

MALA MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Mature Adults Learning Association Inc. Rockingham Branch

OCTOBER 2020

FROM THE CHAIR

How quickly a term has flashed by. From the chatter and smiles and the majority of evaluation sheets, the Term three courses went well. It is again time to ask for your help to see that we can keep offering courses that you find interesting.

As you can appreciate it is now always easy to get a presenter for every topic. We are tracking down a few new leads from our last survey and hope that 2021 will be a year with some new and relevant offerings. We can't engage a presenter until we have at least 10-12 people expressing their interest in a topic. If you have a particular thing you would like, get together with other like-minded people and let us know.

We may have many talents, but mind reading is not one of them!

Surveys are available at the reception desk, or print off the one sent with this newsletter.

Our AGM happens at the end of this term - 25th November. The meeting will be at 11:00 in the library. We are planning a social get together after that meeting at the Wing Bo Chinese Restaurant at 12:30 to celebrate the year that was and celebrate the fact that we managed to get at least one semester in this year. More details later in the newsletter.

Thanks to everyone who made the term a good one, stay healthy and safe and happy and enjoy the break until next term, which starts tomorrow !

Bronwen Usher – Chair



Pilates? - I thought you said pie and lattes !



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

TERM 4

Class Dates : 14th, 21st and 28th of October and 4th and 11th of November.

These dates have our courses starting one week earlier than previously published !



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday the 25th of November 2020

11:00 at the Rockingham Central Library

Please try and come along, it is a great way to show your appreciation for the folk who spend so much of their time in providing these courses for you.

Should you think you can offer your service on the committee, or know someone who could, please pick up a nomination form at the Reception desk or the one sent out with this edition of the Messenger.



END OF YEAR GET TOGETHER LUNCH

Wednesday the 25th of November 2020 at 12:30 (after the AGM)

at the WING BO Chinese Restaurant

located at 6 Cessnock Way, Rockingham

*Cost for the Lunch Special Menu ranges from \$12 to \$16
or choose a la carte if your desire*

Numbers are limited, so if you wish to attend please let us know by the 10th of November

*RSVP by phone on 0417 904 404 or 9528 7133,
email to malarockingham@gmail.com or
sign up at the reception desk at the library*



WRITING GROUP 1 - CONTRIBUTIONS

Confronted with the question, Who am I? the writers tackled the task in various ways. These pieces offer three very different perspectives, but I'm sure you will identify with them all.

Our first contribution is from Martin, who seeks the answer in his life experiences -

Who am I today –80 years after I was born? Even after all those years, it's hard to answer that question. Who am I?

I've never really thought about it - I'm just me, although many of those around me could probably describe who they feel I am.

I am a person who often feels he should shed a little more of his fragmented rigid Victorian-type upbringing. It doesn't seem to fit all that well into today's world. Why fragmented, because at 6 months of age, I stood up in my cot looking at the passing parade in a London adoption agency, and called out to an approaching couple, "Take me". They did.

Despite war, falling bombs, evacuation and rationing, the next twelve years were spent happily as part of a caring, if formal, family.

It was then that deeply-felt friendships - school, scouts, sports – were pulled apart when the family moved from what had become my home to Copenhagen, the Danish capital. The challenge of starting a new life was not easy at the age of twelve. New school, new ways, hopefully, new friends and a new language – apart from the swear words I had learnt while playing with local kids during a previous brief holiday. However eight years passed happily, when friendships again were put aside when I decided to see the world, but intended to resume those friendships sometime later.

I am an amalgam of that past which occurred thousands of miles away – and, seemingly, several lifetimes ago and the total of what has happened since. Has that helped answer the original question, not really. More thought is needed, but that will have to wait for another time.

Martin



I'm writing a book. - I've got the page numbers done.



The next contribution is from Baz who is reassessing himself as he finds himself today -

I'm at the time in my life; I feel my relevance is slipping away from me. This is apparent to me by interaction with acquaintances and professionals, and I wonder if this nagging thought, is due to my previously overvalued assumption, of my importance in this world.

I have always been a confident individual, and prepared to take on most things head on, and consequently, reap the benefits, or weather the storm. But now I feel as though I'm not taken seriously, and my opinions don't matter, as much as I thought they did.

Dealing with professionals is a whole new ballgame, they give you the bottom line, with little explanation proffered, then brushed over when asked to elaborate.

