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AEA DIGEST

Issue no 47
Summer 2016



**Attentive listeners at AEA's International Conference
Learning in Later Life: Theory, Policy and Practice,
which was held at the Open University in April this year
Photo: Val Bissland**

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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jonathan Hughes

I hope you will find a great deal of interest in this edition of the AEA Digest. Thank you, Carol, for putting together another excellent edition. Most AEA Digests now go out as electronic copies. While this is sensible in terms of print costs, the disadvantage is that it means that ‘hard copies’ can’t be left lying around for other people to pick up. Perhaps you could get round this by circulating your Digest to people you think might be interested in joining AEA.

Carol’s request for chair’s notes always makes me look back and see what has been happening as far as AEA is concerned since my last set of notes. I was enjoying the long lasting daffodils back in March. These have all been ‘deadheaded’ now – and the tulips and almost all finished. While there have been changes in the garden, some of the concerns I raised in previous notes continue. In particular there is the need to identify new activities and partnerships to provide a continuing *raison d’être*. Sometimes this can seem like quite an uphill struggle. There is certainly no dearth of stories in the media about the implications of an ageing society. I’m also partway through a Future Learn MOOC called *Challenging Wealth and Inequality* which focuses a great deal on pensions. I’m only part way through and am looking forward to the discussion of intergenerational inequality as far as housing is concerned. Whether the stories are related to pensions, housing (or health) there is always the need for learning, and yet this need is almost always overlooked. This very

predictable tendency sometimes makes it feel that AEA is ploughing a rather lonely furrow.

I think this is what struck me most about the conference that we organised at the Open University in Milton Keynes in April. The combination of the three keynotes from Professor Chris Phillipson, Professor Franz Kolland and Dr Jane Watts, who are all AEA members combined with the 22 papers in the parallel sessions made for a stimulating and enjoyable conference. The three keynotes really linked well together.



Professor Franz Kolland with Jonathan Hughes. Photo: Val Bissland

Franz Kolland focused on the issue of identity. He noted that identities are no longer prescribed for us but are something we have to work on throughout our lives. In the process, “Lifelong learning is an important engine within identity work and reflexive activities.” This raised issues of risk, which were picked up by Chris Phillipson, who highlighted that those transitions from work to retirement are now far more diverse, especially given the rise of what has been described as precarious jobs. Chris suggested that retirement may no longer be a major stage in the life course and that lifelong learning and training has to respond to these developments.



Professor Chris Phillipson.

Photo: Val Bissland

Jane Watts developed this theme and noted that “there are huge policy inconsistencies. For example, much of the current policy focuses on keeping people in work for longer, but funding for vocational learning for older people has been withdrawn. Informal learning for older people in the fourth age is praised while funding for community learning decreases.”

The 22 parallel papers covered a wide range of topics, including drama, dementia care and wearable technologies. This range is itself a reminder of the scope of ‘educational gerontology’. The book of abstracts for the conference is now on the AEA website so you can explore this range for yourself.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/ufiles/Post%20Conference%20Online%20Publication.pdf>

There will also be a special edition of the International Journal which will draw on the conference papers.

However, as far as I am concerned the conference was important because it was far more than the sum of its parts. It enabled people who share an interest in the importance of later life learning in all its guises to come together. Creating such a space enabled us to remind ourselves both that later life learning is an important area and that the work of AEA in reminding people of this importance must continue.

One of the reasons for the conference was as a commitment to the ForAge project to hold an international dissemination conference. It was good to have met this commitment, as the ForAge project has been a central aspect of AEA for a number of years. It was also good to create an opportunity to reflect on the lessons we have learned from our involvement with this and other projects. The one disappointment was that none of the partners AEA had worked with in ForAge were able to attend the conference, although many said they would attend future conferences and sent their good wishes.

As I have already said, it is vital that AEA locates new partners and build up its activities and membership. To this end we have set up a small subgroup, the Projects, Membership and Funding (PMF) Sub-group to identify AEA’s medium term priorities and our capacity to meet these priorities. Currently this group includes AEA Executive Committee members, Sardar Ahmad, Carlie Newman, Keith Percy, Josie Tetley, Jane Watts and me. However, we would welcome involvement from the wider membership, so if you are interested in joining this group, please do get in touch with me. We are also looking to co-opt members to the executive committee. If you think you

might be interested please do get in touch by email (jonathanhughes3333@gmail.com) or phone (01604 376109 or 07410411696)

In my last set of notes, I mentioned a seminar at the OU in London (Hawley Crescent Camden), *Conversation into Action: Democracy, rights, participation, and learning in later life: Housing for all?* This was an interactive workshop, which aimed to further develop a proposed course for intergenerational learning as a possible focus of activity for AEA in the future. It took place on Wednesday, April 20th 2016. A second workshop took place on 22 June 2016. For details of future workshops please contact:

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The free one day dissemination event on AEA's Grundtvig-funded *Wellbeing and Learning in Later Life* project which is being organised by Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Anne Jamieson will now be held at the Open University's London offices in Camden in October. The date will be confirmed shortly. There will also be a one day conference on *Memory and Learning in Later Life*, arising out of AEA's participation in a Grundtvig-funded project of the same title, organised by Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Val Bissland. This will probably be at Strathclyde University to coincide with Brain Week in March 2017.

