



AEA DIGEST

Association for Education and Ageing

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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jo Walker

Another conference and AGM are upon us! The opportunity to work with our friends at Birkbeck University of London was too good to pass up, so our annual conference this year will be 22nd-23rd March in Bloomsbury, under the title 'Learning for the Lifecourse'. You will have had details from Carol and we hope to see you there, especially on the Friday 23rd March, when the programme is particularly about later life learning.

Friday's programme will also include the Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture, which is to be given this year by Dr Eric Midwinter. Eric is currently chair of the Centre for Policy on Ageing, but has been prominently involved in older adults' learning for many years, not least through the birth of the University of the Third Age in this country. He remembers Frank particularly through AEA and the Beth Johnson Foundation in Staffordshire.

If you are a member planning to come to Eric's lecture and the AGM that follows, please arrive at 2.45pm – further details are in your AGM invitation. If you would like to come to the whole day, please register with Birkbeck, who are handling the administration for us. Contact them at lifecourse@bbk.ac.uk or use the form that Carol has distributed.

Publication of last year's memorial lecture by Professor Brian Groombridge is underway, through NIACE, for whose support we are grateful. This will be available in May; it will be launched at an AEA session within a conference in Glasgow to celebrate 20 years of later life learning at Strathclyde University. 'A Legacy of Learning' will be held 9th-11th May at the Senior Studies Institute. If you would like further details of the conference, contact them at www.ell.strath.ac.uk/legacy/index.htm

Our 'capacity building' project is well underway, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. Our consultant has contacted a representative range of people who have an interest in AEA and the Executive Committee has had a recent away day to consider the views collected so far and to agree the foundations of strategic and business plans. When these plans are finalised we will be in a good position to approach funding agencies for support for development work of various kinds.

I look forward to seeing you at the conference / lecture / AGM and to being in touch through another year.

*In February, **Brian Groombridge** went to Finland with an Educational Centres Association team to take part in the EU-funded 'Teddy Bear' project, bringing older people together with some very much younger. He tells us here about his **Vammala Experience***

The temperature was about minus 30°C. The snow was deep and crisp and even, and several of us enjoyed standing or sitting on kick sledges and sliding down the slope outside the village hall. Pushing back up was harder work, so I stopped and talked to a member of the welcome party with a lovely smile. 'Could you tell me what this sledge is called in Finnish?', I asked. She replied: 'Yes. It's called a Potkukelkka. Shall I write it down for you?'. She wrote the word in my notebook and we exchanged names: 'I'm Brian' and 'I'm Enni'.

Enni was ten years old. She was there with two older brothers, several other children, many older people, some very old, and a craft tutor, all from Lantula, a village of 200 inhabitants. We were adult educators and social workers from

the nearby town of Vammala (south west Finland), Italy, Slovenia, and the UK. The local people invited us into their community centre, the former village school, warmed by traditional wood burning stoves. Soon we were making Valentine cards out of raw flax and hand made card while, using their English, Enni and the other children acted as interpreters.

Back in the education centre in Vammala, the crafts being practiced were more varied and skilful but still using simple materials: basket making, quilting, Viking jewellery making, felting and others, but again the generations were well mixed. This was an international episode in the intergenerational projects developed in the four countries over the last three years. Funded by the EU's Grundtvig Programme, administered here by the British Council, supporting the adult learning work of the Educational Centres Association. Each country's project has a different focus - rural crafts in Vammala; reminiscence work in Herefordshire, Stoke and Wedgwood College; mobile phone and computer use in Italy (even working with people with incipient dementia). They are learning from each other, acquiring a better understanding of what kinds of joint educational activity can be successfully undertaken by people of very different ages. Slovenian colleagues are now planning a project in the same co-operative spirit.

The Vammala college provides a wide range of adult education courses, particularly strong in music and drama, computer training for older people, and Open University courses (in alliance with the universities of Tampere and Turku). With help from a professional interpreter, we also took part in a one-

day conference for craft tutors. It was opened by the college principal, a musician who continued the rural craft theme by calling the meeting to order with a goat's horn. The programme was varied: an ebullient woman with a lifetime's experience as a milliner reminisced; an academic from the University of Turku Centre for Future Research, explained the need to plan education with changing demography, skills requirements and other major factors in mind.