But not all doom and gloom. I am enjoying retirement and the various little projects I take on. Even though it takes me about three times longer to complete a task now, than it did - say 20 years ago .But that's life as an oldie, and while I have it, I intend to enjoy it.

Baz



Shirley really hits the mark for so many of us as women in the older generations when a sense of self was so easy to loose. – no apology needed! -

Self, what is self? I have tried to research the meaning and I find it most confusing. If I talk about myself, then to me it is a very one-eyed proposition. I think by now after 86 years on this planet earth I should be able to answer clearly and concisely – but I can't.

I value my privacy and I have never relished discussing ME. The only person who really knew me was my life partner Colin, I still talk to him, but it is rather one sided now. Being a listener, I probably took on other people's problems and tried to resolve them if asked.

Even beginning to write my life story was difficult. For me it became writing about us, how we started our lives as a couple and became a family. I have given a potted history of my beginnings – growing up, working, courting, marrying, parenting. It all encompasses me, yes, but being part of so many other people's lives I feel I have lost my sense of self. I hope you understand me, my apologies.

Shirley Rouse



For many of us our lives has been determined by one little word 'If...'
Here are a couple of examples, that may get you thinking about your own –'if' moment.

First from Georgie a career choice -

Approaching the end of my high school days I had to decide what I was planning to do when I finished school was nursing. At 17 years of age this was not a simple choice. My mother and I had opposing ideas on my future career path. While I had applied to train as a nurse my mother had organised an interview for me to apply for veterinary nursing.

To some extent the decision was made when I received an offer to train at our local hospital. However, my mother continued to have concerns for my health and welfare as she believed that nursing was incredibly physically demanding, and she was concerned that I would not be able to handle the workload.

Nursing proved to be my forte. I had a career spanning many years with a huge variety of rich experiences meeting and caring for old and young people from many backgrounds and countries.

After 30 years of nursing I switched careers studying to become a social worker in the area of child protection. Again, I think my mother would have been overly concerned about my working in this field. After 20 years of joy and heart break it was time for me to retire.

Both of my chosen careers have been emotionally demanding. Both have taken a toll on my health and wellbeing. I now ask myself what if I had followed mum's advice? Would my life have been easier? Would I have been happier?

These are a few of the 'what if' questions I sometimes ponder. The questions to which there are no simple answers.

Georgie



From Shirley a choice to follow her heart -

If I had known then what I know now would I have allowed my 16 year old heart to become involved and risk myself to disappointment and let down.

If I had known then that the infectious smile, drop dead good looks and captivating personality, was not only enticing to me but to everyone he met, would I still risk my love.

If I had known then that my presence and personality would easily be lost in his shadow and I would become the "Hi Mate, so great to see you, really missed catching up, how you been.....What was your name again!" When your life becomes attached to someone else's whose personality is infectious, charismatic and sociable, you will have to share that person whether it is always convenient and acceptable or not.

Someone has to pay the price for the “life of the party” whose top priority is not necessarily centred where it should be and whose consideration for others first, leaves gaps of responsibilities that someone else will be obligated to fill.

If I had known then what I know now would I still risk my love and endure the hurt and betrayal. I am reminded of the saying of Alfred Lord Tennyson “It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all “.

If I had known then would I do it all over again even though there is a price to pay. And there is a price to pay for such a huge magnetic personality. There’s a price not only for the one living with it, but there’s a huge price to pay for the one blessed or cursed with such a personality. A price which may only show up late in life but the account will eventually present itself!

If I had known then what I know now, would I still follow my 16 year old heart. You can’t put an old head on a 16 year olds shoulders. But yes, I would still take my chances! And yes I would do it again!

Shirley Pascal



Thank you all so much for allowing us to share your writing and just a glimpse of your experience. I enjoyed all the stories and I am sure those whose work was not published now will at some stage find their way to later editions of the Messenger.

PS Thanks to Rhuwina Griffiths whose teaching prowess has unleashed the talents of our members.



*There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one know what they are.
W Somerset Maugham*



CONTRIBUTIONS

The Oxnard Chronicle conclude with Charles and Eleanor on the move from the USA to WA -

"Why (sotto voce) on earth move from California to Perth?" We have been asked that many times.