I hope to see you at all or some of these events. I am sure that attending them

will help show you that AEA continues to have an important part to play in making the case for the value of learning across the life course, and particularly in later life.

*So what were the objectives and achievements of our **Learning in Later Life - Theory, Policy and Practice** conference and how did those who attended respond to the event? Further analysis here from **Keith Percy**.*

AEA decided to organise an international conference in the interests of stimulating new thinking about theory, policy and practice on learning in later life. It had other pragmatic goals: i) to raise the association's profile ii) to secure new members iii) to generate income and iv) to honour a promise to the ForAge Project, which formally ended in mid-2015, to organise an international conference which would assist in ForAge dissemination. The AEA conference organised at the Open University campus in Milton Keynes, April 5- 7 2016, achieved all of these goals.



Photo: Val Bissland

The three day conference (beginning at lunch-time on the first day and ending at lunch-time on the third day) met under the title *Learning in Later Life: Theory,*

Policy and Practice. 41 people attended, including those who attended for only part of the conference. 25 were already or became current members of AEA. The majority of participants were British but participants from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Poland, and Portugal were also present. There were three keynote speakers, two other presenters in plenary sessions and eighteen presentations given in parallel sessions throughout the conference. Papers based on a number of these presentations have been offered for publication in AEA's *International Journal of Education and Ageing* and it may be that there will be sufficient of the papers accepted by the editors for there to be a full conference issue of the Journal later in 2016. 23 of participants in the conference were retired or current members of universities; 5 identified themselves as students.

In post-conference email discussion and correspondence and in the responses to the evaluation form, which was distributed to participants a few days after the Conference, comments on almost all aspects of the Conference were positive. "A magnificent experience", one participant described it; "all excellent" commented another; "it was definitely useful and a joy to attend the conference" wrote a third.

There was a great deal of common ground among participants on why they attended the Conference. It was to hear about new ideas and to meet new people. Participants noted that their expectations of the Conference included "some interesting new perspectives on the topic" and "stimulating ideas and new thinking about learning in later life". Their expectations had been met. The Conference programme and its organisation worked well, we were told.

One participant wrote that "it was not only the plenary sessions which provided stimulating ideas; there were one or two thought-provoking theoretical papers in parallel sessions". Another observed "I felt I got some new ideas on the topic. Thank you for the organisation. It was great that... there were sessions ... [with an] opportunity to choose topics that interested me". "Excellent range of presentations" observed one participant. The variety of methods of presentation and the 'practical' or practice-based presentations in some parallel sessions were mentioned with approval. In terms of meeting new people, one participant commented that s/he "met some really interesting people and consequently extended my network. It was great to hear about the work in different countries". Similarly, another felt that "it was great to meet new people and hopefully we can continue these discussions in future in one way or another." Participants found friendliness and informality in conference arrangements and felt welcome and involved, appreciating the opportunity to network with everyone including keynote speakers and presenters around the sessions.



**A chance to catch up with existing colleagues too. Keith Percy and Jo Walker.
Photo: Val Bissland**

Of course, negative but useful comments were made. Not everybody liked having to choose between simultaneous parallel sessions, if they wished to attend both. The timing of the conference was criticised – April is “a very busy time in the academic year”. Although (or perhaps because) international participants were present and making important contributions, the comment was made that it would have been valuable if there has been more of them. A post-conference publication, which contains contributions from all of the speakers in the keynote and parallel paper sessions of the event, is now available on our website and will be distributed to all participants. <http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/ufiles/Post%20Conference%20Online%20Publication.pdf> It contains abstracts, power-point presentations and full papers from many of the speakers and one or two of those three from the remainder.

A viewpoint from one of our plenary speakers. Jane Watts delivered a presentation on 'Learning about transitions - a personal view'



I was working with Hannah McDowall, who chairs the Age Action Alliance group known as *Valuing the (social and economic) contribution of older people*. Hannah is currently working with the Centre for Policy on Ageing and others to deliver a programme funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation on *Transitions in Later Life Strand*. The project uses a story-based approach to exploring later life transitions in order to support local authorities and others to improve their strategic approach to ageing populations. We used this story-based approach to explore transitions in the life course and how education/learning might support individuals through life's changes.

Transitions are interesting - as are all moments of change. Later-life transitions reflect our learned resilience and affect our health and well-being; transitions offer the opportunity to bring generations together and are potential sites for learning. We can learn from past changes about how to face future ones. The session encouraged people to explore life phases mainly in relation to work and retirement and the role of education in its broadest sense, including ways to bring younger and older people together to bring about change.

The life course is changing; we live longer and increasingly do paid work until later. There are lots of positives about the ageing society but individuals, their employers and communities are not yet prepared or aware and have not made the necessary adaptations. The session took the form of a participatory workshop using memory and autobiographical story to understand transitions and learning. Participants selected key transition points in their

own life story and discussed them in pairs. We then looked at these transition points from the point of view of learning and ageing. This included discussing learning in life's phases and stages and also the need for multi-generational inclusion.

