

Informal Newsletter

Hello everyone,

In this newsletter we bring you news, information and items from members in an effort to keep cheerful and keep in touch in these dark days.

The usual U3A groups and Monthly Meetings have been sorely missed since the first Lockdown in March. But, surprisingly, some members have managed to continue meeting throughout. A small number of the Writing Group have met most weeks, socially distancing and continuing to practise their craft.

The Writing Group was one of the first groups started in EVU3A and in normal times members meet every Monday morning. They encourage each other with different stimulating ideas and are a very creative and lively lot. The stories produced can be scary, sad, outrageous, hilarious but always interesting. We look forward to a future anthology from the group.

From Liz Sullivan - member of the Writing Group

Childhood

Sliding down the mountain
On a cardboard seat
Splashing in the river
Biking round my street

Everyday is sunny
Everyday is long
Everyday is happy
Everyday is warm

The smell of dust when raining
A steamy wet dog dries
The smoke from grass fires blazing
That sting and burn my eyes

Everyday is sunny
Everyday is long
Everyday is happy
Everyday is warm

The drone of bees in flowers
The gurgle of the stream
The bark of dogs at twilight
An engine whistles scream

These are my summer senses
The summers of my youth
But I'm too old for passion
And no longer see their truth



The Strollers

Another group that has continued to meet quite regularly is an offshoot of the Walking Group. They could be called The Strollers, because they take their time and only go on short, flat, mostly local walks. They manage to socially distance as they walk, don't share cars or stop at cafes but take their own drinks and snacks. Brian Potts says that this week for the first time they'll be venturing out of Blaenau Gwent and meeting in Llangattock for a wander along the canal.

Au Revoir

One of our founding members, David Watkins (Dai), had been a member of the Writing Group and the Walking Group. Dai moved last month, to Mumbles Swansea, to be near his son. He says he's already joined a local writing group and is looking into joining Swansea U3A, the largest in Wales. We are sorry to lose him but wish him well.

This is a piece written by Dai in June while on a solitary walk at Blaen Y Cwm Reservoir.

The Rock

It's been quite warm lately. The sort of weather where people think about going off to the seaside for the day but because of Covid 19 restrictions we cannot. So, I decided to go for a walk around the Blaen-y-Cwm Reservoir above Beaufort. I have always enjoyed being up there in the cool breezes among the unfurling ferns and scent of mountain thyme.

I was walking along an old track coming from the reservoir and trying to think of a subject to write about. I thought about the larks rising vertically above me, chirping away and the lapwings wheeling and diving over the reeds. There was that hairy caterpillar loping across my path and the herd of ponies that eyed me suspiciously as they munched on grass.

Then I came to a large rock beside the track. Over a metre tall and wide, it sat there in the rough grass like a little stone temple in the hills. Why not write about that I thought, it's been there long enough, for hundreds and thousands of years. It sat and watched when Roman Legions built the road up there. It has sat there through the reigns of dozens of kings and queens. All the history of humankind to it is just a blip. All those sunrises and sunsets, winters and summers, unmoved and unchanged and it will still be there when I am dust, unless some machine comes along and digs it up to make another road.

It has changed though - its surface has been etched by the weather. So, if you looked at it with a magnifying glass you could make out the tiny seashells it is made of. It has little canyons filled with grass and moss, gouged by rain and ice. And lichens have written their stories all over its face. One side of it is shiny where the sheep have snuggled up to it on freezing winter nights and underneath live thousands of tiny creatures protected from paws and hoofs.

It may be just a lump of calcium carbonate or carboniferous limestone but this material, laid down millions of years ago in shallow tropical reefs, has a history inexorably linked to man's journey from hunter-gatherer to where we are today. It is said that early civilisations flourished in limestone country because the soil is more fertile. Several poems have been written in praise of limestone including a famous one by WH Auden.

Yes, there's something special about limestone. It has not been hurled red-hot out of a stinking volcano but manufactured by life itself.

