



OPEN AGE

Members' Newsletter

New Horizons • Second Half Centre • The Avenues • and more
Spring 2021 • Issue No 36

NOW BOOMERS ARE ZOOMERS!



Greetings! After more than a year's absence, the members' newsletter is back as an email – but if you have access to a printer, you can print off your own copy. And now, instead of New Horizons only, the newsletter is aimed at all Open Age members and welcomes contributions from all sources.

Your newsletter team is delighted to announce that COVID-19 has not stopped many members from remaining active, even if the centres where they usually meet are currently closed.

Hundreds have been taking part in online Zoom classes and activities run by Open Age, after booking through the charity's website and connecting with the tutors and members on computers, laptops, tablets and smart phones.

The online programme is shown on the website (see page 12) and listed on weekly emails to members. Classes include all the usual – fitness and movement, languages, literature, dance, drama, art, computing – not to mention quizzes, cooking, bee-keeping, singing, sewing, guitar and more.

Some members have contributed their experiences, photos and pictures to the members' blog on the website. The one-mile fundraising walk last

summer created great interest, with a flurry of reports from many parts of London.

A specially enjoyable day was the annual Silver Sunday event – the national day for celebrating older people on 4th October 2020. One highlight was a dance session in which people could join in at home, standing or sitting, while being filmed for a video on the website.

For more details, including how to contribute, see back page.

GOOD NEWS!

For those who cannot access Zoom, a few outdoor activities could be introduced from May and, depending on the success of the government's roadmap (currently from 21st June), members who do not have access to the remote programme will be invited to indoor activities. Depending on how tests go, Open Age hopes to reopen centres and operate as normal, with the addition of a small remote programme, from September. Please see the CEO's emailed letter dated 22nd April 2021 for full details.

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Open Age AGM 2021

Open Age held this year's annual general meeting online on 27th January 2021, in the form of a Zoom webinar (internet seminar).

Nobody was quite sure how it would turn out, but nearly 50 members tuned in. They heard chair Dean James report that despite the incredible difficulties posed by COVID, Open Age had been fortunate in maintaining financial support, unlike some charities, and managed to set up a virtual service to connect with members after the March 2020 nationwide lockdown.

In the first month, staff made over 10,000 phone calls to inform members of centre closure and to check on members' welfare along with identifying who needed extra support, said CEO Iain Cassidy. From 4th May, Open Age launched a remote programme and now offered over 130 hours of activities a week, either Zoom session or phone groups, with over 1,200 members taking part.

This compared with over 4,000 members the previous year. The fall was due to various factors

- some did not have the equipment or skills to use Zoom, others did not want to, and still others were deterred by the enrolment system or by having to go on a waiting list till the following term if their chosen course was full.

Head of Learning and Community Development Angela Sharkey said the introduction of Zoom classes had been excellent, as members gained confidence. Open Age delivers over 40 courses a week each term, in digital learning, art, languages, drama, creative writing and lipreading.

After watching a video from the Open Age website of Silver Sunday activities, including a seated song and dance presentation of the song *Good Morning*, attendees heard from Head of Outreach and Support Bee Burgess, who described how her team had produced a lockdown cookbook with recipes supplied by phone groups. It is on sale on Amazon.

Open Age has unveiled an in-person plan to cater for anyone unable to access the remote programme - see page 1.

Last year's Open Age AGM 2020

Fund-raising was a key concern at the Open Age AGM held at The Avenues Centre, Westminster, on 29th January 2020. One of the charity's biggest expenses was printing, which cost Open Age £70,000 a year. Those who could were urged to make sure they are listed to receive emails, rather than picking up hard copies. Members could also read the latest newsletter on the Open Age website.

CEO Iain Cassidy told members who attended from all the Open Age venues that they could help further, if they wished, not just by leaving money in wills, but by donating, either online or by filling in a form.

The Annual Report was summarised through a colourful audio-visual presentation featuring photos of members' key activities during the year.

