

# U3A Emerald Winter Newsletter

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## President's Report

## Mal Bowmaker

We have recently had our Annual General meeting and there are some changes to our committee.

Kerry Willis is leaving us to pursue other interests and Tom Connolly is now putting his energies in to the newly separated Men's Shed. Paul Bianco has also retired from the committee after several years in the marketing role. We're grateful to these retiring committee members for their contribution to the smooth running of our U3A. In particular, many thanks Paul, we'll miss you on the committee. Three new members have joined the committee: Cheryl Padgett, and Anne and Bruce Richardson. All members are encouraged to volunteer some time to help with the administration of our organisation. Thanks to those members who attended the AGM and stayed for a social cuppa and chat after.

Our Secretary, Pat Buoncristiani, and I recently attended a U3A Victoria meeting. This is the committee that administers & oversees U3A at a state level, including the all-important tasks of negotiating for funding and developing strategies and programs for the 109 U3As in Victoria. The state committee is calling for help to fill some committee positions, including Treasurer and Secretary. U3A at all levels depends on people volunteering their time. If any member is interested, please contact me.

The Men's Shed is now separately incorporated which allows them to seek more funding and determine their own direction. We wish them well and thank them sincerely for the huge contribution they made to U3A over a long period. Our Working with Wood group continues to use the Men's Shed facilities for their classes.

It has been confirmed that Radio 3MDR has withdrawn from the Hub project, having secured premises in Upwey on very favourable terms. The dedicated area in the Hub for the radio station is now available for other activities. A meeting was held recently to discuss options for this space and also the area originally proposed as an art space. It was agreed that the radio station space would be redesigned as a gallery for art and craft exhibitions and workshops as well as other activities. The original smaller art space will now be a small meeting room (capacity about 10), some storage and consulting suites. The key focus remains to build in as much flexibility as possible to allow for the broadest range of activities. We expect the building to be complete mid- to late-2019.

Our new website has been designed and commissioned with the aim of attracting more members and advising members and the local community of our activities. It also allows easier access to the membership system.

We have been active participants in most U3A Victoria events. We represent Emerald at the Eastern Metropolitan Regional meetings, at U3A Council meetings where overall U3A strategy is discussed and at UMAS User Group meetings.

On behalf of all members, I thank the committee for their efforts over the past few months in ensuring the transition to our temporary premises has gone so well. Thanks also to all our tutors who give their time so generously. I also acknowledge the generosity of the several local organisations that have allowed us to use their premises for our classes. These include St Joseph's Church, Emerald RSL, The Evergreens, The Emerald Art Society, Chestnut Gardens, Gemco, Emerald Library, Cockatoo Hall and Kallista Community House. Also Gaye & Graeme Dunstan and Karen Black kindly run classes in their homes. Live, learn & enjoy.

## Program Co-ordinator's Report to the U3A Emerald AGM

All things considered, the moves to our new teaching venues went off very smoothly at the beginning of the year. This was due to the endeavour of your committee to ensure all the facilities were in place and ready for the teaching year. It was also made possible by the goodwill of each tutor and our members. We are a very friendly bunch of people prepared for a bit of give and take.

Moving out of U3A House meant that we had to provide large screen TVs and multiple point internet access in three venues plus more mobile whiteboards and so on. Security, care of the rented facilities, procedures for opening and closing buildings, what to do about the very important cuppa, ensuring facilities are left as we find them and developing goodwill with our hosts are all part of the picture.

U3A Emerald now uses 11 facilities. Emerald RSL, St Joseph's Catholic Church Hall, Chestnut Gardens, Emerald Evergreen Elderly Citizens' Club, Gemco, Kallista Community House, Emerald Arts Society, Cockatoo Hall and 2 private homes.