I am not directly part of the Teddy Bear team, so it was a privilege for me to be at this event. I went as the ECA's President Emeritus; the project was

adopted in my term of office, and I shall follow it up wearing several hats, including my special interest in Future Studies. In Helsinki I took the opportunity to renew contact with Finnish friends and colleagues whose work includes linking the arts, health and education in later life (the theme of my Frank Glendenning Memorial for the AEA last summer). ECA colleagues led by Chairman Bernard Godding working with the other three Teddy Bear teams ended the week by planning the next phase of the work. I came home with a card thanking me in English for my visit, made by Enni and one of her senior assistants.



Brian Groombridge and young Enni enjoy an intergenerational discussion at Vammala

Eleven years ago at the age of 50 William Tyler downshifted in his career from being a College Principal and became a freelance worker in the field of Adult Education. He writes here about his reasons and the pros and cons of Downshifting.

I remember at the time some of my colleagues envied me, others thought me misguided.

Why did I downshift? Overwhelmingly for health reasons. I felt after over 20 years in senior positions that I had had enough. My health wasn't good and when the college doctor began to question the wisdom of soldiering on to 65 or even 60, I knew I had to take notice.

Of course, there were other reasons too, the most important being how disillusioned I had become with the way that Government was treating Adult Education. I felt desperately out of sympathy with the prevailing emphasis on the utilitarian argument for education. This was a long way from my own beliefs and experience of education in general and of adult education in particular.

After a lot of soul searching the answer was obvious - Get out. Thus, having offered my resignation in the June, I was out of the college by the end of that December. First lesson of freelance life was soon learned. No one owes you anything, and what you have been and achieved counts for nothing. A great adult educator, for whom I worked in the early part of my career, was prone to say that when teaching or researching he was doing 'proper work' as opposed to the

work he did as a Principal. I could empathise with that.

I began on the 1st January with little in the way of work but with a great weight lifted from my shoulders. I began to network like frenzy. The work began to come in, some reasonably paid and some definitely not. But at this stage I simply wanted people to know that I was on the market. I even agreed to appear as the 'Tea at Three' guest on the local BBC Radio Station.

My wife and I have survived, both financially and as a couple. The last is no joking matter as having the husband at home everyday can place a strain on any marriage. We've both enjoyed the last ten years, and reckon now that our lives would have been much less interesting had I continued in post.

In terms of work I would have missed out on meeting such a wonderful assortment of people and doing a wide selection of tasks, ranging from being a professional witness for an adult student suing her university to designing a folklore poster for The Foreign Office and doing a consultancy on an academic library.

My advice to others is now simple – Don't let your life drift away. Make a decision in your late forties or early fifties on how you want to spend the next part of your life. You may choose to keep working in your chosen field, you may opt for a second and totally different career, you may choose to retire early or like me, you may choose to downshift within your chosen profession. It doesn't matter what you choose. It is the choosing which is the important thing.

More detail on our **Annual Conference**, which is taking place this week in conjunction with Birkbeck College in London, where the events are being held on Thursday 22nd and Friday 23rd.

Day One is on the theme of **PART-TIME STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: MOTIVATION AND BENEFITS**. This event is free, courtesy of Birkbeck

Day Two is the actual AEA Conference and the theme is **EXPANDING HORIZONS IN LEARNING FOR OLDER PEOPLE**. There is a charge for this of £35 for non members or £20 for AEA Members and Unwaged. Lunch, tea and coffee are free on both days. Registration is 9.30 am for 10.00 am start on both days.

Also on Day Two is the Frank Glendenning lecture at 3.00 pm (see From the Chair page 1), followed by the AGM at 4.45 pm. These last two events are free to members.

If you are planning to attend the conference, you will of course have booked your place by now. But if you haven't and would still like to attend, it might be worth e-mailing Ms E. Kitteringham at Birkbeck lifecourse@bbk.ac.uk to see if there is still a place available.