We told our stories about moments of great change in our lives - a change that caused a big impact. We considered that change in various ways. What was good about it? What was difficult about it? What did we learn? Transition points we have faced, transition points we are looking forward to and/or which transition points we are dreading. What had we taken from previous transitions and how can that help with future ones? What was very noticeable was a gender difference in the identification of transitions of most impact in the life story.

We were left considering whether there might be formal/structured learning experiences to help to ensure people are better equipped for future (later life) transitions.

The session led me to think a lot more about how our life course can be reflected in so many different narrative lines – the places where we have lived, the identities we have had, the buildings we have worked in and so on. These help me to think more about women's life courses and how others' decisions may also influence our transitions.

For your editor Carol Allen the conference was a first – the first time she has ever delivered a presentation at an AEA event.

My contribution came under the heading of the “practice” part of the conference timetable. A report from the “coalface” of teaching older learners - in my case drama. Gave me a golden chance to trumpet the achievements of my students, some of which regular readers of the digest will have read about in previous issues.



**Carol Allen with some of her actors strutting their stuff in the background.
Photo: Val Bissland**

My particular thanks to Val Bissland, who not only took some brilliant photographs of the conference but also helped me out big time, when some of my illustrative material, as in a video about a film I made with the class, had a disagreement with the conference technology.

I was one of those participants, who was only able to attend for the middle day, which benefited from an exceptionally full programme of events. Following on from Chris Phillipson's presentation was Carlie Newman's contribution in the “practice” department, talking about the educational value of the trips abroad she has organised for older people through her TOFF (Trips for Older Females and Fellas) organisation. And rather than using pics and powerpoint, Carlie brought with her two of her veteran travellers, who gave us first hand

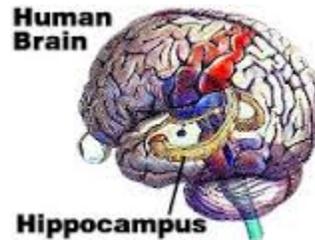
information about the many fascinating things they had learned. Particularly interesting were the memories of one of them about her learning experience with regard to recent political history in Vietnam.



Carlie Newman and “a couple of TOFFs”
Photo: Val Bissland

In the afternoon I much enjoyed Jane Watt’s presentation on life transitions and how to handle them (see page 7) but like some of the participants Keith mentioned above, I had to make some difficult choices when it came to the parallel sessions. I have to confess I am more interested in the practical side of older learning as opposed to the theoretical, so I chose Emma-Reeta Koivunen’s very useful presentation on how new technology can help older people with sight and hearing problems – I have a student with severe hearing loss, who has difficulty in managing her hearing aids – and Jim Soulsby’s lively and very practical advice on educating older citizens about the dangers of scams and how to avoid them – thus missing what I’m sure must have been a very interesting session by Hilary Farnsworth on the Ransackers educational adventure. Choices, choices – it’s what life is all about!

Another session I was sorry to miss was Jo Walker’s on spiritual learning in later life. Sorry Jo, but it clashed with Val Bissland’s equally riveting piece on the importance of the hippocampus – that’s the bit in your brain responsible for storing new memories. It was fascinating stuff and with my growing interest in the science of the brain and the effects on it of ageing (see page 14), that was one I couldn’t miss.

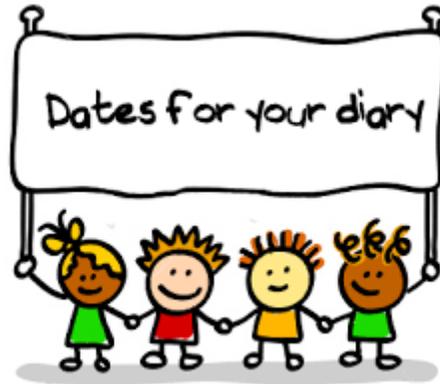


Where your hippocampus is located in your brain. Treasure it!

Congratulations to all those involved with organising such a successful conference with such a variety of interesting presentations. To catch up with those you may have missed, the comprehensive post conference publication of all those presentations edited by Keith Percy is now available on our website and will be distributed to all participants.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/ufiles/Post%20Conference%20Online%20Publication.pdf>

After all that, you must be thirsting to attend the next AEA happening! For details of some of our forthcoming events, turn to the next page



Future events planned for 2016 and 2017 include:

September 14 2016

AEA's Annual General Meeting will be held in the afternoon at the Manchester Metropolitan University. The annual Frank Glendenning Memorial lecture, open to all and free of charge, will follow.

October 2016

A one day dissemination event organised by Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Anne Jamieson on AEA's Grundtvig-funded **Well-being and Learning in Later Life** project at the Open University, Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, NW1 8NP. No fee. Contact k.percy@hotmail.com

March 15 2017

A one day conference on **Memory and Learning in Later Life**, co-hosted by AEA and the Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Strathclyde will take place in Glasgow as part of Brain Awareness Week. It will feature outcomes from AEA's recent participation in a Grundtvig-funded project of the same title. Organisers will be Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Val Bissland. No fee.

