



## U3A Northern Illawarra Inc A Bridge to Learning



Newsletter No. 71

Editor: Ainslie Lamb

March 21 2020

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I expect most members will now be aware, our U3A activities for the remainder of Term 1 have been cancelled, due to the coronavirus COVID19 pandemic. There then follows the four week recess prior to Term 2. So we will be without U3A for at least 6 weeks. During this time we need to be very careful to protect our health and avoid risk of contracting the virus.

Your Committee has been considering ways to maintain social cohesion between our members in the time of “social distancing”. For example, co-ordinators of our Special Interest Groups are encouraged to maintain contact with their members. We are compiling email contact lists to facilitate this – in fact, I expect this newsletter to be distributed to most of our members by that means. Our Website and bush telegraph will also be utilised. No decision has been made yet as to whether Term 2 will also be cancelled – the Wednesday Talks, Film Society and several group programs have been prepared – but the Committee will monitor the situation and keep members informed of developments.

In the meantime – Take Care, Keep Calm and Carry On. This time will pass: *Always look to the sun, and the shadows will fall behind (Ron's Grandmother).*

Best wishes, *Ainslie*

### *Congratulations ...*

In Seniors Festival Week 2020, we challenged the students of Bulli High School to debate the topic *It's A Great Thing to Live in the Digital Age*. Taking the affirmative argument, the U3A team (Elsa Story, Tamara Jero and John Ryan) won the debate, turning the tables on the students who had won last year's debate. The debate was adjudicated by Wollongong Lord Mayor, Cr Gordon Bradbery, AM.



*Photo - members of both teams and Cr Bradbery*



Our Trivia Team also won this year's U3A Groups Trivia Competition conducted by Shellharbour and Kiama Councils. *Photo –Dianne, Ainslie (with Owlbert), Roy, Pat, Ireena, and Margaret.*

## ***WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S NO U3A?***

It's very important, especially in times of social distancing and self-isolation, to keep the mind positive and the brain and body active. By all means, read (especially those books you bought but haven't got around to yet) and watch television and DVDs. Here are some other suggestions:

- The *Brain Games* group will have a weekly online session of trivia, puzzles and creative 'homework' activities: if you would like to join in, contact Ainslie ([ainslie2518@gmail.com](mailto:ainslie2518@gmail.com))
- The *Reading Aloud* group will also be sharing and discussing items of interest online: if you would like to join in, contact Ainslie ([ainslie2518@gmail.com](mailto:ainslie2518@gmail.com))
- Learn something new, that you haven't done before: drawing, painting, craft, origami, calligraphy, paper planes; you may discover a hidden talent. Google for free online teaching sites. Later in the year, we could have a U3A *Coronaworks* exhibition.
- Learn a musical instrument – how about the ukulele – we might even get enough people involved to make up a U3A ukelele performance group
- Undertake a virtual tour (on your computer) of art galleries, museums, parks and cities - google to find sites around the world (and think of all the money you save by not having to actually travel to them!)
- Subscribe to *Your Life Choices* (google the name) : it has a daily bulletin with interesting and useful articles and information for our age demographic, and also has a section on trivia and games you can access (no cost)
- Limit your time watching TV newscasts – too depressing. Instead, go to online sites which offer a wider view of the world and new things to learn. Subscribe to *The Conversation* (google *the conversation au*) an online daily magazine of topical and informative articles by University academics and journalists (no cost). A similar site is Inside Story (google *inside story australia*)
- Work on a 500 or 1000 piece jigsaw – you can come and go to it at any time: its therapy!
- Keep up exercise – a walk around the block or by the beach in the sunshine does wonders for maintaining a positive attitude to life and the wonders of nature – noticing small things like the song of a bird, a colored leaf, a wandering butterfly, a troop of ants, the curl of a wave
- If you are a member of the Balance'n'Bones group, you can do many of the routines at home. If you would like a copy of the DVD to follow at home, contact Ainslie ([ainslie2518@gmail.com](mailto:ainslie2518@gmail.com)) to purchase a copy ( \$20 , or \$25 if you want it posted to you: cash, cheque or online payment accepted but not cards)
- Keep a journal of the experience of *Life in the Time of Corona*; write your memoirs; write some poems or short stories to share with friends online
- Build an igloo with toilet rolls; or make other fun sculptures in your yard with 'found objects' from around the house (you can photograph it then dismantle it)