These included the sponsored Open Age Mile, which involved 24 participants and raised over £600

for Open Age, and an Outstanding Achievement Award won by the Physical Activities team.

Iain said there had been a rather low response to an evaluation form sent out last autumn by email. Of the charity's over 4,500 members, only 740 has responded, which suggested that the system of communication might require reviewing.

But members could also publicise the difference Open Age has made by telling their GPs about the charity and keep up to date with events and news by following Open Age on Twitter and Facebook. Open Age had over 2,000 Twitter followers, and an average of 550 people visited the website every week.

The Twitter link is
@Open_Age

The Facebook link is
facebook.com/openage

Goodbye Ivan, hello David!

Ivan Gibbons, much admired tutor of the current affairs class *In the News* for 25 years, left the job of Open Age tutor in early 2020 when a leg operation some months earlier required further surgery.

He came to visit the class in a wheelchair in February 2020 but later emailed members to confirm that he had decided to retire because of the uncertainty of his situation and the new political landscape.

Margaret Porta, a member of the newsletter team, said at the time: "Ivan was a well-respected, very much liked, extremely knowledgeable and professional facilitator who also had the human qualities required for bringing together such a mixed group.

"He had a capacity for empathy and a great talent for encouraging reticent people to speak. His warm personality influenced each session."

Little did any of us know that the COVID pandemic was about to change the world landscape forever. In March 2020, Open Age centres closed and classes ceased while staff checked on members by phone and email to make sure everyone was managing their lives.

But *In the News*, like many other classes, has risen from the ashes and now has up to 25 people taking part in discussions on Zoom, compared with a previous attendance of 25-40. It also has a new leader in class member David Devore, who oversees the two-hour session every Tuesday morning, assisted by Hervé Bessieres as coordinator.



Ivan Gibbons

"After looking through the newspapers, I draw up an agenda of ten possible subjects, always topical and sometimes controversial. I aim to select from UK, international, environment & technology, plus a lighter theme," says David.



David Devore

"I then circulate the agenda with background notes by email. In class, members vote for three topics, and we discuss these, while I pick the lighter topic.

"Zoom requires some sort of computer ability, but we have

adapted well and learned a few little tricks – like how to raise and lower your hand electronically! Everybody can see everybody else, and one of the benefits is that we can hear people better.

"Most people have got a pretty good handle on it, and everybody seems to enjoy the sessions and find them stimulating."

The class has a strongly international flavour, including members from Japan, Canada, the USA, Germany, France and Ireland, among others, bringing a breadth of different experiences.

This suits David, as he himself is an American from Boston with an ethnically mixed European heritage. He first came to London as a student, but then travelled in Europe, studied in Sweden, taught English in Spain, married a Geordie and finished up teaching maths at the now closed Sarah Siddons Girls' Comprehensive School in Paddington.

"Like all teachers, I try to make sure that the quiet ones have an opportunity to speak. We encourage a wide range of opinions, and everybody can say anything (as long as it is respectful), but you can't dominate the floor for too long.

"I try to choose topics with pros and cons because that's how I see life, and my whole object is to get people to think about why they support something.

"One of the best things about *In the News* is hearing other viewpoints. You suddenly discover that some people see things in a totally different way from you."

Meet the Head of Member Experience

Exercise, running, yoga and painting have helped keep Jenny Marshall going during the year-long pandemic – but her principal concern as Head of Member Experience is promoting the interests of Open Age members and lending a listening ear to them wherever they may be.



Those who attended the Second Half Centre in North Kensington will know her well, but others too may have met her before when she visited locations before lockdown.

She says: “I am currently working from home, like the rest of the Open Age team – however, when we are back to a new sense of ‘normal’, I intend to spend my time between the office, three centres and community hub. So I would always encourage people to come and say hi. You can’t beat a good chat and a cuppa!”

Brought up and educated in Kent, Jenny holds a National Diploma in Arts, a BA Hons degree in Education Studies and a Level 5 Diploma in Management and Leadership.