We currently have 298 members and run a record 44 classes namely –  
 Art History, Botanical Art, Art of Water Colour, Photography, Flowers For The Home, Needlework, Patchwork, Working With Wood, Creating Photobooks, Australian History, Cosmology And Astronomy, Current Affairs, Genealogy, Philosophy, Bird Watching, Pollution, Toxicology and the Environment, Bushwalking, Table Tennis, Yoga, Scrabble, French, Italian, Book Group, Creative Writing, English Language and Literature, Improve Your Writing Skills, Play Reading, The Issues Book Club, Poetry To Delight, Musicians Sharing Group, Over The Hills Singers, Armchair Travel, Cinema Classics, Coffee Club, Exploring Victoria, Gardening \*We have 4 Italian classes, 2 French classes and 3 Genealogy classes.

**Mac Craig**

## NEWS FROM AROUND OUR CLASSES

### U3A Armchair Travel Karen Alexander

For the first time various cables and USBs and links and whatever didn't result in a picture on the big screen. But fortunately we were few and huddled round the computer screen we were transported to the delights of Kangaroo Island's fabulous bushland, wildlife, walks, coastline and scenery.

But April was different. On the large screen, Colin Abbott took us on his bicycle around Australia. Over 15 months starting from his first night in Emerald we were transported to north Queensland, then across the top to Darwin, through the Kimberleys (not via the corrugated Gibb River Road) to Broome, south to Perth and across the Nullarbor to Adelaide then home to Melbourne. While it

was bitumen all the way the total distance was 17,000 kilometres. The same distance, according to cyclists he met in Darwin that they had peddled from Oslo to Darwin.

And the highly memorable bits for Colin? Many, including meeting great people, being invited in for a meal and a bed; the vastness and diversity of this country of ours; water and a sausage when it got just a wee bit hot across the Nullarbor – about 40 degrees; the rhythm of being on the road.

Colin had his bike and trailer with him, and some people had to be restrained from jumping on and riding off for their journey round Australia.

In the next few months we're off to Japan, India, Antarctic Peninsula and the Scottish islands.

... And a couple of great photos from our tutor and intrepid traveller, Malcolm Owen who is presently exploring the Shetland and Orkney Islands.



## Karen Alexander

### Table Tennis



No doubt we are keen - Whilst any 'normal' person is still languishing in bed, we insane table tennis players are up and out in adverse weather. This is an indication of the dedication of our group. It is all worthwhile though, not only for the exercise, but also the socialisation during, and then after at coffee.

We are down a few members at the moment as several have gone 'North' to better weather.

During the Hub building, we are fortunate to be able to play at the Mountain Road Stadium in Cockatoo, which is a much larger venue than we are used to, so we are always open for new members.

Our times are: Tuesdays 10:45AM-1:15PM, and Fridays 9:30AM-12:30PM, all year. We do not stop for school or public holidays.

**Linda Andrews**

## Art History



Our recent classes have focussed on Portraits, Self-Portraits and Printmaking. We have considered what methods artists use to make a good portrait, does the view of the face, be it profile, full or three quarters have any influence on the way you assess the work? Known as 'the gaze', is the person in the portrait looking at you, at something in the picture, or off into space? How does this affect your reaction to the work? These are just two of the questions we considered during our study. And why do artists choose to portray



themselves? Is it just a case of narcissism or are there any other factors to consider? Think of some self-portraits you have seen, what do you think? Are they flattering or are they portrayed "warts and all" or somewhere in between? Great fun to study!

How many different types of Printmaking are there? What is Relief, what is Intaglio? What is the difference between a woodcut, an engraving and an etching? What are mezzotints and aquatints? What is Planographic Printmaking? Lots of questions to which we have now acquired the answers! And coming up – a close look at European Art from the Renaissance to Postmodernism.



**Helen Waring**

## Flower Arrangement

My happy group have been increasing their design skills. The winter presents an opportunity to make something a bit rustic and long-lasting. One of the group mentioned she has two of the earlier arrangements still going with them being partially re-worked with things from the garden. So who thinks flowers don't last?