Silent Valley

Tarie Carlyon is another keen walker. Some of us remember a walk she led in Silent Valley last year in the spring. There were carpets of bluebells everywhere, new beech leaves were unfolding and the sun shone from a cloudless blue sky. It was a really memorable day. We followed Tarie across streams and up twisting paths to high viewpoints above Cwm. It was very challenging but we managed it. Let's hope we'll soon be able to once again enjoy our valley in the company of our friends

Touch - Tarie Carlyon

Today I hugged a tree
and another and another,
beeches mainly, I lost count,
feeling their family firmness, affection,
stronger from the scent and strength
they share together, shared with me.



Having no-one to touch in lockdown,
enjoying their community
as I leant against gentle solidity,
my head and face cradled
in damp green mossy trunks,
I thanked them for hugging me.



One was leaning so far over
I could almost lie on it.
Feeling my feet on roots I wondered
with how many other trees
these roots were communicating.
What were they giving each other?

Looking up at their high canopy
protecting me and all under it
from the fine drizzle of a grey day,
I cherished every shining shade
of verdure, sunshine, sunset, earth,
in leaves beginning to turn.



My back bolstered by a beech trunk
whose branches on one side weep,
sweep down to the ground in arcs,
the leafy wall of a large half-dome,
I experienced briefly a loving home
caressed by music from the nearby stream.

Summer Walking

Two of our youngest and fittest members, Howard and Lynette Watkins, enjoyed sunny days in the summer scaling our local mountains and sent some lovely photos of the summits.

View from the Domen



View overlooking Cwm



Now the season and the weather has changed Lynette has sent a photo of a jigsaw she completed with the help of her granddaughter.



A local walk

For our U3A members who:

1. Feel vulnerable while out alone.
2. Who are of limited mobility
3. Require frequent rest stops
4. Have limited time

All of us at some time or other find we cannot get out and about as we would like. Age, injury, illness can all limit our activities.

I am in this frustrating position at the moment an injury is preventing me exercising as I would like so I have had to improvise with very short walks four times a day. So, I would like to share with you one perfect place for exercising.

The Cricket Club at the Eugene Cross park is about 2000 footsteps if you walk around the Cricket/Rugby field. There are many benches and rest places. The scenery is verdant and bright with our gurgling river bouncing by. Many people walk their dogs and their granddads there so you can usually have a friendly chat. The walk may be extended if you feel fit enough. The walks surface is flat and metalled and traffic free. There is even a coffee/Tea vendor on the rugby side. Car parking free, is at the rugby end and behind the cricket club.

Hope to meet you there soon...



Sometimes we are unaware of the treasures on our doorstep

Elizabeth Sullivan MBE

Circle Dance update - Mary Jones

Sadly, the group had just started and met for only two sessions before the Lockdown in March.

A friend, who leads an Abergavenny group, tells me eight of them have been meeting again and dancing. They don't hold hands and aim to keep 2 metres apart. She takes along a garden cane, which is about 2 metres long, to help them visualise the distance! There's no socialising indoors once the session is ended but they all enjoy the exercise and touch of 'normality'.

Circle dances are short simple dances from all over the world, some from ancient traditions and some new, they can be lively or slow and reflective. There are known to be benefits to mind, body and spirit. It's enjoyable, expands a range of movements, improves concentration and feelings of well-being.

Our group will need to find a new hall when we start again as the Institute is no longer available. But one day we will be back!

Coffee Mornings

Committee member Gary Denmead has started Coffee Morning Zoom sessions on Tuesdays and Conference Call Chats on Thursdays. On miserable grey December days, when it's too wet and cold to go out why not spend an hour in pleasant and uplifting company? Join Gary and friends and cheer yourself up!

Message from EVU3A Committee

The committee is continuing on your behalf and meets regularly by Zoom. If you have any questions, items or photos to add to our next informal newsletter, please let us know.

Meanwhile, keep safe everyone and keep in touch until we all meet again.

