

Winter Party – January 2011



The meeting room at Argenta House was transformed into a gorgeous party venue, thanks to Hilary and Anna.

Gradually the Christmas tree became covered with the outlines of hands brought by members, some plain, some lavishly decorated; some with wise sayings on and some bringing hope for the New Year.

The most magnificent feast appeared on the tables as OWCHers arrived and added their contribution. We welcomed several people who came for the first time, some after hearing the Radio 4 You and Yours programme.

There was a really hopeful atmosphere and lots of positive energy as it seems as though the site at Barnet is really within reach and the long years of work, with their raised hopes and disappointments are finally bearing fruit.

WISHING EVERYONE A HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL NEW YEAR.





Quarterly Newsletter No. 44 January 2011

OWCH Member Profile

Rachel
Interviewed by Nicolette

For its time mine was a fairly conventional middle-class upbringing particularly in the sense that the boys got the education, whereas the girls got the "finishing".

My brothers went off to university and I did a secretarial course on the grounds that, as a girl, I would soon get married and have children and so have a man to look after me. Thereafter I worked in book production for nearly 20 years, eventually running my own small publishing business with a couple of male colleagues. But I also did get married - very happily I am glad to say - and had the expected two children.

When I reached 40 my husband (who was 25 years older than me) retired and I decided to quit regretting my lack of higher education and finally go to university. So I read for a BMus at Goldsmiths College because I played the cello and had always loved music.

This led to a new career: after a number of odd jobs, I got the opportunity to start an enterprise buying, restoring and selling good quality violin family instruments as an adjunct to an established piano shop that a viola playing friend of mine had recently taken over. The business flourished and before long I bought myself out and was able to operate entirely on my own.

I loved it - associating with craftspeople, professional musicians and amateur music lovers was a delight - but it was hard work too and so, as I approached 65, I decided to sell up and retire.

Good decision: retirement has opened up all sorts of new experiences and possibilities for me. For each of the first five years I spent three months working in a school in Kolkata, India. I am involved in running a lively Saturday morning music school for youngsters in North London, fund raise for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and have become a Listening Volunteer for the Samaritans.

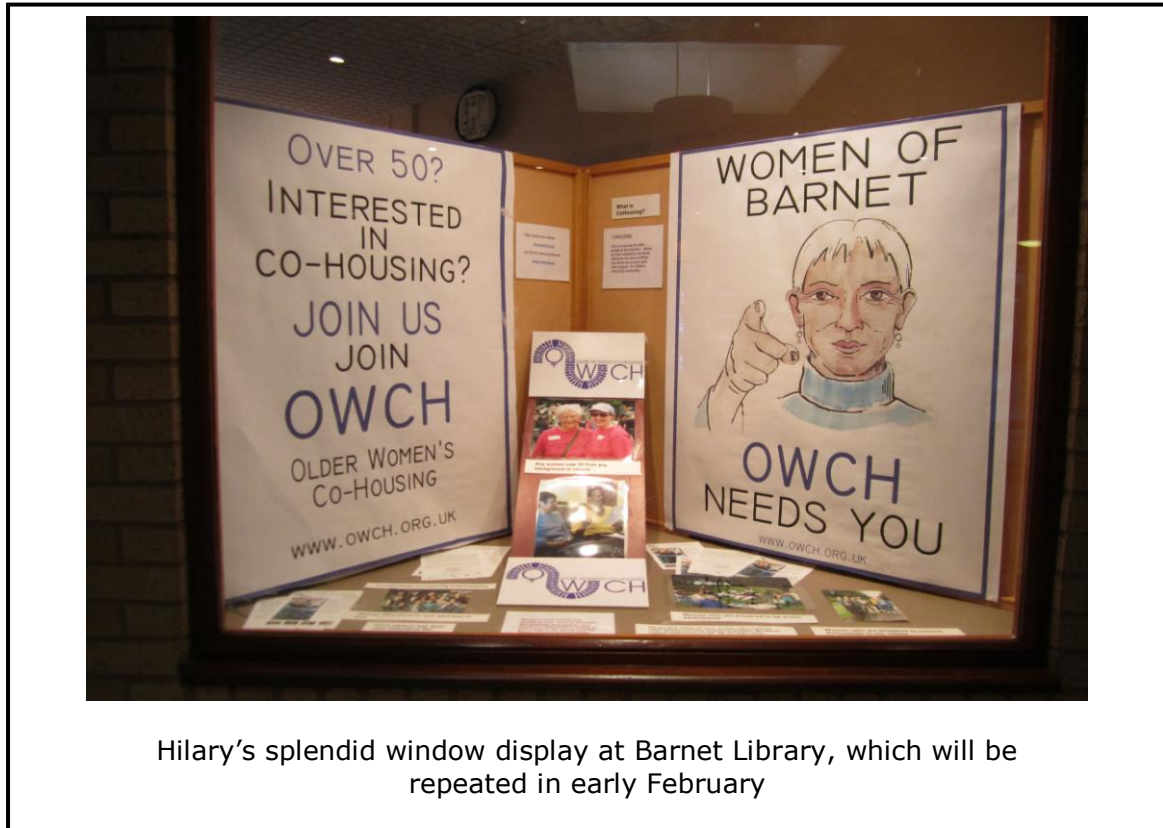
In addition an increasing number of grandchildren keeps me on my toes. I may be in my seventies, but life is still full of interest and new challenges.