I hope some of our U3A members were able to see the Five Seasons Piet Oudolf documentary at The Cameo recently. It was beautiful, informative and made by a generous and enormously talented garden designer. Possibly can download now if you have missed it. We all find this great fun.



Photo from the May Class.

## Elaine Hahn

### Patchwork

Everyone has been busy finishing projects. I am happy to see such wonderful work from all the ladies. We are very comfortable here at my home, our numbers are down as it seems people have gone off to warmer climes. I hope they have taken some sewing with them to keep up their skills. For those still here we had a very relaxed day of show and tell. Not much work got done but the company was great.

## Karen Black

### Genealogy

Genealogy classes have continued with researchers looking for their family history. Anne Deschepper gave us a viewing of the Strathclyde University Genealogy Course, where you can undertake a Genealogy course lasting six weeks, at no cost.

Genealogy is not just a list of names of ancestors. It is about real people who lived, loved and worked, often in other parts of the world, with entirely different lifestyles, in different jobs to us. It is real History. However, at various times it can become very difficult finding things. Records might not be available or hard to track. So this year we have also given some attention to DNA.

Those who have attended our course have listened to me nag about proving the line. Not to accept blindly what Grandma said or at what Ancestry "hints" . But prove it, at least 2 points, certificates, parish registers. census and all of the records that we know are available. Know your family. Some names are indeed hard to find. I have 5 Smith families, try looking for Thomas in Wales. We undertook DNA. The results were lodged on "Gedmatch", which is a program designed to find DNA matches used by many researchers and offers a range of tools to bring about a match. Which they certainly did. A huge match to an Uncle John, father of an illegitimate child - the grandparent of the searchers who had been searching for years. Much rejoicing to have filled that gap in their knowledge of their family.

But wait, a bigger, better match slipped in above the previous *high*, a whopping big match. Which family does this belong to? We have only 2 families in New Zealand and we know both of them well. Can't be a match for us? We know our families. Then we are advised there are six matches to this particular family. Slowly, the penny drops, our Grandfather was not our Grandfather! Never mind what the certificates said. DNA is a science and DNA does not lie.

So my suggestion to all researchers, even if you are sure of your tree, you have proved it line by line, think about testing your DNA. Consider whether you want more cousins - Autosomal will give you up to 4 generations well matched, 5-6 generations can be a bit harder, as the DNA is weakened by the increasing number of Great Grandparents. YGene's will give the male line, father to son, from the beginning of mankind, with relatively slow mutations. Mitochondria (MtDNA) will give you the mother's line, mother to daughter, from first women.

If you have taken a DNA sample, and looked for matches, don't just rely on what your processing company has offered. Register free on Gedmatch, copy your DNA results and lodge them on Gedmatch. Instructions how-to are on the site. Consider whether you want to look for more results and lodge on My Heritage, and FamilytreeDNA. All companies cover a different client base, so it's well worth spreading your results around as many sites as possible. And in most cases, if privacy worries you, and in this day and age it should be considered, you can use an alias. That way you have made your results more widely available and it hasn't cost you any more.

For those who haven't tackled DNA, you can still use Gedmatch services by making a GEDCOM from your computer program and lodging it with them, again use an alias if you wish. It won't cost you a cent, and while there you can search the existing Gedcoms.

If any one has any queries, feel free to contact me, or come along to a class meeting, we will help if we can.

**Hilary Thomas** Tel: 9737 956

## Garden Group

The weather has finally changed and our gardens are responding, albeit a little confused, to that glorious rain; I have daffodils in flower. Such a delight to be out, preparing the garden for the winter.

The group has been out and about but for the next 3 months will escape the cold and meet at St Joseph's.

In April we tried our hand at propagation; cuttings, seed and seedlings, we will know the results in spring. The Wenzell's are kindly nurturing them for us.

May : saw us being introduced to the Allowyn Garden at Yarra Glen. A delight around every corner, and a Devonshire tea before heading home. Many of us plan to visit again when seasonal delights, such as the 100 metre wisteria walk is in flower, or the ribbons of bulbs are in full display. A garden for all seasons.