Details of these and other events as they become available will be posted on the events page of our website <http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/aea-events.html>

OBITUARY

*It was with great sadness that AEA learned of the recent death of **Professor John Benyon** on May 19th 2016, aged 65 years, at his home in Leicester. He had been diagnosed with a terminal illness less than a year before. **Keith Percy** pays tribute to a valued friend and colleague.*



John, a distinguished academic and former Director of Lifelong Learning at Leicester University, was a longstanding member and supporter of AEA. He assisted in the foundation of the *International Journal of Education and Ageing* and was Chair of its original International Advisory Board. He was, with Jim Soulsby, responsible for bringing into existence the EU- funded Forage Project of which Leicester University was the lead partner and in which AEA became a key partner,

developing and maintaining the database of knowledge about later-life learning.

John came from Southampton, studied and taught politics at Warwick University, was active in political protest and became a Labour councillor. He joined Leicester University in 1981 as a lecturer in politics. He also taught classes in Leicester's Department of Adult Education. Stimulated by the phenomenon of urban riots in a number of British cities in the early 1980s, he moved from the politics of local government to produce important books such as *The Police Powers, Procedures and Proprieties*, and *The Roots of Urban Unrest*. In 1987 John established the Centre for the Study of Public Order at Leicester University, which became the Scarman Centre in 1997 and subsequently the Department of Criminology. He was an early pioneer of distance learning at Leicester.

John moved to become the first Head of the Institute of Lifelong Learning at Leicester in 2000. His interest in AEA naturally followed. John became a participant in AEA's annual conferences and was a welcome, outgoing, kind, friendly and perceptive presence in them. In 2008 he hosted the annual AEA conference and Glendenning lecture at Leicester. In the conference John spoke about Leicester's contributions to lifelong learning, in particular later-life learning. He had secured a grant from the ESRC for a Research Seminar Series on *Older People, Learning and Society* and between 2007 and 2009 he organised at Leicester seven seminars with about 25

research and discussion papers on theory, practice and policy in later-life learning. At least seven of the speakers were members of AEA. In 2010 the Leicester seminars provided all the papers for the second issue of the AEA's new *International Journal of Education and Ageing*.

John stepped down as Director of Lifelong Learning in 2008 and retired from his full-time position in 2011. He remained with the Institute in part-time roles until his final retirement in 2015. It

was during this latter period that John managed and led the 16 (originally) international partners of the Forage project (2012 -2015). In mid-2015, even after he had been told about his terminal illness, John completed the Project's final report and sorted out the labyrinthine complexities of partner final payments from Brussels. Members of the ForAge Project across Europe and members of AEA will remember John fondly.

OTHER NEWS

*Val Bissland has drawn our attention to an example of lifelong learning and volunteering feeding into real life improvements in the community. The writer of this piece is **Robert Conway**, a senior student at Strathclyde University's Centre for Lifelong Learning. Robert is a volunteer for **CARROT** (Cambuslang and Rutherglen Review On Tape), where he is broadcasting local news for blind people in his area.*



"Good morning everyone. Robert Conway here. I hope you're coping with our cold and blustery Scottish winter. It's the birthday today of our bard Rabbie Burns, with many a lively Burns Supper being celebrated worldwide. My favourite Burns rhyme is *A Man's a Man for A' That*, but don't worry, I'm not going to burst into song! Instead, here are the news headlines."

This is the chatty style I adopt to introduce the listener to the talking newspaper for visually impaired people in my locality. It was established over 30 years ago and then used tapes or CDs. Now it uses memory sticks played on special 'radios' supplied free, thanks to great support from local businesses and people.

About five years ago my local bowling companion mentioned 'CARROT' was looking for new volunteers. I came along and was thrown in at the deep end. Although I was used to public speaking I felt a bit nervous at first. However, soon I was looking forward to recording, and

bringing my personality to the delivery of local news, letters to the editor, quizzes, sports and even the 'stars'. I just imagine I'm speaking to one person.

Now as team leader and mentor to new readers, I select articles from *The Rutherglen Reformer*. We have four teams, two technicians and five admin assistants, who all pull together to make people smile, laugh and hear the week's local events. We receive many letters of appreciation. One listener said it was the highlight of her week, especially items on times past, which brought back such happy memories.

When we finish an edition I feel a great sense of satisfaction and this has turned out to be the most satisfying voluntary

work I have ever undertaken. My friends think this work is somewhat glamorous. But I don't get carried away!

I would urge everyone to volunteer to help others. It brings a lot of happiness to your own life as well as making a real difference to others less fortunate.

Val Bissland is editor of The Centre for Lifelong Learning Facebook site at <https://www.facebook.com/CentreForLifelongLearning/> where you can find some very interesting information about lifelong learning activities in Glasgow.