Age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away,
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.

~Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,
Morituri Salutamus

Quarterly Newsletter No. 44 January 2011



Hilary's splendid window display at Barnet Library, which will be repeated in early February

Honeybee

I picked up the OWCH flyer at the Age UK day centre where I do voluntary work. I was keen to learn more about the project since I am thinking about downsizing my living accommodation and I like the idea of knowing one's neighbours and the OWCH positive outlook about older women.

I emailed the organisation and was invited to an informal meeting at the Honey Bee cafe. There I was met by Maggs, an OWCH member who said she had sent me an email saying that she would not be at the cafe due to the arctic weather that day. Luckily I did not get this email and Maggs did actually get there.

Anyhow! I learned about the long history of OWCH and how much work has been done (and is still being done) by very imaginative and energetic people. My first private thoughts were to wonder if I would be able to match their ferocious determination and organizational talents if I became a member.

Having attended my first formal meeting subsequently, I am still very interested and will attend future meetings to learn more.

Olga





Quarterly Newsletter No. 44 January 2011

Learning French at the City Lit

In 1977, a friend of mine was given £1000 to buy a property in France. She had lived in France, felt strongly attached to the country and spoke French fluently. She used the money to buy a barn in The Dordogne.

The barn was in a bad state of repair. Although the tiled roof was intact and the massive oak beams supporting it almost as good as new, the walls had crumbled badly. There was a mud floor, no lighting; and no water supply, except to a huge stone cattle trough outside. Despite all this, she was inspired by the building and the beautiful countryside and determined to make it habitable.

After having the appropriate drains and a water supply laid on, she managed to recruit work parties of friends to go out each year to set about making the place into a home. I can remember when the first shower was installed, with hot water; and a refrigerator obtained. We all learnt how to point a wall and do simple carpentry. We cooked on a central fire, the smoke escaping through the roof tiles and we slept on foam rubber mattresses in the hay loft. Then the floor was tiled and a new floor put in the hay loft which was made into a proper bedroom. Later, the cottage originally attached to the barn, but long since destroyed, was rebuilt with almost all mod cons.

From the beginning, we interacted constantly with the French people living in the surrounding hamlet. One elderly lady would cook for us once a year and would visit every day to teach us French words; and several

of the neighbours would come round to look at our work and tell us the latest news and weather forecast. They also came to our rescue in the event of emergencies, including medical emergencies and those to do with the building.

One year, when my friend and I picked grapes with the surrounding farmers, we were invited to join the vendange supper and some of our neighbours would invite us into their homes..

For all these reasons, I wanted to be able to speak French fluently. Initially, I enrolled for a course at L'Alliance Francaise, where we were taught in small groups, for 4 hours per week. My French improved enormously and I could enjoy talking with our French neighbours. However, I gave this up as I took on more demanding jobs and soon lost fluency.