One answer is clear. I knew that where as most universities taught anatomy specifically for medical students, UWA had become much broader and deeper. It also taught anatomy and human biology to nearly 1,000 non-medical students. It had a big research wing with many masters and doctorate students in specialties of human biology. UWA was supporting Human Biology as the largest science subject in the WA High Schools. All this gave it a research and financial base that no other Australian anatomy department had.

I had known David Allbrook, the Professor at UWA, in earlier times in the UK but what I did not know was that David had decided to take early retirement and that a vacancy existed for a new professor. I certainly did not know that there had been a search already but with no appointment had been made. I didn't even see the notice when UWA advertised a second time. I was not looking at that space and would not have done except that reason two popped up in the form of a 'tickler' from a Perth colleague wanting to know why I had not applied for the job.

I decided to make contacted with UWA's Vice Chancellor, Professor Bob Smith who was canny enough to dangle a carrot. "We know you haven't applied for the job but would you to come to Perth to discuss whether or not you would be willing to let your name go forward in another search? We will bring Eleanor and you out for a couple of weeks to see us". Well that was an offer to good to miss.

Bob Smith, though an Australian, had previously been President of the University of British Columbia. That meant he was familiar with the North American scene (at that point, our scene!). Between the two of us, one English and the other Australian, we spoke a common language: "Academic American", with everything that goes with it!

Eleanor and I had a wonderful time in Perth. We were taken everywhere and each time the car seemed to go along one or other of the roads in Kings Park, or along Mountsbay Rd by the water, or along Riverside Drive, or past Cottesloe Beach, or to Hillary's or ...! You can just imagine our trips in beautiful Perth weather!

I gave seminars, we met spouses and families, we talked with students, and we saw houses (no schools needed on this possible move as the boys were now grown. We knew we'd be mad not to like the place, the environment, the people, and the students, especially the students. But we were still not yet sure that we really wanted to come. When the crunch question came "Will you come" they asked? "I am willing to allow my name to go forward into the search" I said. The 'American' Australian VC knew exactly what I meant! The bargaining had begun!

One day while 'down-town' we happened to see an English Silver Tea Service that was hall-marked for 1930, and with an anchor for the city of Birmingham. This was Eleanor's date and place of birth! It was beautiful silver. It seemed to be an omen!

We thought it was too expensive so, decided not to buy, the vendor brought the price down but again we said no. Again he reduced the price even more. We still decided not to take it. There was no point in taking the silver if we didn't take the job, and had to pay duty going back into the States! But my name did go into the search.

We were then invited for a second fortnight. This meant the real interview and, as you will understand, the real negotiation. My interview with the new search committee was interesting. I thought I blew it by saying that "jogging was for the birds" (in the presence, unbeknownst to me, of the three departmental joggers, OOOPSSSS); my line was squash and in-line skating!

I also made it very clear that if the department wanted an HDPG, (a "Herr Doktor Professor God") and many professors were like that in those days then I would not accept the post. Thankfully the search committee made it clear that if I was an "HDPG" then they would not want me.

On this second visit the Silver Tea Service was still there. What's more, at the same low price. But now we had the problem: buy it now, and we'd pay duty on entry back to the US. Unable to resist it we bought it but gave it to a colleague in Perth to look after it till we really came again for good. A good faith offering on both sides!

After we'd arrived for good, I told the story of the Silver Tea Service in my first talk to the department. I made one very big mistake. I described it as "Antique Silver" having just said it was hallmarked in the city and in the year of Eleanor's birth: OOOPSSSS!!!

Professionally this moved all worked out well. The agreements that I had made with the Vice Chancellor meant that we were able to double the size of our research and teaching staff within about four years. I was enabled to make half a dozen new tenured appointments from around the world, including appointing senior women. The department was good to start with but this quickly made it much better.

We started a new Scientific Society (of Human Biology), a new Centre for Human Biology, and a new Journal of Human Biology. We started annual meetings for Australia, even managing to have them sometimes outside Australia. We further supported Human Biology in the High Schools of WA (I gave many lectures in the high schools, and we had many high school groups visit the department). We even arranged things so that school teachers could participate in, even be full members of, our new Human Biology Society.