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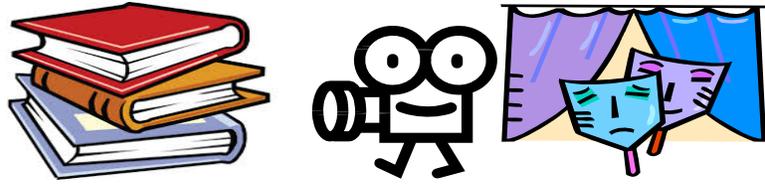


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AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

*Even though it's not a great idea to spend too much time in front of the telly, the box can be a great source of learning. There's been a lot of Shakespeare on recently of course marking the 400th year since the Bard's death. And you can learn a lot from programmes like *QI* and *University Challenge*. Because of the ageing demographic, there also seems to have been a plethora of programmes dealing with the **Ageing**, from both a scientific and a practical experience point of view. **Carol Allen** has been goggling at the box to see what she can learn.*

Although I am an arts oriented person, I also have a great fascination with science. And while I have to concentrate a bit fiercely when it comes to astronomy or quantum physics, as I struggle to understand the theories of experts like Stephen Hawking, human biology is a bit easier. And many of the programmes dealing with that more than touch on the science of ageing.

Dr David Eagleman's series on *The Brain* earlier this year was a case in point. His subject matter was the various aspects of how this organ functions – whether we voted for Brexit or Remain for example was probably as much influenced by the conditioning in our subconscious mind as by logical decision making! - but inevitably at many points the programmes touched on how ageing affects the brain. I think it

was this series, which included a study of a closed order of nuns, which concluded that a person who has enjoyed a better education has a reduced chance of developing dementia. While another episode was devoted to the importance of social interaction in order for the brain and the person to survive. And yes, how memories are created and the role of the hippocampus, that came up too.



Photo: BBC Factual

Angela Rippon, now 71, seems to have become the number one choice for presenter, when it comes to programmes devoted to ageing per se. As part of May's *Living with Dementia* season, Rippon, whose mother died of the disease, fronted the documentary *The Truth About Dementia*, which looked at the ways science is working to combat the disease and in which she bravely took a genetic test to see if she is likely

to develop the condition herself. The test was negative – she isn't. We also learned from that programme about the importance of a good night's sleep, which gives the body a chance to flush out the plaques involved in the development of dementia and is also important in the retention of memory. It also emerged that learning a new language can help to prevent the development of dementia. Must do some more work on my Russian! Then was a recent edition of Horizon devoted to the latest research and treatments in this area, where I discovered amongst other things that the humble egg, one of my favourites, is rich in the brain building nutrient choline. So it's still not a bad idea to "go to work on an egg".

Ms Rippon also cropped up again co-presenting the more cheerful and practical two part series *How to Stay Young*. I had a personal interest in that, as one of my drama students was recruited as one of the older people invited to take part. They were split into two groups for twelve weeks for different forms of exercise – one committed to a strict walking regime and the other to playing ping pong several times a week. When they were tested at the end of the programme, the walking team showed a marked improvement in physical function – heart etc – while the ping pong group had upped their intellectual capacity. My student was in the ping pong group. She was pretty sharp in the brain department to start with but she's now become ace with a bat and ball!

From the same series both Ms Rippon and I were delighted to discover that one of the best forms of exercise all round is dancing. The evidence is there in the

weekly jazz dance class I go to, where my teacher, who is in her seventies, still has the agility and figure of a much younger woman.

Most recently there was *Secrets of Growing Old* in which people in their 70s, 80s, 90s and even 100 plus were extolling the enjoyment they are getting from getting older. They included an 83 year old woman whose grey hair and wrinkles have made her an in demand fashion model; a 96 year old man who is a keen body builder and an 83 year old woman who is the world's oldest skydiver.



Photo: ITV

While musician Gary McIntyre, 82, who has recently become a master of jazz improvisation, is a prime example of the theory that people don't reach the top of their game until they're well into their 70s, when our brains make new connections, opening up fresh, creative ways of thinking.

*Continuing with the active ageing theme, former dancer turned therapist Anne-Lise Miller has a very positive attitude to ageing and her cheerfully titled new book, **Too Young to Grow Old- Take control of your health now**, which is packed with advice on how to stay fit and healthy well into old age.*

So attractive is the title that I had not one but two AEA volunteers eager to review it! Interestingly they have rather contrasting views about the book. First a review from Renfeng Wang, who is a PhD student at the Belgian Ageing Studies Center in Brussels.

We live in an ageing society. By 2050, the world population over 60 is expected to reach two billion. Meeting the special nutritional and lifestyle needs of this expanding population, so as to prevent age-related disease, is a growing imperative. Anne-Lise Miller's new book is about the need for these. The book combines recent research-based evidence in nutrition and biochemistry with developments in psychology, and provides realistic strategies for mitigating the steps of ageing. Miller's purpose appears to be to encourage readers to share her enthusiasm for and efforts to promote a greatly enhanced quality of life for older adults. .

Too Young to Grow Old takes readers on a journey that includes theoretical, empirical and practical issues, with a total of 6 chapters organized into four parts - "introduction," "psychological angle," "physical and nutritional angle" and "detailed plans and recipes." Part I outlines what the author terms as "good health." Part II highlights psychological stress and coping in later life. Part III deals with physical and nutritional intervention in ageing, while in the last part Miller provides a list of detailed suggestions and plans for coping with the particular challenges covered in the preceding part of the book. Taken as a whole the book covers the entire breadth of the relationship between lifestyle and health.



