

MALA MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Mature Adults Learning Association Inc. Rockingham Branch

SEPTEMBER 2020

FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome back. It is with great delight that I can finally say that. I know that MALA has been missed. It has been wonderful to see so many smiling faces at classes again and I hope you are all enjoying your courses.

Thank you all for your COVID safe awareness and helping us comply with all regulations. It is easy here in WA to lower our guard, but unfortunately that little virus is still out there. Thanks E.J. for your great poem, I trust you are enjoying your classes.

I must give a big thank you to Esther for her work in contacting everyone and ensuring that they had first option on the course of their choice. Unfortunately some contact details and phone numbers did not result in contact. Please check that your details are correct and clearly written on your enrolment forms. Thanks to Julie for taking charge of the COVID plan. Beware she will insist we abide by it!

I'd like to thank Charles for the Oxnard Chronicle – a fascinating mirror on how society and Medicine has changed over the years. Thanks to Rhuwina for providing us with some writing challenges to keep our brains active and our skills sharpened. Thanks to Meera for her philosophical contribution to the newsletter during our 'blackout'. Thanks too, to those wonderful members, (often with the name Anon) who have sent in poems, family histories – (thanks particularly to Steven Sims for the 1918/19 history) and book reviews for us to share. It has made a difference that we could at least say in contact electronically.

Hopefully, we are here to stay for the rest of the year.

Just a reminder : Please pick up your name lanyard on arrival and place in a the boxes provided when you have finished with it for the day.

Thanks

Bronwen Usher – Chair



JUST FOR FUN

Things kids have written -

My Grandpa has tattoos and Grandma has graffiti on her legs – (varicose veins)

What is dawn? Well....., it's sort of a backwards sunset.

Space is something I never have enough of.

A dictionary is a book for people who can spell.

A queue – a train of people.

Quarantine is a boot camp for germs and viruses.

SECOND WRITING CHALLENGE

The task was to imagine and write about (in 200 words) a moment that you would re-live – if that were possible – and say why you chose that particular moment.

With life 'normalising' again and many of you away on holidays there was a disappointing response to challenge 2. So no wonderful stories this month from you. There must be many of you with great stories to share and I hope you will be inspired to get writing again soon.



You don't stop laughing when you get old – but you do get old when you stop laughing.



TERM 4

A look ahead to Term 4 (with fingers crossed!)

Wednesdays at Rockingham Central Library

9:30 Let's Get Going and Write Part 2 with Rhuwina Griffiths

9:30 French Part 2 with Kathy Gecan



11:30 Philosophy Part 2 with Meera Finnigan

11:30 Science and Medicine with Charles Oxnard

11:30 Strengthen Your Writing Skills with Rhuwina Griffiths



13:30 Forensic Science with Bob Mead



13:00 Fun with Flowers – At the Autumn Centre (Fridays)

Thanks to our lecturers, who have been able to make time in their busy lives to fit us here at Rockingham MALA back into their schedules. Your time and work are very much appreciated.



Positive thinking will let you do everything better than negative thinking will.

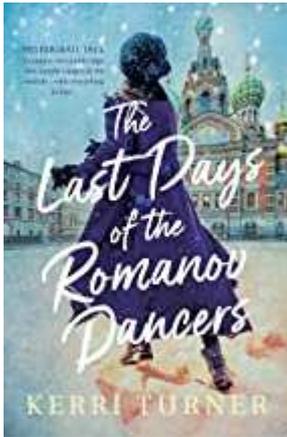


BOOKSHELF

This month offers two very different books, suggested by Margaret and James :

For those of you who love historic novels try -

LAST DAYS OF THE ROMANOVA DANCERS by Kerri Turner.



Set in Russia in 1914 - 20 and tells the story of the dancers with the Imperial Russian Ballet. The book describes how the dancers had to strive to achieve better status in their profession. Of course money talked then too and the dancers' way to do well was to win the friendship of wealthy sponsors.