She joined the SHC as office manager in January 2013, and three months later was promoted to Centre Manager, overseeing its growth until it hosted 90+ hours of weekly activities, workshops, lecture series with famous guest speakers and art exhibitions with leading artists.

In April 2014 Open Age took over the running of the centre from its base in the same building – the former St Charles Hospital.

“I had to amalgamate two centre programmes (the Positive Age Centre in North Kensington where OA hosted activities for a number of years and the Second Half Centre), along with a very diverse mix of members!

“My role was very hands-on, working closely with members, volunteers, tutors, coordinators and interns, developing a wide range of activities for older people, along with working with local community partners.

“I found a passion for the job and continued to work with many arts partners to break down barriers for older people and make their voices heard.”

Soon Jenny was promoted to managing the Kensington programmes, whilst still managing the daily operation in SHC. Successful partnerships she has led on for Open Age have been the National Theatre’s Public Acts programme, The Saatchi Gallery Members’ Exhibition, The Tate Modern Members’ Exhibition in partnership with Flourishing Lives and recently the work with the Courtauld Gallery.

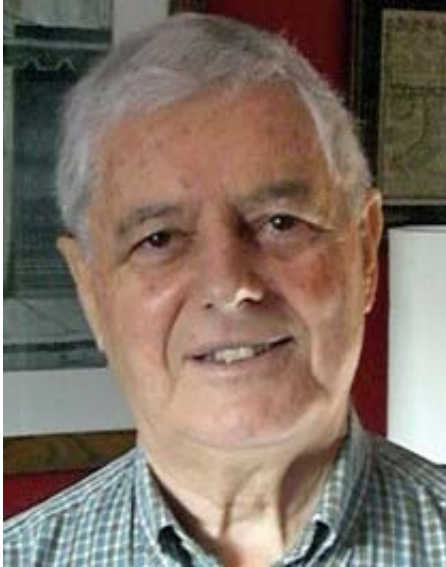
In February 2019, following the restructure within Open Age, she was promoted to Head of Member Experience, which combines developing special interest and social activities and the art and cultural strategy, along with ensuring members have a positive and consistent experience. This involves developing policies, agreeing work standards for third party tutors, implementing and identifying training needs, and line management of locality managers and their associated teams who run our three centres and community hub.

“I am proud to be part of a team that has been so innovative in the response to the coronavirus,” says Jenny. She refers partly to more than 10,000 phone calls made by Open Age staff to check on which members needed support, and the organisation of online classes via Zoom.

“The OA team worked tirelessly to get to the point where we are now and to offer such a diverse range of activities in an incredibly short space of time, in a new way that we have never done before. Being part of Open Age doesn’t feel like a job, but a family, and we all have our parts to play.”

How John discovered Russian poetry

Former TV broadcaster, actor and university lecturer John Edmunds celebrated his 92nd birthday in lockdown mode at his home near Brighton on 3rd April 2021 – as he did in 2020 when the COVID pandemic has just started.



A volunteer tutor with Open Age for 12 years, specializing in Shakespeare and French classical plays, John has spent most of the last year translating Russian poetry instead of teaching at the New Horizons centre, as his classes don't lend themselves to Zoom. He hopes the regular classes can resume in the autumn.

He discovered Mikhail Lermontov, an acquaintance of Pushkin, by chance through a friend and realized that existing English translations did not do his poems justice – especially a moving piece called *The Angel*. To check out John's versions online, click on lermontovreborninenglish.com

His pandemic experience was slightly skewed after his first vaccine jab. He had a bad reaction called 'agitation', with nervous tension, needless anxiety and insomnia lasting seven weeks.

"I've known others to have had it, but it's not mentioned on the warning list of possible side-effects," says John. "Otherwise I've been in very good health and I am well aware how lucky I am at my age."

It's all a far cry from April 2019, when John celebrated his 90th birthday with a buffet lunch party for members and friends at New Horizons amid a mini performance concert alongside the cake and candles.