If you are only planning to come to the Frank Glendenning lecture and the AGM, please let Carol Allen, AEA Secretary know for catering purposes before Wednesday 21st March. Otherwise you might not get your cup of tea!

Contact details for Carol are:

e-mail: Carol@carolallen.wanadoo.co.uk or 020 7385 4641

And if you don't manage to make any of the events, fear not. There will be a full report in the next edition of AEA Digest.

AEA Secretary and Digest Editor Carol Allen not only writes about films for this publication and others, she also nurses an ambition to make them! And at the beginning of this year, she achieved that ambition in a small way by entering the BAFTA Orange One Minute Film Competition "60 Seconds of Fame". It was, as she tells us here, a very educational experience.

Meeting director Thomas Vinterberg, a member of the Dogme "back to basics" film movement at the London Film Festival in the late nineties brought home to me to the impact digital technology was about to have in terms of film making becoming accessible to anyone who wanted to have a go. During our interview Vinterberg showed me the digital camera on which he had shot his film "Festen". It was small

enough and light enough to fit into my handbag. "Crikey", I thought. "With a digital camera and the Dogme philosophy - using only available lights, props etc - anyone can make a film now. Even me."

It has however taken me a while to get it together. Three years ago I scraped together the money to buy a decent quality digital camera and shot a goodly amount of footage of my friends for the practice films I intended to make - mini DV tapes are really cheap now. I tried to get myself onto a video editing course but they were either too expensive or the subsidized ones were aimed at young people working for an NVQ qualification ,not for older people just wanting to learn (have we not been here before?), and often only available to the unemployed or those living in a

particular local authority area. I was even refused entry to one on the grounds that I knew too much! So I bought myself an editing programme on the internet but somehow I never found the time to learn how to use it. Until two days before Christmas, when my attention was drawn to the "60 Seconds of Fame" short film competition. The closing date was 4th January, not too late for me to get my act together, if I really concentrated.

The object of the competition was to encourage anyone with a good idea for a one minute film based on the chosen theme "Celebrate" to have a go. With the world closed down between Christmas and New Year, I needed an idea that I could shoot by myself in my own living room. And I got it one evening, when listening to the Beatles "Rubber Soul" album and the track "In My Life":

"With lovers and friends I still can recall
Some are dead and some are living
In my life I've loved them all"

I had my story, "Celebrating Friends", I had all that footage and several carrier bags full of old photographs going back over the years. Unfortunately I couldn't use the song that had inspired me as my soundtrack - no copyright material was allowed - but there was a library of music tracks, which one could download and use for free for the purposes of the competition only and it wasn't difficult to find something suitable.

As this was the story of me and my friends, in order to create a coherent visual narrative I was going to have to video myself - and anyway, I had no other actress available. After doing a

dry run in my living room, balancing the camera on various bits of furniture, I realised I was going to have to buy myself a tripod as a Christmas present. I then made a list of the shots I needed to link my existing material together. Videoing oneself is an interesting experience - setting up the shot, flicking the LCD screen over so you can see what you're shooting, getting into position and then realising you're going to have to do it all over again because you've chopped the top of your own head off! But by the end of the afternoon, I had my footage "in the can". Next stage was to select the shots I needed from my existing tapes, put these plus the results of my afternoon's shoot into the editing programme, along with the still photographs, which I could scan into the computer. Learning to use the editing programme was to put it mildly a challenge, one which at first I thought I would never master. But once I'd learned the basic principles of how to arrange the shots in order and trim them fore and aft with the help of a near impenetrable handbook and a charming young man on the telephone helpline, it went reasonably swimmingly though, as my first cut though came out at 1'45", a whole chunk had to come out of the middle. I was then reduced to cutting fractions of seconds out of the remaining shots and dumping a couple in order to get it down to 59". Putting a title on proved to be surprisingly easy, as did adding the music track and learning how to fade in and out at the beginning and end of my little movie. The final stage was to "export" or save my video in one of formats acceptable to the organizers and "upload" it onto the site, which was another challenge.

No I didn't get into the finals but neither did several other films, which were better than mine. Competition judging is a very subjective thing after all. But I learned a lot from the experience and now have several other projects in my head, which I'm hoping to turn into movies. It's also of course a skill that I

and indeed anybody could also put to a variety of educational purposes, such as living and local history, storytelling and other projects. Or equally to make a memento of a holiday or an important family occasion.