*Other suggestions welcome.*

## **The Changing Mind - A Neuroscientist's Guide to Ageing Well by Daniel Levitin**

*Book Review by William Leith, Evening Standard., 27 February 2020*

Daniel Levitin is a neuroscientist and this is a book about the human brain as it gets old. Levitin tells us what happens, why it happens and what you can do about it. Well, what can you do? The short answer: eat real food, get a proper night's sleep, walk in natural environments and make sure your brain is always working. He quotes Keynes: "In the long run, we are all dead." True. Still, we don't need to be so passive. We can put up a fight.

So the book has an optimistic tone. Levitin tells us about age-defying people such as Mick Jagger and Jane Fonda — Jagger has a personal trainer and dances a lot; Fonda walks and lifts weights.

Then there are the "blue zones", places that produce lots of people who live beyond a hundred years — "Nicoya, Costa Rica; Sardinia, Italy; Ikaria, Greece and Okinawa, Japan (some lists add Del Mar, California)". What happens in these places? Old people do lots of healthy things such as walking and gardening, they have many human connections, they eat real food and avoid stress. Of course they die in the end. But something is keeping them alive and healthy for longer. Levitin thinks people in Okinawa, Japan live longer because they are always learning something new.

Levitin thinks about what the brain needs to do when we're young. It constructs our world for us. As we interact with our environment, our brains retain all the data that is useful to us. The world we see is not the world as it is — it's the world as our brains want it to be. The brain constructs the world for us. Of course, there comes a point when the brain goes wrong and our world starts to deconstruct.

There's a very good section on memory and how our memories are not fixed. They're a work in progress. In other words, they are malleable fiction, rather than stable fact. We tweak and spin things to help us get through life. Also, "they are not stored in a particular place. Memory is a process, not a thing". It is created by getting out there and interacting with the world, collecting data and trying to observe patterns in the data. That's what the old people in Okinawa are doing. They are still learning. We see why it's better to walk in the wilderness than in a park. In the wild, your brain learns something new with every step you take.

Levitin loves to tell stories. He's a good companion. He tells us about when he walked around wearing distorting lenses to see if his brain made compensations (it did). As we get old, we can't see or hear so clearly but the brain uses its experience to improvise. In the end, things are not so great. Our brains start to go wrong, then our world falls apart, then we die.

But still, there are things we can do. He cites the sleep guru Matthew Walker — one reason we need to sleep properly is that, as we sleep, our brains are cleaned by cerebrospinal fluid. He also cites the food guru Michael Pollan who says: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." By "food", Pollan means whole, rather than processed.

So, eat like a scientist. Exercise adventurously. Sleep like a baby. Make your brain work hard. Have lots of friends. "And allow yourself to have fun now and then," Levitin advises. "Eat a little ice cream. Have some chocolate."

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*I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures - Lao-Tzu*

## PROPOSAL FOR A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP RELATING TO MUSIC

*Music is the only sensual pleasure without vice – Samuel Johnson, British lexicographer*

If you accept this statement by Dr Johnson and it appeals to you, then please sign up to join a group of similar minded musicians who just enjoy getting together and making music.

If you play, or have ever played, any musical instrument, including the voice, or merely like good music, then you are welcome. Suggestions and ideas for making these sessions recreational and entertaining will be well received.

*People who make music together cannot be enemies, at least not while the music lasts - Paul Hindemith, German composer.*

Contact Jan Brown ( [northhillta248ax@internorde.on.net](mailto:northhillta248ax@internorde.on.net) or 4268 2017

This could be a very enterprising and entertaining U3A activity – contact Jan so he can start to build the group, in readiness for resumption of U3A activities – Ed.

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