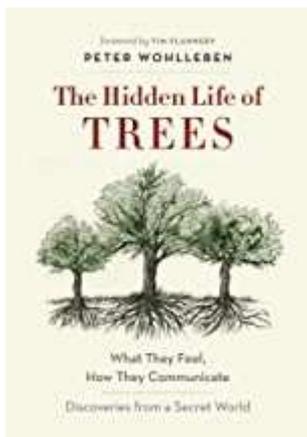
This is the period of war and upheaval in Russia and there the vast discrepancy between the way the aristocracy and ordinary workers lived well defined. The well-known character Rasputin is a strong character in this story.

The vocabulary is very descriptive. It is a lovely but tragic love story. I enjoyed the history aspect. Well worth a read.

Margaret Steele

For the nature lovers -

My most fascinating read in ages has been THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES by Peter Wohlleben.



It's subtitled "What they feel, how they communicate, and discoveries from a secret world".

I guess from my citizen science work in WA I'd thought I knew enough about how trees cope with our poor soils by enlisting the help of fungi. The average tuart has up to 25 different fungi living amongst and on and in its roots.

This book takes the relationships between trees and fungi and between trees and other trees to a whole new place. The foreword invites you to enter "a wonderland" in which trees care for each other, share food and talk to each other.

It's not a fantasy book. Everything is grounded in Peter's own observations and research as a forester, lumberjack and scientist at the Institute for Environmental Research at Aachen University in Germany and from other research throughout the world.

It's also not a difficult academic treatise. It's written in a conversational style that's easy to grasp and easy to pick up any time. The chapter headings entice - for example The Language of Trees, Love, Tree School, Street Kids - and each one can be read separately.

I heartily commend this book to people who want to expand their understanding of trees and their ability to support the life-nurturing work that trees do.

James Mumme

Thanks for the feedback on the Book Reviews.

CLUETOPIA cracked a mention and THE RADIO GIRL continues to be popular.



A laugh is a smile with the volume turned up.



Image and meme published on sun-gazing.com; original author unknown



WORDS, GLORIOUS WORDS

POON – What you do when you even up a wobbly table.

HURPLE – Hunch into yourself as you walk in the cold or wind.

EYE SERVANT – Someone who only works when being observed.

YULE-HOLE – An extra eyelet on your belt – for use after Christmas Dinner.



CONTRIBUTIONS

The Oxnard Chronicle continues with Charles and Eleanor on the move....

Dear MALA Friends

Our last letter detailed some of our experiences in our early days in the UK. Our next step was from UK to the USA.

Why make such a move when I seemed to be in the best place for me with Prof Zuckerman in Birmingham? For one thing it is not good for one's academic soul to be staff at the same place as one had been a student. For another I was getting restless and change was on the way in UK.

I was offered the Readership in Anatomy in 'Barts' (St. Bartholomew's Medical College, London). The Professor, Alec Cave said: "If you apply, you will get it! But I do not advise you to apply." He knew changes were coming in London; medical schools were being amalgamated; positions were being closed. He was right.

Changes were also scheduled for the National Health Service. Perhaps this could have given me some opportunities. In fact, the changes proved negative, so negative that 1966 was a peak year for the 'emigration of doctors' (mainly Canada and Australia)!

Changes were even coming to UK universities too. The Robbins Report was supposed to improve university teaching and research! It did not; it made them worse! Funding for research was to be increased. But of course, it was reduced! The result: an academic 'brain drain'. Academics fled to the USA, following the research money offered in the USA as it challenged Russia and Sputnik. (a 'brain suck', rather than a 'brain drain')!

This climate in Britain definitely did not hold a good future for Eleanor and me. The question was What should I do? I decided to do Law!!! I had no desire to practice Law, no intention of becoming a coroner. I just thought it would be an interesting education. So, in due course I matriculated at the University of London doing the first-year Law curriculum: British Constitutional History, Tort, Contract, and Roman Law. I loved it. Especially Roman Law! It was really Comparative Law, from the Doms of the Kings, through the Laws of the City States, to the Roman(ce) Legal Systems of countries like Italy and Spain (and even elements of 'Roman Law' in the Laws of States like Louisiana). It was just like Comparative Anatomy all over again. So, if you need help in the 'manumission of slaves', I am your man.!!