*As well as film making, another of your editor's educational pursuits is taking part in a weekly jazz dance class – good exercise, fun and intergenerational. The class ranges in age from 14 to mid 60s. However for those who don't fancy measuring their less than flexible bodies against the young, a new project **Let's Dance** in Islington, London, could perhaps be a more enticing option.*

Let's Dance was launched to the press with a tea dance led by five piece band Ray Fernandes Sound, the in-house tea dance group from The Ritz Hotel, Piccadilly. That was however a one off event! The project is a new series of nine, low-cost, dance classes aimed at the over-55 age group and supported by Age Concern Islington, The London Borough of Islington and Sadler's Wells and has funding up until March next year.

The classes take place across different venues in Islington and vary in style from Ballet, Gentle Movement, Egyptian Dance, Asian Dance, Zumba – a salsa based dance style, Samba to Lindy Hop and cost a very reasonable £1 for an hour.

Project organiser Sheila Dickie describes them as “gentle classes, designed to entice the over-55s into becoming more active, having fun and meeting other people”. They are run by professional teachers experienced in working with older dancers, and are for anyone over 55 - no experience necessary. They are proving to be very popular and some of the students who have signed up are well into their eighties.

Which is great if you live in the borough of Islington but unfortunately the classes are only open to Islington residents. However, as Sheila points out, this excellent project could be replicated

anywhere in the UK and is a fun and exciting way to improve fitness levels in an older age-group. So if you'd like to start a project like this in your own area, Sheila, who is an enthusiast in her subject, has very kindly offered her advice. You can contact her by e-mail on shedickie@btinternet.com or by telephone on 07970 670 809. And if you live in Islington and would like to take part just ring Age Concern Islington on 020 7281 6018 and ask them to send you a brochure with details of the classes.

Another positive use of one's leisure time is of course reading a good book. Alex Withnall has been reading "No! I Don't Want to Join a Book Club" by Virginia Ironside, which is of particular interest to older readers.

Virginia Ironside is already well known as a journalist and agony aunt and indeed, as the author of what is widely acknowledged as one of the best books on bereavement ever written. (*You'll get over it. The rage of bereavement. Virginia Ironside – 1996 Penguin Books*) Now as she herself hits her sixties, she has given us the diaries of her alter ego retired teacher Marie Sharp. Long divorced, Marie lives in Shepherd's Bush ("up and coming" but never actually up and come') and has to cope on a day-to-day basis with her flighty French lodger, her gorgeous young male Polish cleaner, various bizarre neighbours and her assorted friends as well as her only son Jack and his girl friend Chrissie who are domiciled in Brixton. On top of that, there are invitations to dreadful dinner parties, mysterious spam emails, all those health concerns ('For the last week, I have been convinced I have throat cancer') and

non-stop worries about just about everything and everybody. But there are exciting times ahead as Marie celebrates her sixtieth birthday; she's already done sex, drugs and rock'n'roll and now she wants to 'start doing old things, not young things'.

So we experience Marie's delight as she collects her pension, acquires her Freedom Pass and becomes eligible for free prescriptions. But she is resolutely NOT going to learn Italian, do an Open University course or join the University of the Third Age ('That's what Marion does. She's forever doing nodules or whatever they are'). She doesn't want to learn about anything ever again ('learning is for young people. Done young') and is particularly scornful of 'those oldies who spend their lives bicycling across Mongolia at eighty and paragliding at ninety'. And as for joining a book club as one of her well-meaning friends suggests – no thanks!