June: Mike Hammer is coming to introduce us to gardens world wide. Each garden has its own presentation. I think we will be wanting to go and see them ourselves after this.

July: Peter Allen will talk on permaculture ,as part of the care for our gardens.

August: Jeanette and Johannes will be back from their northern garden tour and we will share their memories and insights into these special gardens.

September: we are off to Debbie's, to see her garden and its special collection of bulbs.

We are always open to suggestions for garden visits or guest speakers. Being interested in gardens opens up a wide wonderful world and it is fun to explore some of it on a Monday with such a great group of people.

### Edith Colley



Beautiful Allowyn Gardens near Yarra Glen

### Current Affairs

To give you some idea of what the class does, here is an abbreviated version of the list of topics which we believe are topical. Members are asked to add to the list then we get everyone to select their two key issues and we then prioritise the order. At the May 7<sup>th</sup> the list included;

1. The New Start payment, should it raised? Would lifting the amount deter people from it?
2. The practice of pairing in the VIC Parliament. Ethics in Govt?
3. We currently have a businessman promoting his plan on how schools should teach?

3a *Cambridge Analytica* Did you see the 4 Corners documentary? Are you concerned about your data being shared or sold to other orgs who may use it to influence your purchasing decisions and political preferences?

4. James Comrey interview on 7.30 report.

5. Will the battle for control of the fire services influence your vote? 68No/20Yes
6. Should we fast track applications for white South African farmers?
7. Is there any value in Australia being in the Commonwealth?
8. Have you lost faith in the bank? Where will you place your millions in the future?
9. What are going to do about congestion in Melbourne?

### **MAJOR TOPIC INFRASTRUCTURE/THE PLANNING AND FUNDING OF**

We obviously need to plan many new projects to cope with the increasing population in Melbourne. This an urgent need but how can this be achieved.

*You are most welcome to come along to Current Affairs and participate.*

### **Dick Bartley**

#### **Australian History**

This year our major study is Tom Keneally's Book, *Australians Origins to Eureka*.

You can buy it for \$15 at QBD store in Fountain Gate or Knox City. This page turning narrative has been described as a corker.

To give you some idea of the program here is what we did on May 14<sup>th</sup>

Monday's Program for Australian History will include:

#### 1. Chapter 6.

The story of the second fleet is depressing, nearly as bad as the revelations from bank royal commission. It is wonder anyone survived. Some did to make a major contribution to Australia's future. Keneally's attempt to see the coming of the British through indigenous eyes is a good one.

PLEASE NOTE IT IS NOT COMPULSORY FOR YOU TO READ EACH CHAPTER BUT COME ALONG AND HEAR THE IMPRESSIONS OF THOSE WHO HAVE.

2. I have recently purchased a book (yes my wife says not another one!) on *The Big History Questions, Snapshots of Australian History*.

Did you know there was a very serious proposal to establish a Jewish state in the Kimberley or the Battle of Brisbane at which we were not fighting the Japanese? All will be revealed!

3. Discussion; Should we spend \$50-60 million remembering Captain James Cook?

4. Big History. David Christian has developed a program that teaches young people that they have a heritage as human beings. He will explain all via UTUBE.

*You are most welcome to join us on a second or fourth Monday at 10.30 at St Josephs*

**Dick Bartley**

### **The Book Issues Class**

The members choose and agree on an article, book etc

In May the topic was The Moment of Truth. History and Australia's Future by Mark McKenna. Previously, Hugh White's views on how we would get on Without America.

Members have a month to complete the reading and then we have a discussion at 9.15 on Monday prior to the Current Affairs class.

The objective is for class members to gain a more in depth insight in a current issue.

The aim is to ensure everyone has input into the choice so they are really reading about something that interested them.