Unexpectedly I (we) was invited to a scientific meeting in California. We went of course. It was our first time abroad; currency regulations at that time limited you to taking 10 pounds sterling out of the country! The University of Chicago had its spies out! I was invited to interview for a job. And not just me. Chicago knew that if I was to be interested in a move, then Eleanor must also be included. We were there for two weeks and saw the schools, houses, shops, other partners, and general surroundings. Wonderful! We met all the families, had many dinners, and generally fell into the Chicago academic society. By the second week, we felt we belonged.

There were interesting sidelights though, when in our second week Eleanor took herself off to downtown Chicago by train. It wasn't until she started back that she suddenly realized she didn't know which station she had got to (it was 57th street as it happened). Looking at her ticket it said 63rd street so she got off there. As soon as she alighted she knew she had made a mistake. She asked for directions to the University of Chicago. No one knew although it was only 4 blocks away! The University area although marvellously multi-ethnic in 1966 it was surrounded by 'black ghetto' and Lake Michigan! El arrived home bemused and little wiser.

At the second last dinner before we were due to leave the conversation turned to the murders in the area and of one such when a student who had been killed and his body hung on the railings. Silence ensued as they suddenly remembered they were trying to recruit us. They need not have worried the University was so good that we had no hesitation in us agreeing to the move. The offer was good. From a salary of 2,000 pounds in the UK, we were offered 17,000 dollars at Chicago. We thought we had died and gone to heaven!

Imagine our surprise when we arrived back there in October to find that they had been paying us as from March; so, we already had an unexpected eight months balance and we had received the annual rise! All this and they funded a trip back to London in the November for a prestigious CIBA Foundation Lecture for me. My UK research grant was matched from day one! It is marvellous how the University of Chicago (a private university, in spite of its 'city' name) looks after its people. It induces enormous staff loyalty! If only other universities could be similar!

There was just one a small snag. You cannot do a British Law Degree in the USA. So, I was forced to be a 'Law School Dropout'; of which I am very proud!

Many of you are emigrants yourselves, and aware of the hazards and travails of travel. We decided to make our journey a holiday too, a holiday that included Lena, Eleanor's mother. Needing to take a lot of luggage we went by sea embarking at Southampton on the Canberra (2 years new at that point). Our route took us to Bermuda, Nassau, Miami, the Panama Canal, before going back up the West Coast, via Acapulco, San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco to Vancouver. There we stayed with friends. Guy, our son, had his 5th birthday there. The train back across the Rockies to Winnipeg, and down to Chicago completed a great holiday!

It was wonderful to have Lena to help us with the boys. One incident that amazed her was when in Los Angeles she asked for a beef sandwich (in UK a small triangle of bread, butter, thin slice of beef and a lettuce leaf) received a huge helping of mashed potatoes, lathered in gravy and enough beef to feed a family for a week during the war.

The immigration procedures in Chicago were interesting and included providing the results of a WR and Kahn blood test (certifying that we did not have syphilis); signing that we were not prostitutes (as if we would have signed if we were); signing that we were not and never had been members of the Communist Party and declaring all the bottles of Heinz Piccalilli, Houses of Parliament Sauce and Marmite (before we knew about Vegemite) we had brought with us!

Lena stayed with us in Chicago for the first three months. This was wonderful for Eleanor. She has someone to share the frustrations with when things went wrong in a new country, a daunting task alone. She and Lena had many a laugh together. When eventually Lena did go home, she knew where we were, what it was like, she could visualise the house, and the boys, - and there was the telephone. (Of course, no ZOOM in those days).

The first thing we did was to get Guy and Hugh into the Laboratory School at the University. To our amazement we had to undergo an interview (for 5 and 6-year-olds)! “What do you want for your boys”, we were asked. El and I looked at each other. What did the interviewer mean? We both said: “We would like them to be happy!”

We now know we were supposed to have said: Lawyers, Doctors, Professors, or something like that! Michelle Obama in her book recounts an almost identical interview at that school –the Obamas answered the question with an almost identical response. The Obama kids also went to that school, so the answer must have worked.

One teacher warned us (I think she had had experience with English families before) that we were not to send the boys to school in shorts and a tie. In November, Chicago winter, long trousers, parkas and ear muffs were the order of the day!

Guy had a stammer at that time, but his teacher didn't find that out as he just didn't speak for the first three weeks. He was also shy, and when the teacher put on a play, he was given the job, hidden behind a small window, to take the tickets. It must have been quite hard for him. But the teacher, Mrs Moses, was lovely and did her best!