There was only one thing wrong to my way of thinking. It was clear to me that our new title, including the words 'Human Biology', should really encompass all the biomedical sciences. Wouldn't it be wonderful, I mused, if Physiology and Biochemistry would join us in such a conglomerate? WOW. Would that suggestion have been a mistake? I wonder. However, it was the other two departments who made the mistake. While our department doubled in size, then doubled again a few years later the other two departments shrank in size. Not good. We had a very good run of some ten years producing some excellent developments. Their departments gradually shrank to mere runts of their former selves. Good people, very good people, but without the resources and push that a conglomerate could have developed. What a shame!

Even on our first visit Eleanor was appalled that shops shut at lunchtime on Saturday, and were certainly not open all night as in LA! Petrol was 'rostered' at the weekends! And whenever we wanted anything, it had to be obtained from the East Coast. Everything was so 'English'. We had just spent 25 years escaping from England!!.

This culture shock continued to hit us. We had not long been living in a lovely 'Californian' style house - that was what sold it to us - we went out one night. In the darkness, the stars were wonderful. There was not one light on in our street, except for our house - we had every outside light on full blast - the 'American way' of 'protecting' one's home! We discovered that our neighbours left their cars in the drive, with the ignition key in the lock. Our car was completely secured. Sadly all that has now changed.

It was a lovely house, swimming pool, half-inside half-outside jacuzzi, very Californian, but also of course, also very West Australian. We had had a lovely little bush in our Pasadena garden: a Geraldton Wax; but we only realized at this point where the name came from!

There were other problems too. Eleanor still loved her tennis but her she was the great grandmamma on the tennis courts. The other wives had ankle-biters. They wanted to play tennis at mid-day, and put any girl who couldn't take the heat in a cold shower! They were ferociously competitive - Eleanor was not quite into that. However when we moved closer to the University things became much easier.

Problems continued to pop up. The University had said that they would move all our goods and chattels, both our home and laboratory. We took that at face value and told the moving guys to just pack everything. Sometime after we'd arrived at Bull Creek we had a communication, from quarantine saying they had some bones - would we come and collect them. It was then I remembered that I'd said pack everything and they had done just that, everything, including bones. Don't forget this was more than thirty years ago and we knew nothing of getting permission to import biological specimens. Oops, I said, those are just bones I use for teaching the medical students. Luckily they accepted that, but asked us to collect them. I couldn't go, so Eleanor went down to Quarantine. What they brought out was a little plastic bag with some teeth in dirty fluid. I don't think that's for us, said Eleanor. "Well, they said "It's for a doctor in Bull Creek" It transpired that it was for an Asian doctor who had brought his own teeth with him to be buried with him when he died! When our bones arrived I found that there had been an extra bone that our guys had packed, a gorilla skull, borrowed from an LA museum. That had to go back!

We decided to take that skull back with us on a subsequent trip. I put it in our hand baggage. As it was going through the x-ray machine, I saw the examiner stiffen up, stop the machine and run it back. "Would you mind opening this particular box?" I was asked. "Not at all" I replied, "but perhaps you would like to do it in private - it might upset the other passengers!" I was escorted to a small room to open the box. I had packed the skull upside down with the huge gorilla teeth pointing upwards. I thought the guy with me was going to faint. We got through OK and took it safely back to the museum.

We had moved many times before, but this move was by far the most difficult for us, especially for Eleanor. It was easier for me, I was loved wherever I went. However, we worked it out. Perhaps having our son and his wife follow us from California to Western Australia helped.

Helping put them both through second sets of qualifications and careers here helped too. And now, with coronavirus being the way it is in WA, where else would you like to be?

However, things never stay the same. During our time in the UK, things had gradually gone downhill. Money for research was gradually lost. When we went to the States, funding was so good, that we thought we had died and gone to heaven.

However, again, things never stay the same. Later during our time in the US, things gradually went downhill. Again, money for research was gradually lost. I became accustomed to applying for six grants to get one! So, when we came to Australia, I applied for six grants. Almost to my embarrassment, I won three grants out of six! Once more I thought I had died and gone to heaven.

However, again, again, things never stay the same. Even now, in Australia, things have gradually gone downhill. Where have you heard that before? And where could we go next? The answer has been retirement. Retirement where I have continued to get funds from UK, Europe, USA and Australia. Not dead yet, but in research heaven yet again!

