer of *Georgy Girl* – remember the sixties film with Lynn Redgrave and James Mason and that infuriatingly catchy theme song?

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*I came across a survey a couple of months ago of the all time favourite happy ending movies for the Over 50 age group. And from the results it would appear that **The Golden Age of Cinema is still the number one.***

When it comes to the nation's favourite happy-ending films, the golden oldie movies of yesterday are still top of the charts according to a survey conducted by RIAS, the over 50s specialist insurer. Despite being over 60 years old, the UK's favourite happy ending film of all time is the classic *It's a Wonderful Life* with James Stewart. *It's a Wonderful Life* is the ultimate 'feel good' film directed by Frank Capra and has been a firm favourite of critics and fans since its release. This high-spirited Christmas tale stars the unforgettable James Stewart as George Bailey, the man who receives the greatest Christmas gift of all.

Also in the top ten were classics including *Grease*, a firm favourite with the young of today, even though it was made nearly 30 years ago and *The Sound of Music* (1965) also proved to be much-loved classic, despite modern big budget, high technology offerings including *Shrek* vying for our affections.

The nation's top 10 happy ending films are:

1. *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)
2. *Pretty Woman* (1990)
3. *Dirty Dancing* (1987)
4. *The Sound of Music* (1965)
5. *Shrek* (2001)
6. *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)
7. *Grease* (1978)
8. *ET* (1982)
9. *Love Actually* (2003)
10. *Ghost* (1990)

Janet Connor, managing director of RIAS, comments: “We all love the feel-good factor that we get from watching films that have happy endings and this seems to be equally true of both men and women, young and old alike, across the country, as evidenced by our survey results.

“We are delighted to be announcing our sponsorship of Odeon senior screen and will be carrying this ‘happy endings’ theme into our promotion of their reduced price admission for the over 50s.” The survey was carried out to coincide with the launch of RIAS’ major new sponsorship of ODEON Senior Screen, which offers the over 50s access to regular, reduced-price cinema screenings across the country on weekday mornings.

*Details of this scheme can be found on the RIAS website at <http://www.rias.co.uk/media-centre/Odeon/> - though I’d check first with your local Odeon that they are part of the scheme, before you get too excited.*

*It would be interesting to hear what your all time favourite top films are – and do they necessarily have happy endings? If you’d like to let us know, we could share them in the next edition of **AEA Digest**. So if you want to contact Carol with either a piece for the digest or any administrative queries or indeed other members of the AEA Executive committee, here’s how to get in touch.*

### ***The Association for Education and Ageing***

**Patrons:** Baroness Sally Greengross, Mr Derek Legge, Professor Arthur Stock

**President:** Professor David James

**Chair:** Jo Walker, [jo.walker@cofeguildford.org.uk](mailto:jo.walker@cofeguildford.org.uk)

**Secretary:** Carol Allen, 132 Dawes Rd, London SW6 7EF [aeasecretary@googlemail.com](mailto:aeasecretary@googlemail.com) Tel: 020 7385 4641

**Treasurer:** Ron Speight, [ronspeight2003@yahoo.com](mailto:ronspeight2003@yahoo.com)

**Elected members:**, David Crossan, Mervyn Eastman, Brian Findsen, Anne Jamieson, Carlie Newman, Jim Soulsby, Glenys Tuersley, Dr Alex Withnall

*And now turn to the next page for the pick of the current and upcoming movies*



***Meryl Streep as CIA anti-terrorism head Corrinne Whitman in “Rendition”***

## ***On Screen***

### ***Carol Allen***

America's film makers are currently casting a more than somewhat critical eye over their country's military and other activities in the rest of the world.

***Rendition*** is a gripping drama about the American government's policy of abducting foreign nationals thought to be a threat to national security for detention and interrogation (for which read torture) in secret overseas prisons. The victim is Anwar (Omar Metwally), an Egyptian national, resident in the States, who is kidnapped by the CIA and sent to an unnamed North African country for "questioning". Official witness to what he describes bleakly as "his first torture" is CIA rookie Douglas (Jake Gyllenhaal), the moral conscience of the film, who is under orders from ruthless counter terrorism chief Corrinne Whitman (Meryl Streep) back in America. The treatment of Anwar, against whom the evidence of terrorism is paper thin and blank wall of official denial his American wife (Reece Witherspoon) meets, when she tries to find out what has happened to her husband, are both horrifying and have a disturbing ring of truth to them.

***In the Valley of Elah*** has veteran soldier Tommy Lee Jones is trying to find out the truth about his son, found murdered shortly after returning from serving in Iraq. Charlize Theron is the police officer who reluctantly helps him and while ostensibly a murder mystery, the real meat of the story is the destructive effect that the Iraq war is having on the young men who are fighting it.

I remember enjoying the 1972 film of ***Sleuth*** with Laurence Olivier as the husband engaged in a battle of wits with Michael Caine as his wife's young lover.

Kenneth Branagh's elegant new version with a darkly menacing screenplay by Harold Pinter, which shakes the cobwebs off what is by today's standards a somewhat creaky thriller, sets the film firmly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – with liberal use of strong language, I should warn you. This version has Caine now playing the older man, with Jude Law (who also recreated *Alfie*, not so successfully) as the young actor who has stolen the wife's heart. The deadly verbal jousting between experienced, sophisticated age and youthful, cocky beauty is alternately funny and creepy, with Law just about managing to hold his own against Caine, who is at the top of his form.

Another veteran who can still cut the mustard is Gerard Depardieu. In ***The Singer*** he plays an ageing crooner of old style French ballads, still doing the rounds of provincial dance halls. He falls for a young estate agent (Cécile de France), who after one night of passion rejects his further advances. The tentative relationship between them is beautifully done and Depardieu is touchingly vulnerable as a man coming to accept that his heyday both as a lover and an entertainer is gone. He also sings well - not too well but *pas mal*.

Films don't get a very long run these days, but ***And When Did You Last See Your Father*** is still around and well worth catching. It's a well acted and very English story about a father (Jim Broadbent) and his son, played as an adult by Colin Firth and as a teenager by Matthew Beard in the many flashbacks which give us the roots of their often painful but ultimately deeply loving relationship. Broadbent in particular gives a brilliant performance as a man who's both delightful and infuriating.