Both boys soon fell in to the swing of things, although it was not until the very first summer, when they went to summer camp, and learnt the American games, that they really became acculturated. The fathers were expected to join in and play too. The other kids knew that we were English and we found out that they were taking bets on how many inches Doctor Oxnard would hit the baseball. They lost out –what they didn't know was that I had been a cricketer. It was wonderful to hit a ball without using all the awkward stances of cricket. All I had to do was swing and belt it. Home run each time!

Winter came and the boys wanted to skate. The fathers flooded the large common area around the houses. I took the group to an ice rink down-town where they would learn ice hockey. The first day I fell on the ice and bled profusely onto the ice from a cut eyebrow. Every week after that the kids would all skate over to see if “Dr Oxnard's Blood” was still there. It was for many weeks, until new ice gradually built up.

El was into sport too. Tennis was her game and she was delighted to be taken in by the tennis crowd in Chicago. El made good friends there some of whom are still in contact now. More friends were acquired later through tennis when we moved to Pasadena. Tennis there was played on company and private courts, no need to join a club at all. In fact El did not belong to tennis club until we arrived in Perth. In Perth all the other players had ‘ankle biters’; El was great grandmamma on court!

We also played squash together. Me, with my 7 foot arm span against El's at barely five foot. I was an experienced squash player, but El was armed with her tennis skills. We had many marvellous games by inventing new rules. I was responsible for the whole court; but El was only responsible for the half court in which she happened to be. This led to fantastic rallies. We also had another important rule. The person who won was the person who won the last point and El made the decision as to what the last point was - so my only strategy was to prevent her getting a point at all! I always lost!

Our time in Chicago included the Viet Nam War. There were student sit-ins and riots everywhere. At one US University, the police were called in; naturally they were armed and many students were shot!

This thankfully did not happen at the University of Chicago. Our students did decide to stop the University functioning by sitting in the administration building. They had not understood the nature of that university nor the calibre of its president. Most of the Chicago University administrators were just professors, doing admin as a service to the institution. They merely took their admin to their research offices, and the university continued. The students did do a lot of damage to the admin building, but the institution still worked.

The President (Professor Edward Levi) did not call in the police; absolutely no guns. He left the protestors alone, and, after two weeks, they left with their tails between their legs! Ed Levi opened the damaged building to the community and life went on without a single shot fired. (Levi later served a period as Attorney General of the United States, smart cookie).

Interestingly I was back in the UK at that same time and observed how the University of Birmingham handled the student sit-in. The student sit in began with about 20 students in the great hall. Senseless choice really as the great hall was only used only for ceremonies. However, the Vice Chancellor of Birmingham made remarks that really inflamed the students, and within a few days there were several hundred students sitting-in.

At this point the VC called in the police. Calling in the police in England is not quite the same as calling in the police in the USA. One large, fat, Sergeant and one long, thin, Constable with a bullhorn, walked into the middle of the students. The Sergeant told the Constable what to say and raising the bullhorn, he announced: "You are all committing a trespass; will you please leave". Such is the power of the word trespass (forgive us our trespasses) in English Law, that the students all meekly left. Interesting differences between institutions and countries!

Some years later, at the time that Martin Luther King was assassinated, the National Guard was called out because the Chicago Blackstone Rangers were burning their own neighbourhood, 63rd street. Tanks were situated at every intersection; but not to help the situation in 63 street; but to protect our area (57 street, Hyde Park)! This was particularly frightening for El because I was in New York, and she on her own with the kids.

Academic Work in Chicago was wonderful. I was only required to teach one course (Anatomy for Doctors) per year. The rest of the time was for research! Wow.

However, to attract research students I developed two new graduate courses: Medical Engineering and Mathematical Anatomy. Because these two courses were not available in any other University in Illinois, students at other universities could also take my courses for free. This was wonderful.

These new courses led on to many other student interactions. We invited all our graduate students together with all the professors to fortnightly discussion meetings. Both students and staff had to talk about research. As staff, we were only allowed to talk about ongoing research, research that was not complete in order that the students could see us struggling with new ideas, with un-finished ideas and the problems of finding solutions.

The students talked about their work, even if they were just beginners. This was such a good way of putting staff and students on a similar footing.