*You are most welcome to try out the group. Please contact me and I can forward you our current reading.*

**Dick Bartley**

### **TRY A PICK ME STICK**

This is a special offer for all members of Emerald U3A. Do you have trouble in U3A classes being noticed and therefore limiting how effectively you can participate in the program? Well we have the solution for you THE PICK ME STICK. This has been "exhaustively" trialled in the Current Affairs sessions and the data indicates that the holder of the PICK ME STICK has increased his participation coefficient by at least 2-5%. He really didn't need too much extra attention but I am sure if you are not the assertive type the PICK ME STICK is for you.



**pick me**

The PICK ME STICK comes in three dynamic colours ABC red, a Murdoch blue and a neutral white and is available at a special price for U3A members. Be quick as sales are going through the roof. The Men's Shed is currently in negotiation with our people to mass produce the PICK ME STICK. Details in the next newsletter.

For more information contact the inventor Dale or come along to a Current Affairs and see how it works.

**Dick Bartley**

## Poetry To Delight

*Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind* - Rudyard Kipling

Where does the power of poetry come from? Poems are language in concentrated form. They make you feel and they make you think. They take you out of yourself, transport you to other worlds, away from your present troubles. Because they use words with beauty and care, they demand to be read with attention and without rush. The words must be savoured, because they are the linguistic equivalent of the best food and wine. Poetry is mind food, real nutrition for the soul. Attentive reading slows the breath and empties the mind of other cares. Especially if read aloud, and slowly, the rhythms of a good poem may be inherently calming and therapeutic, regardless of the subject matter.

At the same time, the subject matter of poetry - memory, love, the restorative power of nature, confrontation with sorrow and death - often serves for attentive readers as a mirror of their own feelings, a welcome discovery that we are not alone in our own dark or anxious state.

### Mac Craig

## Creating Photo Books

The Creating Photobooks Group that commenced at the beginning of the year has just completed its first series of workshops. The group met each fortnight at the Senior Citizens Hall learning the basics of producing *Snapfish* photo books. They also discovered that this simple looking exercise requires a degree of patience and persistence but the effort is worth it.

What a delight when a book is finished and finally arrives in the mail.



Karen Black with two books she produced - a great result for all the work put in. Well done Karen.

Here's Jill Lightfoot and Jim Thomas working on their projects with Anna Gdansk looking on. She was taking time out while photos were being uploaded from her computer to her *Snapfish* project.



Interested in putting your travel pictures, family photos in a photo book? It is proposed that we run another series of workshops later in the year. We'll keep you posted.

## Graham Dunstan

### Working with Wood

The new year is well under way and the WwW class has settled into Shed 2 courtesy of the Men's shed. We have a full complement for the start of the year with some new members.

We welcomed Karen and Penny and they are right into a project, making a tool box to carry tools between the class and home



Anne finished working on another table platter using a beautiful piece of timber. No sooner had Anne finished than she started another two platters, one using Sassafras and one using Huon Pine. Now she is working on the restoring of a small side table she has had lying around

This involves repairing the timber joins, stripping back the old surface and re-polishing it. It will look great when she is finished.



Cheryl is making a table extension for her sewing machine with guidance from Pepe and Jeff. The sewing machine will sit inside the extension and be level with the table of the machine. She will be away travelling till the



end of June when she will return to complete her project.

Jeff is still going strong on his cigar box guitar and has decided to



make an alteration to the original plans, making a small modification to better align the strings. Hugh brought in a challenging project. It was a thin turned timber disk plate about 80 cm in diameter with a few edge splits which we repaired in an innovative way to restore the entire piece. He also brought in some small Blackwood and Huon Pine pieces and created the layered stand you see in the photographs.

It is a Japanese inspired stand for a water filter or similar heavy object .