Anne-Louise Miller
Photo: Ham and High

Within the book, Miller is careful to clearly define important terms. She provides a sufficient but not overwhelming context for the discussion, and then offers practical advice. For example, "Chapter three: Create Health from Within", she begins by reviewing the four essential factors that influence health and then describes the processes that influence ageing both internally and externally. From there, Miller gives step-by-step guidance on how to design anti-ageing plans. Moreover, she uses tables and graphs to help readers to get a clear picture of her ideas.

Miller does not just understand health, but also understands people. *Too Young to Grow Old* is a rich blend of ancient wisdom and modern science." Throughout the book, from Lao Tzu's original Taoism in ancient China to C. S. Lewis' novels in modern Europe, Miller makes a connection between eastern and western philosophy. The most important ancient book of Chinese medicine, as well as a major book of Taoist theory and lifestyle, is *The Emperor's Inner Canon*. There's a very famous saying, "the sages usually pay less attention to the treatment of disease, but more to the prevention of it." Miller endorses that view.

This book will be a useful companion, no matter how old you are. I am planning to follow “the seven-day bowel and tissue cleanse” menu even though I’m still only in my 30’s and use Ms Miller’s tips on nutritious diet and good lifestyle for better health at each stage of life.



Dr Eileen Rubery is a public health and toxicology expert, who previously worked in the Department of Health and she has certain reservations about some aspects of Ms Miller’s book.

The catchy title immediately attracted me and when I read the press release for this book, which says that the author ‘debunks the belief that age is the cause of those annoying symptoms that too many of us have come to accept as “part of getting older” ’ – an excellent message for a generation that has an average life expectancy of around 20 years, when they reach what used to be seen as the seriously old age of 60 plus - I thought this might be a really useful book. I was however less sure what the secret for obtaining this benefit was going to be.

But while in many ways I came to this book with a positive feeling, my enthusiasm was somewhat diminished by the references to ‘toxic’ painkillers

and the considerable enthusiasm for colonic irrigation, suggesting a tendency to misunderstand the realities of the biology of life. That pain can be severe and painkillers sometimes very welcome is something many of us unfortunately have to learn at some time.

The general recipe book at the end, claiming that various foodstuffs would slow the growth of a range of cancers also gave me some concern. The evidence for any benefit from the various chemicals was usually slight. While on the balance of probability it is quite possible that one or two of the agents the author devises regimens for may produce some limited benefits, I doubt any will turn out to be of significant benefit in delaying aging. Statistically it is more likely that the majority of them will turn out for a variety of reasons to have no significant effect and that a few could be somewhat harmful or at the very least make you feel worse rather than fitter in the short term.

So, rather a mixed bag overall and in terms of the way the book is presented, I did find the impossibility of reading the references at the foot of the pages due to their small size and pale colour extremely irritating. Furthermore, since most of them were just links to websites, this made checking the basis of her arguments generally very difficult. A few well chosen references to some accessible literature would have been a great improvement.

Nevertheless, the author pursues a very responsible attitude towards the various regimens she recommends, giving advice that is likely in general to prevent anything much in the way of serious

detriment to those who decide to follow one or two of her plans. In her ‘Detox. Plans’ for example, she is careful to advise those on medication to consult their doctor about any likely adverse effects before they follow one of her regimes. There is much common sense advice within the book that we would all do well to follow. Being overweight is undoubtedly bad for your health, as is smoking and too much time as a ‘couch potato’ in front of the television. If this book encourages more people to take at least a few active steps to improve their diet, get treatment and seek resolution of those odd aches and pains symptoms that do not remit fairly quickly but are indeed all too easy to accept as ‘just part of aging’, it will be worth its price. But personally I would avoid the colonic irrigation and the intensive “Detox. Plans”. As the author herself responsibly informs you, in the short term they will make you feel lacking in energy and tired and I fear that experience is unlikely to be compensated by much in the way of a significant feeling of well-being later.

Too Young to Grow Old- take control of your Health now!” by Anne-Lise Miller, publisher: Fisher King Publishing Ltd., LS21 1JZ: 21 March, 2016: Price 14.99/€15.75

It’s been an interesting period for the New Horizons older learners’ drama group, writes Carol Allen, in that we’ve been working through the Victoria and Albert Museum with Complicite theatre on an intergenerational community project on the theme of Carnival.

Complicite is an international touring theatre company, based in London. It was founded in 1983 by Annabel Arden,

Fiona Gordon, Marcello Magni and Simon McBurney, who is currently co-director of the company. If you were a fan of the tv series *Rev*, you’ll remember McBurney as the interfering Archdeacon. The company’s main body of work has been of devised theatre pieces and adaptations and revivals of classic texts. In addition they are also very active in creating education projects within the community with groups of all ages.



Tea – photo Complicite

One such was *Tea*, an intergenerational project with Dora House for over 50s in St John’s Wood, London, which saw the tenants working with young art students and trainee chefs, recreating the tenants’ stories and recipes of tea times of old – Lyon’s Corner House, sugar rationing and the arrival of the avocado pear! A pop up tea room with old style fare was created and it all culminated in a performance piece.