The discussions were informal and appropriately lubricated. Having them in our home added to the informality. We invited students and staff from other local institutions. Eventually they were so popular that people had to sit on the floor and the stairs! Later still numbers meant that we had to move to a university room - but that was never as good as our home!

Ever since, Eleanor and I have invented such groups of varied subjects and titles, such as 'Biomechanics Group', 'Medical Anatomy Group', 'Engineers in Medicine Group', 'Medical Student Research Group'. In Los Angeles, Pasadena, and in Perth they have always been highly successful. Holding them in our homes (or in LA, with its cultural differences, in Thai Restaurants) the groups have always enjoyed them. They were so good for encouraging graduate students and staff, for inter-institutional cross collaborations, and for developing new academic questions. One sometimes forgets that it is often informal relationships like these that are the most stimulatory of new ideas.

I had one student from Northwestern University to whom I gave a 10 for a project. – a rare thing. That student still remembers that project and that mark! Her name is Kathy Reichs, and she later made a killing as the author of many 'Bones' books, films, and television programmes. We still talk; asked about her next task, she sent us a photo of her latest grandchild!

The Midwest 'Big Ten Universities' held a meeting of Dean each year. One year the Chicago Dean unable to attend himself deputized a Professor Chandrasekhar Chandra to go. Chandra was a delightful, very quiet Indian, who was the Morton D. Hull distinguished Professor in Astronomy and Astrophysics, and a Nobel Prize Winner. The main matter for discussion was the question at the meeting was how small should a class be, before, in the interest of educational efficiency, it should be cancelled. Suggesting such as twelve for an undergraduate class and perhaps eight for a graduate class were floated.

There was much discussion but Chandra, so quiet and gentle, listened but did not participate. However, at the end of the meeting, it was the custom for the Chairman to go around the room asking: the opinion of each Dean in turn. It so happened that Chandra was on his right hand and therefore the last one to speak.

What was Chicago's opinion? Chandra finally spoke. He had, he said, forgotten about his Saturday morning class in a term when he was on sabbatical leave at the Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin. He therefore drove back to Chicago every Friday night, met the students, and then drove back on to Wisconsin on Saturday afternoon to continue his sabbatical.

He continued, "There were only two students in the class"

Unable to contain himself one hot-shot young dean almost shouted: "That's it; that's the sort of class that should be cancelled"

Chandra quietly completed his sentence " ... and their names were Yang and Li!"

(Both subsequently got Nobel Prizes)!

As Buchan said in 1940 "To live for a time close to great minds is the very best form of education."

America was a marvellous time in our lives, but all things must change and Australia beckoned.



Life is simple, but we insist on making it complicated – or so said Confucius.

(Comes under the heading of nothing much changes)



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

TERM 4 Enrolment Day - 30th of September

Class Dates 21st - 28th of September and 4th, 11th and 18th of November

Annual General Meeting - 25th of November 2020



STOP PRESS

A CALL OUT TO 60-80 YEARS OLDS WHO ARE HAVING PROBLEMS SLEEPING

If you are having problems sleeping it can affect your chances of developing dementia. The link between bad sleep and dementia is now proven and this study is looking at ways to change sleep patterns and reduce the risk and delay onset of dementia.

SLEEP IMPROVEMENT STUDY

We are recruiting individuals who -

- ❖ are 60 – 80 years of age,
- ❖ have trouble sleeping,
- ❖ feel their memory isn't as good as it was,
- ❖ are willing to spend 2 nights in a sleep lab and
- ❖ are willing to undergo brain scans.

For more information, or to register your interest, please contact :

Study Coordinator Jo Shaw :

Telephone: 08 6457 0264

Email: j.shaw@ecu.edu.au

THAT'S ALL FOLKS

All things come to those who wait - in the right queue – or that was the theory until COVID-19 decided differently when no matter how long you waited, toilet paper and hand sanitiser were not guaranteed.

And remember . . . Research shows that laughing for two minutes a day is as good for you as a 20 minute jog. Me, I sit in the park and get my two minutes in laughing at the joggers.

It is lovely to see so many smiling faces back together and I see that the enthusiasm for learning has not dimmed.

Long may it continue !

Bronwen Usher