He is gifting it to a friend. He is also working on a table of decent proportions with some long held and well seasoned Blackwood beams. Roy made a step ladder for his garden and did a great job of it. He changed the design after realising it was too tall for the purpose he wanted so he ended up with TWO ladders. Mal decided the damaged parts of the shelving he made previously were beyond fixing so we will make entirely new pieces to fit the old. Pepe is away travelling and has mostly been helping out where he can. Jim continues to do his own things with something new most sessions His latest project is was a set of sawhorse trestles which he completed in the one session



Jim Thomas

**Blythe Osborne** Working with Wood class.

### Some notes from the philosophy class

What is beauty?

“Beauty enriches our lives. Living in the Hills it’s all around us in the landscapes, the majestic trees, dappled sunlight and at this time of the year the mists and autumn leaves. Of course beauty also manifests itself in our human creations – in art, poetry, music, in crafts and even in the lines of some cars or in the action of a fast bowler. Beauty, it seems, can appear almost anywhere.

But what is it? The old saying has it that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” suggesting that it is a purely subjective experience. But is that true? For the last couple of months the philosophy group have been looking at the attempts of various philosophers to understand beauty and its place in our lives. This topic has given us plenty to chew on and has provoked some lively discussion.

Soon we will be moving on to an introduction to philosophical ethics. This will involve us considering various answers to two significant questions: What is the good life? and How should I live? “

**Keith Purdie**



## Reading For Pleasure

Sadly our group has decided to take a break, our last meeting took place in April.

It's been lots of fun sharing a huge range of books with the group for over a year, with particular thanks to Dot and Marjorie for their commitment to turning up every month during that time with all kinds of interesting books for us to try. We hope to start up again in 2019, and look forward to welcoming some new members then.

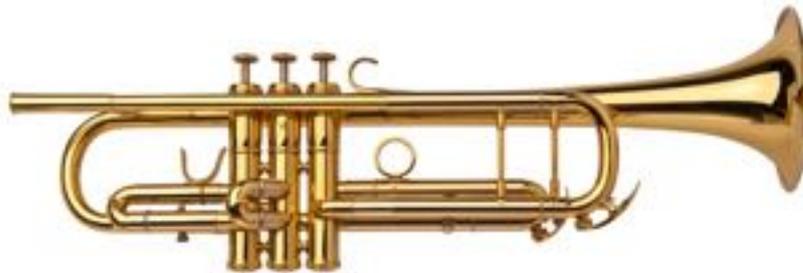
In the meantime..... happy reading !

**Kathy Smith**



## Musicians Sharing Group

This group started as a platform from which we, who have started learning an instrument (including voice) for the first time or, who have picked up an instrument where they left off after .. ?.. many years, could perform to a non-critical and sympathetic audience. We then found it was fun finding something we could play together. We are very fortunate to have a member amongst us who arranges music. She arranges for the mix of instruments that are played by members of the group. In the second half of our session we now make music together.



SO ..... if you play an instrument and would like to play in a group come along. We have room for a few more. We meet on the third Tuesday of each month at 10.30am.

**Gaye Dunstan**      **Tel: 5968 5220**



## PHOTOGRAPHY with Paul Bianco



Well, we've enjoyed an extended summer, albeit a little too dry, a summer that has extended well into autumn, and I think it's been great for ripening tomatoes. However as I write this, reality has struck: rain, which we obviously all need, but accompanied by very cold temperatures, and that's the bit I for one could do without. Even so, on May 9th ten members of the Photography group ventured out into the semi-cold to capture the last colours of autumn at Alfred Nicholas Gardens in Sherbrooke. If you've been to these gardens you would agree that is a lovely place to visit, especially in autumn with a camera in hand. Although much of the colour had gone there was still enough to inspire members. Here are a few of the images captured.

We currently have sixteen enrolled in the Photography group but as classes are held separately for

Beginners on the 2nd Wednesday and Advanced on the 4th Wednesday of each month I never have sixteen at any one time. I am therefore happy to have more people enrol. If you are a novice, or you've perhaps bought a new camera recently, you just want to learn more about taking great photos, or if you are already well-versed in the art but would like to share with like-minded members, go to the website and enrol. We'd love to see you.