The piece we have been working on was also devised theatre, developed through a series of workshops, from which we learned new techniques to add to the work we’ve been doing in class, particularly in terms of mime and movement. One of the highlights was a session with Complicite founder member Marcello Magni, a leading figure in the

world of mime, who introduced us to the techniques of mask work and Commedia dell'arte.



Photo: Joukowsky Institute

In the workshops we did improvisations and tableaux on the theme of life changing journeys. We then selected one participants' tale of a journey to India as a child with her mother, which then formed the basis of a street theatre carnival piece (with masks!), which we performed on the patio outside the church in Colville Gardens in Notting Hill as part of a local festival. Our first experience of street theatre – speak up and try to ignore the rain!

*Your editor has also written and is directing a play for **Women and War**, a month long theatre festival on that theme. My play is called **War Babies**.*

War Babies is the story of two women born in World War Two, whose lives have been shaped by that war. Kate is a former war correspondent and Louise a French born grandmother and widow of her English husband. Both were war babies. Kate's mother was Grace, a London ambulance driver in the Blitz, Louise's was Marguerite, a French wartime resistance worker. Neither woman knew her father.

Although both characters are in their seventies at the opening of the play, this is not just a story about two older

women chatting about their past. "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players". On the stage of our theatre of war two actresses and the actor, who plays the men in their lives, act out Kate and Louise's lives and those of their mothers at various ages and in various places – wartime London and France, the café and cabaret culture of Paris, the war in Bosnia – as the twists and turns of the story reveal the secret that has brought them together and the identities of their lost fathers are finally revealed. With so much of it rooted in World War Two, there is also a strong Jewish element in the story. This is a tale of war and peace, life and death, love – and theatre.



The festival, which is produced by the So and So Arts Group, is taking place in their theatre spaces at 6 Frederick's Place, EC2R 8AB – nearest tube station Bank – from 4th to 31st July and my contribution is just one of 16 shows plus various other events. Full details of the festival and how to book can be found here. <http://www.womenandwar.co.uk/> If you're in London, I do hope you will be able to come along.



*Turning now to London's glittering West End theatre scene, **Carlie Newman** recommends two exciting musical productions*

Although people are flocking to the Savoy Theatre (until 8 October 2016. Box Office: 0844 871 7687) to enjoy Sheridan Smith in ***Funny Girl***, the whole production is well worth seeing. This has proved the case with Sheridan Smith's recent absence from the show and her understudy Natasha Barnes taking her place. By all accounts Barnes gives a smashing performance.

The story itself is fascinating. The beginning of the show has Fanny Brice (Sheridan Smith) looking back on her stage and personal life. She performs as a somewhat inadequate chorus girl. Gradually under the loving training of Eddie Ryan (Joel Montague), she blossoms into a lovely comedienne and when she is spotted by the impresario, Florenz Ziegfeld (Bruce Montague), she becomes a star.



Sheridan Smith as Fanny Brice with Joel Montague as Eddie Ryan
Photo: Photo: Johan Persson

Small in stature, Sheridan Smith is amusing as she dances and sings with a chorus of tall girls – made even taller by their high headdresses.

Another tall person is Nick Arnstein (Darius Campbell). Fanny falls in love with him, ignoring the fact that he is an obvious gambler. She offers him support and very generous amounts of money which he wastes. And although she has a baby and emotional problems with her husband, Fanny continues working.

A very good supporting cast includes Marilyn Cutts as Fanny's mother, who is not pushy like the mother of Gypsy Rose Lee, but proud of her daughter's achievements, with an acknowledgement of her own part in the song, *Who taught her everything she knows?* Darius Campbell is a handsome Arnstein with a strong voice and personality and fine stage presence.

But it is Sheridan Smith who has top billing here and rightly so. While she's not Barbra Streisand and so completely loses the Jewish thread – which Streisand caught so well – she is particularly good in the comedy parts, especially her stage performances as Fanny, when she laughs and fools around. Smith shows what a fine actress she is when we see her thinking through the words as she sings strongly and with feeling, *Don't rain on my parade*. She has a good voice and is an excellent actress as she shows in *People [who need people]*. Sheridan will need to be careful in a long run not to go over the top in the comic bits. I actually prefer her in the straight parts where her expertise as an actress is to the fore.

Book now and enjoy a good musical with the extra bonus of a fine singer/actress/ comedienne in the star role.

One of the top musicals of all time, ***Showboat*** (New London Theatre, Drury Lane, London booking until 27 August

2016 Box office: 0844 412 4654) has everything one demands of a good show - enthralling story, good music and memorable songs, some lively choreography and terrific performances by the cast.

It helps, of course, that the musical is based on Edna Ferber's novel about the stage performers and other workers on the Mississippi River. Spanning a period of 40 years it tells the story of the stage folk and the black workers surrounding them. With music by Jerome Kern and book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein11, this production, directed by Daniel Evans, comes from the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield. Alongside the cast members we have the enchanting river boat which is a character in its own right.



Photo: Johan Persson

Captain Andy (Malcolm Sinclair) is in charge of the paddle steamer and he decides who will play each part. When the show opens, Julie (Rebecca Trehearn) is the obvious star. She plays alongside her husband and fellow star, Steve (Leo Roberts). When the couple are forced to leave because Julie is of mixed race, Andy has little choice but to put his lovely daughter Magnolia (Gina Beck) on stage in place of Julie. Young and falling in love with the gambler Gaylord Ravenal (Chris Peluso), Magnolia leaves not only her own family but also her family of co-workers on the river boat to follow him.