So, after I retired, I enrolled for a French course at The City Lit, where I have been attending classes now for about six years. These classes are one of the highlights of my week. This is partly due to the fact that we are taught by French teachers and the standard of teaching is high. Also, we are introduced to French literature, history and current affairs. We have also looked at events in Francophone countries in different parts of the world and the difference between French spoken in France and that in Quebec.

As well as enjoying the intellectual stimulus which this offers, I've made friends, including Christine, who introduced me to OWCH. I look forward to meeting the other students and to meeting them

Quarterly Newsletter No. 44 January 2011

between classes to see French films. I regret that I still do not speak French fluently, but it is a great pleasure to be able to read a novel in French, albeit with a dictionary nearby.

I think that languages are interesting in themselves and there can be nothing more rewarding than to be able to communicate with people from other countries in their language. Also, we live in a multi-racial society and although most immigrants learn English in time, many newcomers do not speak English initially and some never learn English. Any one who wishes to be able to communicate with new immigrants would benefit from the ability to speak relevant languages.

Adult education is threatened by cuts in funding. It will be a tragedy if only people with enough money to pay the full fees could enjoy the opportunity to study throughout life.

I still visit the barn twice a year. Sadly, many of our original neighbours have died. However, we have made some new friends and farming, which seemed to be in decline in the area, shows signs of being revived, although not the viticulture.

Helen Matcham

Wouldn't they be proud of us for continuing in their tradition?



Dear Editor....

I wanted to tell you about....

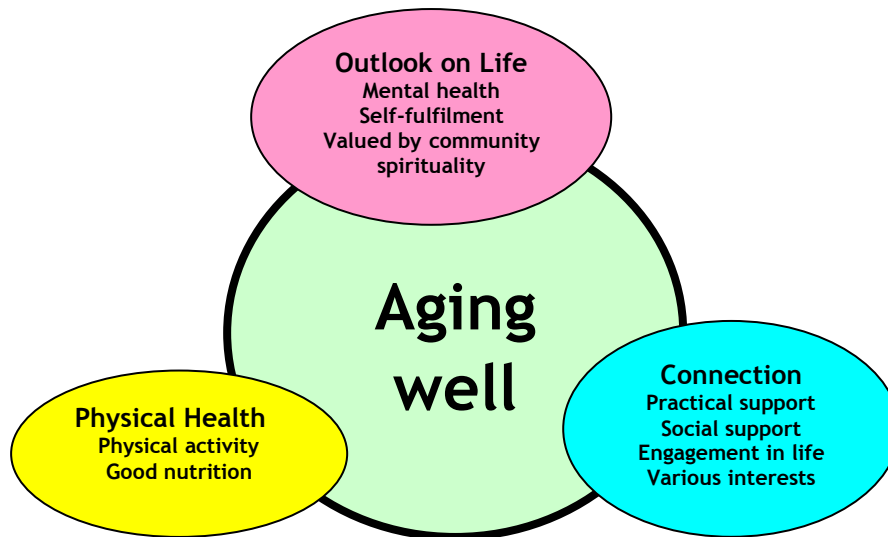
...the book I read... the film I saw... the interesting article I found in the paper.... the cartoon that made me laugh... the thoughts I wanted to share....

PLEASE TAKE A MINUTE TO SEND SOMETHING TO SHEILA FOR THE NEWSLETTER

“Father Time is not always a hard parent, and, though he tarries for none of his children, often lays his hand lightly upon those who have used him well; making them old men and women inexorably enough, but leaving their hearts and spirits young and in full vigour. With such people the gray head is but the impression of the old fellow’s hand in giving them his blessing, and every wrinkle but a notch in the quiet calendar of a well-spent life.”

Charles Dickens

Quarterly Newsletter No. 44 January 2011



A large study by Stanford University in California shows that getting older can lead to emotional stability and happiness. It confirms what we OWCHers know – that emotional support and connection, keeping physically and mentally active and being engaged with life will take us confidently into old age.

Laura Carstensen, a psychology professor and director of the Stanford Center on Longevity, is the study's lead author.



It's a prediction often met with worry: In 20 years, there will be more Americans over 60 than under 15 (this is true in UK too). Some fear that this will mean an aging society with an increasing number of decrepit, impaired people and fewer youngsters to care for them, whilst also keeping the country's productivity going.