Changes have continued for Universities too. They underwent 'devolution' (several skins being shed), leading to a remarkable increase in managerialism, reporting and bureaucracy. Federal governments of both colours have seriously under-funded higher education. Research dollars have virtually disappeared. Universities have been forced to go abroad for funds from students (and just look at the pickle that has landed them in!). Having students from abroad is good; but the way it has happened is likely to be damaging to the students, to universities and to countries.

University administrations have been multiplied by three! Academic staffs have been divided by two! Many secure career positions have gone. Insecure part-time positions have come. Only administrators are secure, and even they are becoming insecure as a result of coronavirus! Good people are leaving research either for abroad, or for administration, because, within the universities, that is where what little money is left, is lodged. Our best young researchers are leaving Australia. I myself have had 8 go abroad within the last 8 years. Previously I attracted them from abroad. I do not envy my successors.

Some of this may sound like an old man's grumpiness. But it's not; it's unfortunately true! After our UK, USA, and UWA phases, we have entered a fourth phase: NON-RETIREMENT RETIREMENT! We have found plenty to do, and MALA figures very large in that, but that is for another time.

Best wishes to all, and stay safe Eleanor and Charles.



There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.
W Somerset Maugham



BOOKSHELF

If you have read a good book and enjoyed it – chances are that someone else will enjoy it too, so drop us a line and we can all share the enjoyment.

Here are this month's suggestions :

LIVING VERSE - AN ANTHOLOGY OF VERSE compiled by AK Thompson

I stumbled across this book as I was reorganising my bookshelf. It was a book I had had in School in 1954. It was my first introductory to poetry, other than the nursery rhymes that I had learned as a small child. I stopped what I was doing and spent the next hour just dipping into it's old yellowing pages. The delight I learned then is still with me as I rode again with the Highwayman and watched Tennyson's Eagle clasp the crag with his cooked hands. I joined the Bora Ring and with Judith Wright, and saw the full antipodal eyes of the Kangaroo of DH Lawrence. I strolled the Country Towns with Kenneth Slessor. Even the first introduction to Shakespeare came here too with the Play by C. J.Dennis.

I loved the book back then and I wonder now why it has been so long since I picked up an anthology of poetry. I will be seeking out more of it now. If you can find a copy it is a great memory catcher



A ROOM MADE OF LEAVES by Kate Grenville

Kate Grenville dedicated this book to "all those whose stories have been silenced." She takes you behind the standard history book version of the wool industry to a relationship behind one of its unacknowledged champions to learn the real truth about a woman's empowerment.

A wonderful story about a woman who in her later years came into her own power and forged herself an independent, comfortable lifestyle in an era when that happened rarely. As the blurb says we hear what "one of those seemingly demure women from history might really have thought."

Based largely on letters recently discovered, it is the historical account a formidable, pioneering woman with a notorious bully of a husband who left conflict wherever he went (for instance as a member of the Rum Rebellion). He was often absent for long periods of time, enabling her to do the real work. According to Grenville, she, not he, laid the grounds for the merino wool industry that was a huge part of Australia's development! It was she who understood sheep breeding having been brought up on her grandfather's farm in Devon.

This is a book I couldn't put down but it did irritate me because while it was based on fact, it was partly fictional and I didn't know what was true. For instance was it true that she was raped by him and the forced to marry him and follow him to Australia? Did she really have the delicious affair in the room full of leaves?

For one who loves history, Kate Grenville is a writer who once again brings the history of the early European settlement of our country alive for me.

Vicki Foster



Book Review Feedback

“Thanks for the recommendation of *The Last Days of the Ramanova Dancers* Margaret. I also enjoyed it a lot. It is wonderful story of love and tragedy. My family roots were originally in Russia and I felt it linked me to that.”

“Dark Emu seems to have awoken curiosity in a couple of members, and have send them looking for more information on the indigenous way of life before colonization. Thanks for that recommendation too.”

THAT'S ALL FOLKS

I trust you have all enjoyed your break and those of you lucky enough to have your family in WA, your grandchildren. Look forward to seeing you all in Term 4. We are currently working on the 2021 program, hopefully some of you will let us know what it is you would like to see included in time for us to source people to deliver those courses.

Remember life is not about collecting things, it is about collecting experiences.

Bronwen Usher



As Aunty Acid says

“It is hard to diet when your favourite exercise is chewing.”