He recited a few favourites, including a humorous self-penned ditty about the injustice of life – rather appropriate today. For anyone who missed it, here it is:

It's Not Fair!

When Sally got less jelly than her brother,
Outraged complaints she showered on her mother:
"It's not fair, Mummy, he's got more than me!"
To her it was quite clear what ought to be:
Life should be just, good conduct should be
 lauded,
And naughtiness should never be rewarded.
In Wordsworth's words, still "trailing clouds of
 glory",
The child in time would learn a different story.

When of her rights she claimed to have been
 cheated,
Her mummy might have countered, "You've been
 treated
The way life is, my darling: life's not fair,
And that's a truth that you'll just have to bear.
For one thing, Mother Nature is a bitch
Much crueller than Snow White's horrid witch,
Who on both good and wicked often launches
Plagues, fires and floods and sudden avalanches;
She suffers babies to be born with genes
That don't work as they should, a horrid means
Of seeing that even the starting-line is skewed
In life's race: some are happily imbued
With riches, brains and talent, others lurk
Bound by their handicaps in endless murk.

We're here on Matthew Arnold's darkling plain,
Where there's no certitude nor help for pain;
So don't expect too much and do not whinge.
If you experience a rosy tinge
Of joy, bask in it for it will not stay;
Appreciate what good things come your way,
And cosset those less fortunate than you,
Remembering that no-one gets their due.
There is no fairness: we're the slaves of chance
More likely just to hobble than to dance."

But Sally's mummy, though she knew the truth,
Bit back an answer she thought too uncouth.
Besides, she was too busy on her phone
To adopt so philosophical a tone.
"Oh, Sally dear," she said, "here's some more jelly.
Now hold your noise and go and watch the telly."

John Edmunds

Milly and Hannah's Joy of Singing

Lockdown may have made you feel like screaming at times – but why not make it more tuneful, and join between ten and 15 other eager songsters via your laptop?

Before COVID, tutor Milly Bianchini used to teach singing at the Second Half Centre in North Kensington. Now she hosts two sessions a week on Zoom for all Open Age members, called Singing For Joy with Milly.

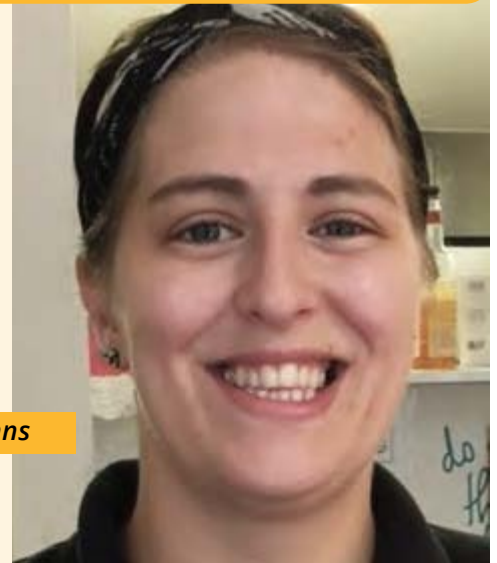
The Tuesday and Friday sessions cover a wide range of genres including pop, folk and musical numbers and sometimes opera classics, if Holland Park Opera Company are available for concerts or teaching. This can include warm-ups, breathing exercises and voice projection.

A few participants were members of the Chelsea Belles choir at New Horizons, including Daphne Morgan who led the group when the leader left.

Milly is assisted by Hannah Munns, who left her job as New Horizons café manager in August 2019 to become the senior co-ordinator at St Margaret's Centre, South Westminster, near Vauxhall Bridge.

Apart from popping into the office occasionally to check on the electrics and the water, Hannah has been largely home-bound with computer and phone in the past year like her colleagues.

Since the Open Age Zoom programme started, she has taken on numerous roles as co-ordinator of up to eight Zoom classes – issuing invites, opening lessons, providing technical support and dealing with any problems.



Hannah Munns

Singing For Joy is a particular favourite because Hannah has always loved to sing, and she and Milly are both half Italian.