**Paul Bianco**



## Creative Writing Class      What do you think of Emerald U3A?

The first time I heard these words I smiled indulgently at the little old lady who was espousing its virtues.

She was a regular customer of the chemist's shop I managed, but after she left I dismissed all thoughts of attending any sort of further education. After all, *my* third age was a long way off.

Still, it was nice to know that little old ladies had somewhere to pass their twilight years, doing whatever it was that little old ladies did at this University of the Third Age.

Now, when looking back from the vantage point of my own third age I realise what a dolt I was.

If anyone deserved an indulgent, patronising smile it was certainly not the little old lady. She had discovered one of the most rewarding, stimulating and mind enriching institutions, where third agers can not only embrace subjects they have long wanted to explore, but also engage in many exciting new ones, courtesy of our excellent volunteer tutors.

As members of our Creative Writing class, we submit our deliberations, machinations and cogitations, be they factual or phantasmagorical. In prose or verse we do it for the sheer joy of writing, and the companionship of our fellow third agers.

In summation, if this is the Third Age, then bring on the Fourth and Fifth! With no time left to ruminate on the negative aspects of advancing years, we give thanks to the creators of this wonderful organisation: *The University of the Third Age*.

### ***Margaret Abercrombie***

I am a new-comer to Emerald U3A and am enjoying my 4 groups very much. Everyone is very friendly. Stuart's creative writing class always has very interesting exercises for us to do in class, as well as the topic homework that we write about for the following session. Dot's bushwalking group has been to many excellent local places for walks of about 2 hours / 6 kilometres. Jean-Marc guides our Beginner French class through spoken French as well as giving us insight into the culture of France. I have 3 very interesting ladies in my Improving Your Writing Skills class where we have been proof-reading their creative work. There is an enormous reservoir of skills and experience in the people who come to all the groups. it is wonderful that this is shared with other people.

### **Peter Saunders**



Cuppa time during one of Bruce Richardson's brilliant sessions  
**Toxicology, Pollution & the Environment**

## U3A Brains are Beautiful

When I was younger I had a rather pessimistic view of my brain. The general opinion seemed to be that brains begin an inevitable decline from around the mid 30s. Reaching my peak so early made the downhill slopes look pretty rocky.

A mature brain weighs about 1.5 kg and contains some 100 billion neurons or nerve cells, which between them make trillions of connections or synapses. The frontal lobes of the brain which are responsible for decision making, impulse control, planning, working memory and the like may not be fully developed until we are around 35 years old - explaining a lot of the more difficult behaviours of young people. Is it really downhill from there?

There is little doubt that our ability to think fast seems to decline as we age, and we tend to have more memory lapses. But what we lose in being able to think fast can be more than made up for with our ability to think smart. The older we are, the more experiences we have added to our store of memories. We accumulate more and more practice in carrying out certain kinds of cognitive tasks, and so we become more skilled thinkers. Experience helps us to anticipate what might come next and to predict where different courses of action may lead us. We become a bit wiser.

I compare my stock of memories to a personal library. When I was twenty I didn't have a very big library, so when you asked me about a particular memory – a name or a fact – I could find it very quickly. At my age now, I have a huge library built over more than seven decades. Sometimes it takes me a bit longer to locate a particular person's name or recall an event. Speed has had to give way to complexity.

Learning new things doesn't have to become slower. Cognitive speed might decrease, but we have access to a whole range of learning strategies that we have accumulated throughout our lives. We may well be able to learn new things more efficiently because we know from past experiences how to best approach a new task. We have learned so many new things through our lifetimes – how to read and write, how ride a bicycle, how to bake a sponge cake, to measure area and how to paint a room, to drive a car. So many new intellectual and procedural skills. All that experience helps every time we want to learn something else.

We also learn how to discriminate better. We learn what to ignore, what isn't really relevant and what is critical. We don't waste as much time with things that simply aren't necessary.