Life runs far from smoothly for both Julie who is left alone to try to make a living and Magnolia, who brings up her daughter, Kim, by herself.

It's a spectacular production, beginning with the show boat slowly moving forward looking like a tiered wedding cake. It is all lit up and is as attractive to the audience as it surely is to the people watching it approach from the river bank. Choreographer Alistair David makes use of the roomy thrust stage and there is some lovely dancing by the large cast.

Peluso as Gaylord has a strong and beautiful voice, which when matched with Magnolia's sweet singing is meltingly lovely as they sing *Only Make Believe*. It is noteworthy that the supporting cast is not merely in the background but allowed their individual moments in the spotlight. As the young black Joe (Emmanuel Kojo) sang *Ol Man River* in his deep, deep voice, my skin tingled! Trehearn as Julie is something special and we miss her when she is not on stage. It is so sad to see her drunk and alone later in the show.

Is this the best ensemble work in London? I can't think off hand of better. The show deserves to be seen by a big audience and I would urge you to book now.

Recommendations here from Carol Allen as to current films on the Cinema Screen.

Although it opened a few weeks ago now, *Florence Foster Jenkins* is still around in cinemas in the West End and around the country and well worth catching. Florence, a rich socialite and eager patron of the arts in New York of the forties, is famous as the woman who so believed in her talent as a singer that

she hired Carnegie Hall to show off her skills. Problem was she was tone deaf had a voice like a shrieking banshee. So this could have been a one joke comedy but though there are indeed plenty of very funny moments, director Stephen Frears and writer Nicholas Martin have actually given us a rather poignant tragic-comedy.

Florence is married to her second and much younger husband, failed actor St Clair Bayfield (Grant), who does everything to support his wife and protect her from the truth. Although their marriage is celibate for tragic reasons we discover later in the film and every night St Clair tucks his wife up in bed before going off to spend time with his mistress (Rebecca Ferguson), it is still a genuinely loving relationship.



Florence and St Clair.

Photo: Nick Wall Photography

Meryl Streep as Florence is first class as usual and the relationship between her and Grant is both touching and convincing, while Simon Helberg as Florence's reluctant accompanist, who fears working with her will jeopardise his career as a serious musician, gives a delightful supporting performance. His face when he first hears her "sing" is a study in comic conflict.

Veteran director Ken Loach, who has just celebrated his 80th birthday, was for some a surprise winner for the second

time in his career of the Palme d'Or for best picture at this year's Cannes Film Festival with his latest film *I, Daniel Blake*. It tells the story of an older man struggling to survive in the austerity climate of today's Britain. While we await the release of this new film, Louise Osmond's documentary *Versus: The Life and Times of Ken Loach* gives us a comprehensive and entertaining review of the director's work. Loach actually announced his retirement two years ago but when the Conservative government was returned to power, he was moved to come back into the movie arena with Paul Laverty's story dramatizing the human cost of austerity policies.

Although we see Loach in the early sequences making wry jokes about fearing he might miss a trick or two on the set at his age, he still appears to have a firm grip on his craft, as we see him searching out locations and directing his actors and crew on this latest movie. And do not be misled by Loach's courteous and gentle manner. This most left wing of directors, described by Tony Garnett, who produced Loach's ground breaking tv drama *Cathy Come Home* half a century ago, as "the most subversive director this country has ever had", has stayed determinedly true to his political principles and struggle for social justice. And as actor Gabriel Byrne puts it, "I wouldn't like to cross him."

In her coverage of Loach's life and work Osmond's well crafted film darts about chronologically, intercutting comments from Loach and his many collaborators and admirers with illuminating archive photographs of the man as a schoolboy and as a young actor – he once understudied Kenneth Williams in a West End revue – and with clips from his many films. The scene from *Cathy*

Come Home where Cathy's children are forcibly taken away from her can still move one to tears, even in isolation.



**Homeless family Cathy (Carol White), Reg (Ray Brooks) and their children
Photo: BBC Films**

The boy Billy with his kestrel *Kes* still charms. Ricky Tomlinson, caught unawares in the bath by a group of startled Moslem lady house hunters in *Riff Raff* is still hilarious. There is a lot in Osmond's film which is virtually a

master class for young film makers. Other memorable moments include Loach heartbreakingly restrained as he recounts a personal tragedy in his life and deeply embarrassed as he recalls the only way he could make a living in his "wilderness years", when no-one would fund his films, which was by making tv commercials, including one for Macdonald's.

It wasn't easy to get *I, Daniel Blake* made either, as his producer Rebecca O'Brien tells us. One funder rejected it for lack of commercial potential, another for being "politically difficult". Yet over the years Loach has brought to the screen well over fifty stories – feature films, tv plays and documentaries. Maybe he hasn't yet changed the world – though *Cathy Come Home* in particular had a dramatic effect on public awareness of homelessness - but he's certainly made us think about it.

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