But on Monday she assists with Shared Reading (Ghada Gaylani), on Wednesday Greek Mythology (Ghada again), on Friday Beginners' Drawing (Clare Newell) and also Literature and Poetry Appreciation and Creative Writing (Robert Silver), plus random baking sessions and other projects like Open Space for talks and speakers (Geoff Brown).

On Thursday she co-ordinates a phone group for people who don't use Zoom but want to stay in touch with interesting talks and topics, ranging from architecture to Jane Austen. Themes are chosen by Hannah and the North Westminster co-ordinator Andrea Carrington.

WOMEN IN ART by phone link

How many women artists can you name offhand in comparison to male artists?! I certainly was at a loss to do so. I was therefore excited to have the opportunity to participate in a Telephone Link class which, drawing from the collection of the National Gallery, consisted of three one hour sessions when we were introduced to and discussed the roles that women have played in the Western History of Art.

From artists to sitters to patrons, we discussed and learnt about the vital and important contributions that these women have made. I found it fascinating and was pleasantly surprised at how well it worked via telephone link despite one or two very minor glitches!

Our facilitator, Fiona, did an excellent job picking up our comments and her explanations were so informative and enlightening (we were sent images of the paintings being discussed in advance). It is hoped that once the galleries and museums open again, we will meet up with Fiona to view these paintings for real and continue our observations and discussions – to which we are greatly looking forward.

*Judith Steuart-Corry**

* New Horizons member Judith ran a general knowledge quiz group every Wednesday at Chelsea. The quiz group now continues on Fridays via Zoom and is open to all staff and members. Judith does not participate, but sends in questions.

Lynn and her dog Pepper

Open Age member Lynn Bellamy writes:

"I used to go to the church in Fulham for Sandra Decosta's zumba class, then Vivian's zumba class. I still do online zumba with Vivian Tuesday and Friday, plus keep fit and soca, and also singing on a Friday. I try to do a class every day

"But my dog Pepper has helped me to get my daily exercise. If I didn't have him, I would not have bothered to go out or get dressed.

"He likes to meet people, so I get to talk... at a distance... to others on our walks.

He used to give his paw to people, but with COVID he now touches your foot instead – so he is following COVID rules too!"



Kiss from Kit Kat



Daphne Morgan (New Horizons) was inspired by her cat to pen the following poem:

Shielding now for many months
And getting fed up of my home,
But I am one of the lucky ones
As I do not live alone.

Hugging and cuddles from humans
Is something that I miss,
So imagine my joy, when Kit Kat jumped up
And gave me a wonderful kiss.

It's so unusual, never done this before,
Although lived with us for six years.
Maybe his little pussy cat heart
Could sense my unshed tears.

Daphne Morgan – March 2021

Gee Gee the parrot

Louise Hooper's pet parrot featured prominently in the spring 2019 (Issue 33) edition of the New Horizons newsletter. Parrots are highly intelligent birds, and her beloved African Grey named Gee Gee is no exception – entertaining, unpredictable and often hilarious.

Her company has been a godsend to Louise during the lockdown. Gee Gee spends time with her plush toy friends Frosty Tiger, whom she adores, and Daffy Duck, whom she really rather dislikes, but her favourite place is the top of her owner's head, where she loves to sit, and from where she either reads Louise's book or watches television.





Grand National: Is horseracing humane?

Last year's Grand National was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. But this year on Saturday 10th April 2021, it was back, along with most other races, although courses were closed to crowds and punters had to be content with watching on TV and betting online.

It was a momentous occasion, with the race being won by a female jockey for the first time. But two horses fell and one had to be put down. So the age-old question returns – is horseracing humane?

There have been 12 horse deaths in the Grand National itself since the year 2000, but 54 over the whole of the three-day Aintree event. Often euthanasia follows a broken leg, because horses cannot get up or walk on three legs due to their body weight.

Animal charities and animal lovers often demand that this and possibly other races be banned, but some experts take a different view. They say horses love to run, and if they know their rider well, they enjoy being ridden on most occasions.