However, a new Stanford study, published on 25th October 2010 in the journal *Psychology and Aging*, shows there's a silver lining to the graying of the nation. As people grow older, they tend to become more emotionally stable. And that translates into longer, more productive lives that offer more benefits than problems, said [Laura Carstensen](#), who has published many articles about her work on life-span development.

"As people age, they're more emotionally balanced and better able to solve highly emotional problems," she says. "We may be seeing a larger group of people who can get along with a greater number of people. They care more and are more compassionate about problems, and that may lead to a more stable world."

Between 1993 and 2005, Carstensen and her colleagues tracked about 180 Americans between the ages of 18 and 94. Over the years, some participants died and others aged out



Quarterly Newsletter No. 44 January 2011

of the younger groups, so additional participants were included.

For one week every five years, the study participants carried pagers and were required to immediately respond to a series of questions whenever the devices buzzed. The periodic quizzes were intended to chart how happy, satisfied and comfortable they were at any given time.

"As people age, they're more aware of mortality," Laura Carstensen said. "So when they see or experience moments of wonderful things, that often comes with the realization that life is fragile and will come to an end. But that's a good thing. It's a signal of strong emotional health and balance."

Whilst previous research has established a correlation between aging and happiness, Carstensen's study is the first to track the same people over a long period of time to examine how they changed.

The undertaking was an effort to answer questions asked over and over again by social scientists: Are seniors today who say they're happy simply part of a socioeconomic era that predisposed them to good cheer? Or do most people – whether born and reared in good times or bad – have it within themselves to age with a smile? The answer has important implications for future aging societies.

"Our findings suggest that it doesn't matter when you were born," Carstensen said. "In general, people get happier as they get older."

Over the years, the older subjects reported having fewer negative emotions and more positive ones compared with their younger days. But even with the good outweighing the bad, older people were inclined to report a mix of positive and negative emotions more often than younger test subjects.

Carstensen (who is 56 and says she's happier now than she was a few decades ago) attributes the change in older people to her theory of "socio-emotional selectivity" – a scientific way of saying that people invest in what's most important to them when time is limited.

While teenagers and young adults experience more frustration, anxiety and disappointment over things like test scores, career goals and finding a soul mate, older people typically have made their peace with life's accomplishments and failures. In other words, they have less ambiguity to stress about.

"This all suggests that as our society is aging, we will have a greater resource," Carstensen said. "If people become more even-keeled as they age, older societies could be wiser and kinder societies."

So what, then, do we make of the "grumpy old person" stereotype?

"Most of the grumpy old people out there are grumpy young people who grew old," Carstensen said. "Aging isn't going to turn someone grumpy into someone who's happy-go-lucky. But most people will gradually feel better as they grow older."

Copyright © 2009 Stanford Center on Longevity



Quarterly Newsletter No. 44 January 2011

Are you ready to downsize?

Possessions can truly *own us* as we struggle to clean, maintain, replace, and endlessly upgrade the "stuff." Shedding a few extra pounds of belongings can be very freeing! So, here are some tips to help us all pare down gradually.

1. For every new item you bring into your home, determine to lose another item.
2. Twice a month go through one drawer or cabinet. Separate the stuff you have used within the past year from the unused items. If there is something in the unused pile that you are certain to need in the near future, keep it. Otherwise gift that entire pile to trash man, friend, relative, or charity.
3. If you have clothing you don't really like or is too large/small, give it away.
4. Think of those collections of things you are keeping "just in case" – ice cream containers, newspapers, magazines, old ribbons and bows, gift boxes, string, rubber bands off the broccoli. Decide on a small number (maybe 1/4 of the number you now have) and dispose of the rest.
5. Is there a hobby that you have outgrown? Find another enthusiast and make her day.
6. Do you have possessions that are starved for affection? Remind yourself, "This thing needs someone to love and care for it!" Be kind to that item and find it a

good home where it will be cherished.

Perhaps you will be inspired by this quote from a true minimalist.

"I had three chairs in my house: one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." – Henry David Thoreau, the ultimate downsizer

Martha Clouse

(Martha@organised4life.com)



Your Newsletter editors, Sheila and Sue, would love to hear from you... email us at either s.nicho@talktalk.net or sue.peopleskills@live.co.uk