And yet, as we follow Marie's progress into 'old' through her diary entries, it's impossible not to be aware of the new learning journey she's undertaking. Firstly, there's the birth of her grandson Gene. Initially, she's unmoved but as he grows and she takes on some babysitting duties, she finds herself completely overwhelmed with a new kind of love for this little creature ('I'm like a lovelorn teenager pining for Cary Grant'). Secondly, she faces the rapid decline and death of her gay chum Hughie; yet even as she experiences terrible sadness, she comes to understand that grief is a kind of blessing '...only another side of loving, one part of what it is to be human.' And then thirdly and most unexpectedly, Marie realises that even though she's resolved to embrace

celibacy, she's still capable of fancying her first love, the indomitable Archie who's now a widower but who, we learn, did actually reciprocate her feelings all those years ago. As we leave her, Marie has a date looming and is finding 'the whole thing utterly thrilling and goofy-making, and tender and lovely all at the same time...'. Not at all what she expected 'old' to be!

I read this book at a sitting during a particularly tedious train journey and certainly got some strange looks from fellow passengers as I was helpless with

laughter one minute and reaching for a tissue the next. It may have been described in the blurb as 'what happens when grumpy old women meet Bridget Jones' but Marie's diary is something more than that. For me, it's a joyous celebration of later life and the triumph of love in all its forms. Highly recommended!

"No! I don't want to join a bookclub"
by Virginia Ironside is published by .
Penguin/Figtree at £12.99
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The Association for Education and Ageing

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

And a final nag from your editor/secretary, before we look at some upcoming movies. Some of you have still not yet got around to paying your subscriptions. My address for your cheques is in the box above!

Subscription rates are:

Individual membership	£20
Unwaged	£10
Corporate membership	£60
("With journal" subscriptions have for the time being been suspended)	

On Screen

Carol Allen

Proving the point that stories about older people can also be of interest to the young is ***“Away From Her”***, a beautiful and very moving film about Fiona and Grant, a couple in their sixties (Julie Christie and Gordon Pinsent). Early in the film we and Grant become aware that Fiona is developing Alzheimer’s. Set in Canada, the film is written and directed by actress Sarah Polley aged 28 and it’s interesting and heartening that she should choose this subject for her first feature and handle it with such maturity and understanding. Christie is still very beautiful, even with a few lines and grey hairs and she gives a lovely performance of a woman of great grace and charm, who is strong and self aware. She is conscious of what is happening to her and it is she who chooses, when the time comes, to go into the care home she and her husband have chosen. Soon she can no longer recognise him but she is still such a loving woman, that she transfers her caring to someone who also needs it, wheelchair bound fellow resident Aubrey (Michael Murphy). The story is told through Grant’s eyes, and you really feel for him, as he is excluded from Fiona’s world. It is primarily a love story about a 44 year old marriage and how it survives this tragedy. It also doesn’t avoid the issue of older people’s need to still express their love physically, which is very delicately handled. Good supporting performances from Murphy as Aubrey and Olympia Dukakis as his strong wife. And not only did I find it an emotionally gripping and uplifting experience, so did my 27 year old goddaughter.

The German film ***“The Lives of Others”*** well deserves its best foreign film Oscar.

It presents a chilling picture of life in East Germany in the eighties, where the state demands total control of the lives of its citizens and the effect that has on them. Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe) a devoted officer of the State Security or Stasi is not only very good at his job but he sincerely believes it is essential for the welfare of the people. He is assigned to the 24 hour surveillance of leading playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and installed in the loft above his victim’s apartment with tape recorders noting everything that happens downstairs. But when he discovers the operation is for the personal gain of a senior party official, Wiesler’s faith in what has been his life’s work is seriously shaken. Superb acting in what is a complex, engrossing and tense drama.

Michael Apted’s ***“Amazing Grace”*** is about MP William Wilberforce, who devoted his life to the campaign to abolish slavery. A handsome looking costume drama it is disappointingly a little confused in its telling but Benedict Cumberbatch is excellent as Wilberforce’s friend William Pitt the younger, who became Prime Minister at the mind boggling age of 24, Ioan Gruffud fills the hero’s shoes well from youth to middle age and it is the story of an Englishman of whose achievement we can be proud.

Based on a W. Somerset Maugham novel, ***“The Painted Veil”*** perfectly evokes the moral and social mores of the twenties. Kitty (Naomi Watts) is taken by her cold and unapproachable doctor husband (Edward Norton) to a remote part of China as punishment for her affair with another man. Eventually the work they both do there causes her finally to fall in love with him. Beautifully acted with the ring of truth and very moving.