Galloping at top speed in a race is not the same as a leisurely trot or canter, but the World Horse Welfare charity in the UK, having studied the horse-human partnership for over 90 years, believes it is legitimate to have horse sport so long as the welfare of the horse is put first.

They would like to see a 'social licence' to operate – which ensures some sports are "ethical, transparent, accountable and reflect the values of society" – extended to horse sport.

CEO Roly Owers, writing in the summer 2019 issue of their magazine, pointed out that horses are always subject to injury, whether they are being ridden or not.

Liverpool University research from 2011 showed that 40 per cent of horses had suffered a traumatic injury within the past year, but only 13 per cent of injuries occurred during ridden exercise, while 62 per cent occurred while the horse was turned out in the field.

"We can never reduce risk to zero, but equally we need to recognise that there is clearly higher risk in sport," adds Mr Owers. "Every fatality or serious injury needs to be reviewed, and lessons learned."

Can risk really be reduced? Mr Owers says yes. After two fatalities during the 2012 Grand National, the WHW participated in Aintree's review, which resulted in several changes, including the replacement of solid wooden fence cores with softer plastic. This has reduced falls and probably deaths.

Other factors include the number of runners, the fitness of jockeys and horses, the length and position of the race and racing frequency. The role of the recently formed Horse Welfare Board will be fundamental in overseeing these.

An American psychologist says horses often want to win to become the dominant horse, even if they don't know it's a race. As part of a herd of horses in motion, it's in their natural instinct to run, and they will often run fast, with a few that try just a little harder to be in front when they take part in group gallops.

After the race, they know that people are excited – or sad. "They take a lot from how the people around them are reacting because they are sensitive," says Jenifer Nadeau, an associate professor of equine science in Connecticut. "That's the thing about horses – they do read people's body language."

Kay Shelley

Paul leaves, but Sara steps in

Centre Co-ordinator Sara Ferreira had to hold the fort at New Horizons in March 2021, when the Senior Centre Co-ordinator Paul McGowan left to take up a new job with the Mental Health Foundation.

Previously, she and Paul took turns going into the office to keep up with the maintenance, but like other staff they were both busy co-ordinating Zoom classes online. Paul used to look after History of Art, Italian Archaeology and Poetry and Literature Appreciation, which have now been distributed between the rest of the Member Experience Team (centre



Sara Ferreira

coordinators and their managers). Sara looks after a Theatre Dis-

cussion class on Wednesdays, Italian Archaeology on Thursdays and is currently helping the Adult Community Learning (ACL) tutors pending recruitment to fill the vacant administrator position.

She also co-ordinated a two-part online workshop with the Saatchi Gallery in February and March called *Portraits and Memories*. It featured French street artist JR's project *Wrinkles of the City*, which links old people and architecture.

Paul acted as quizmaster to the weekly quiz on Fridays but now staff will take turns to create and host the quiz monthly.

Poet Colin gets more creative

Open Age has kept members busy during the COVID pandemic by offering online classes via the Zoom video conferencing service app for one-to-one or group meetings.

One of the attendees is Colin Angwin, who enrolled for creative writing classes at New Horizons, Chelsea, over four years ago and poetry classes at the Second Half Centre, North Kensington, two years ago. Both are run by Robert Silver, who like many tutors was happy to continue teaching online where possible.

A few people dropped out, but the remaining members pulled together to make things work, says Colin. "Meeting online is not as good as meeting in person, but Robert handles it very well. In the Poetry class we study established poets, and for homework we can write our own poems. For Creative Writing, Robert sets us a theme each week and we write a short story or an essay. With all this, I don't really

have time for any other classes.