What made me gloomy in my younger years was that I also believed that older brains no longer grew new nerve cells or neurons. It was generally held that the production of new neurons ended in early adulthood. Not so!

Recent research into brain functions and new imaging techniques have brought with them a lot of encouraging news for older thinkers and doers. While the numbers of neurons in some parts of the brain may decrease with age, a very recent Columbia University study found that older people continue to produce neurons in the hippocampus – the part of the brain associated with emotion, cognition and memory – at a similar rate to young people. There is some conflicting evidence about the speed of neurogenesis in the older brain, but it seems to be the case that we do continue to produce new brain cells throughout our lives.

Among our existing brain cells we know we can keep creating new connections – new neural pathways. Every time we learn or do something new, we create new connections and increase the complexity of our plastic, mouldable brains. Every time we practice something new we strengthen those connections. Learning new things and then doing them changes our brains, making them better.

The brain requires about 20% of the body's supply of oxygen to function properly. How does that oxygen get to the brain? Through blood vessels that are pumped through by the heart. Here is a key to keeping our brains functioning optimally. Exercise encourages blood flow, and blood flow gets oxygen to the brain. If we want our constantly evolving, changing and active brains to perform at their best we need to give them plenty of fuel – the oxygen carried by the blood stream.

As we age it becomes more and more important to stay active, to move around, to learn new things and to practice and perfect the things we have learned. Where better to do all these things than with a U3A group? If I was a doctor, and a patient over 55 came to see me asking about how to preserve their general health, I would write the following prescription:

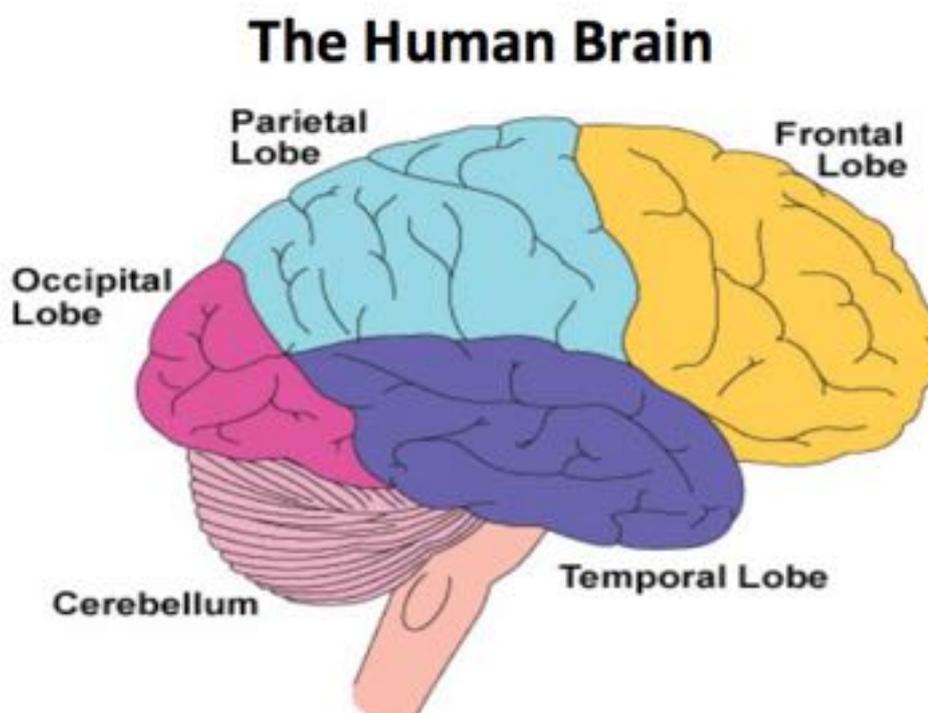
#### **For optimal health**

Daily exercise

A healthy diet

Join a U3A

**Pat Buoncristiani**



Thank you once more to all our  
great contributors.

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Photo - courtesy of Susan  
and Stuart Hodgson

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