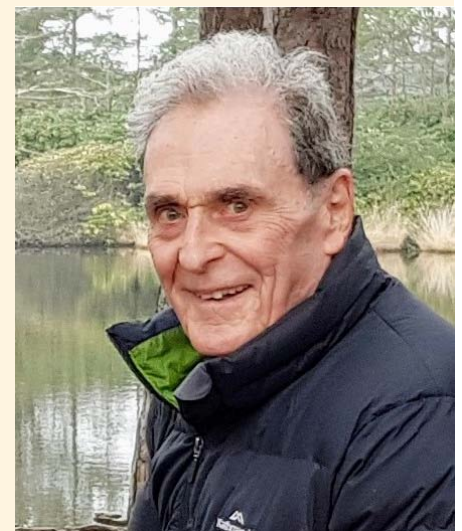
"In both classes it is fascinating to see how varied styles are and how differently we interpret the themes he sets. Robert says he could identify the work of each of us even if we sent it in anonymously.

"A recent example of a Creative Writing theme was 'Rivals and Enemies', and for Poetry we have created responses to poems written by women during World War I."

Born in what was India but is now Pakistan, and a Kensington resident of long standing, Colin spent many years working in marketing for an American business information company. He always enjoyed writing, but it wasn't until he attended a sample at a Silver Sunday event at Open Age that he took the plunge and signed up.

He enjoys both classes so much that just before the first lockdown, he decided to keep a record. He was about to set up a

blog to feature poems and stories he had written, starting with one about a blazing row on the Piccadilly Line.



Colin Angwin

He is still struggling to set up Colin Angwin's Tales on www.colinangwin.com - but you can read some of his work (and that of Robert Silver) on the website [All The Write Lines](#), featuring contemporary poetry by London's best unknown poets.

Hear 'Strong 4 You' on YouTube

Rudyard Kipling's poem *If* which starts with: "If you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs..." may have inspired many of us suddenly trapped in the most devastating global catastrophe for a hundred years.

What some people did in the COVID lockdown could be the subject of many a future novel, feature or memoir.

Reading, writing, painting, walking, keep fit, singing, dancing, chatting on Zoom or Skype, were just a few of the rediscovered activities that kept us busy, in touch and even sane, in a situation hardly anticipated in our wildest dreams.

Like many other musicians, your newsletter editor Kay Shelley and her songwriting partner, former pop guitarist

Gavin Sparks, were inspired to produce a song about the struggles of those battling the Covid-19 pandemic.

Strong 4 You was not originally written about the pandemic, but it seemed so appropriate that they decided to go into the studio and record it. The producer's daughter added her vocal remotely from the west coast of the USA.

In September 2020 they posted the song on YouTube on their Sparks & Shelley site, with an amateur video made by Kay. Since then it has had nearly 600 hits, even though they are virtual unknowns.

The poignant pop ballad was one of many songs penned by the duo. In normal times, Kay & Gavin run a jazz and Latin band with female singer called Pimp My Jazz, which performs swing jazz, Latin, Great American Songbook and other well-known standards in the London area.

Their performances include a few songs from their 14-track album of original jazz and Latin songs, but they also write in other styles, including pop, country, R&B, blues and ballads.

All 14 songs – or at least two-thirds of each – can be heard online on the music platform SoundCloud under the name Pimp My Jazz CD. Some of the

songs are also played on a US-based online radio station called Outbound Music, which can be accessed around the world.

Kay, a retired journalist who writes lyrics for Gavin's instrumentals, said: "It gave us something positive to do, because all our band gigs were cancelled.

"*Strong 4 You* is about someone whose spouse or partner is suffering

or seriously ill. It could be seen as highlighting the struggles and stresses that people were going through in the first months since the March 2020 lockdown.

"Lots of people seemed to like it and found it moving or inspiring."

A handful of Sparks & Shelley songs have been covered by other artists, including an Italian singer and an Irish country singer, although copyright payments are minimal.

A few years ago, the late great singer George Michael heard one of their jazz songs and emailed Kay via a mutual contact to say: "I heard the song *Loving Love*, and I must admit that there is talent in you. You did a great job!"

Anyone interested in the band or the songs can contact Kay via her details on the back page, or go to the website lemonrock.com/pimpmyjazz



Kay and Gavin



The web link to *Strong 4 You* is youtube.com/watch?v=IBZ8BfepwAk

Trapped between England and France

Travelling to and from France is not easy during a lockdown, as Open Age member Yonita Macgregor found during the past year. She lives in Chelsea but has a cottage in France which needed renovating.

When the COVID emergency began in March 2020, Yonita was still in Burgundy in her converted barn. She had worked there for five months helping builders with improvements, including putting in a new back door and new flooring.

As the lockdown began, she had to travel back to the UK by ferry to sort out a leak in her London flat. Despite a shoulder injury incurred while carrying a beam, she hoped to return to France in May 2020 for an urgent repair to her roof tiles.

Her French roofer Monsieur Claude worked alone and was not on the internet, so when France closed its borders, she had to phone to tell him where to find the key for the ladders. After many failed attempts, she got through.

"It was a nightmare because the heavy rain threatened to damage my display of paintings," recalled Yonita, a former decorator. "The roof had about five holes and would not last another winter.

"Then I found that M Claude was having a knee operation, so the work was delayed. But he said the roof would survive."

Yonita expected the frontier to reopen in June, so she planned to take a bus to France early in July. In fact, she was not able to return until September. But her roofer had started work, and she aimed to stay till it was finished.

"I had a date for my return to London, but I could not leave with the cottage unlocked. I also needed to get the chimney fixed," said Yonita, who cancelled her bus ticket with no refund. "It was getting cold, with no real heating."

Yonita found herself trapped by fresh travel restrictions and was still in France in November. Worried about Brexit and Christmas, she managed to book a new bus journey in December and, after many delays and form-filling, she reached Paris then crossed the channel to Victoria.



Yonita's cottage roof

Yonita explained: "I only managed a night-time booking because my son understood the new paperwork. Three men had filled the bus with enormous holdalls. Other luggage had to be literally squeezed in.

"At Customs in the early hours, we had to sit and wait our turn. The bus took off for London in the dark. At Victoria I heaved a sigh of relief, as my tiny bag was still there. But it was sitting in this vast empty space!

"Only five of the passengers had got through to Victoria. What happened to the others? Were they sent back? How? I did not realize that a little form-filling could have such dramatic consequences!"

Back in London, she reconnected with relatives and had her first vaccine jab in January 2021, followed by one in April. She hopes to return to France this summer to get her garage floor tiled and use the space to exhibit art work – although France may still have a curfew, and one cannot be away from UK for more than three months out of six.

"Here at home I struggled to find a dentist and I need more exercise. But my life in the past year has been quite traumatic, so it's good to have a break."

R.I.P. Vivienne

Vivienne Aldington, who wrote a piece on the NH Book Club a few years ago, passed away very suddenly in March 2021. Judith Steuart-Corry, who attended her funeral, writes:

“About two years ago Vivienne suffered a brain bleed but recovered well after a year’s rehabilitation

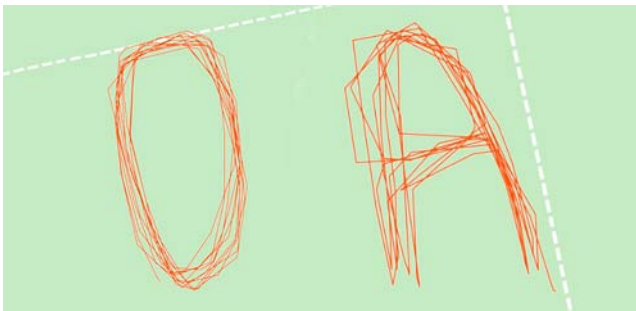
regime. I don’t know whether this was a contributory factor. She and I had a regular Tuesday morning ‘meeting’ over a cup of coffee during the lockdowns, so I shall miss her greatly. She was so down to earth, with a delightful sense of humour – we shared many a giggle.”

Our Open Age website

A good way to keep in touch with what other members are doing is to access the website www.openage.org.uk and click on ‘News & Member Blog’.

Open Age events featured on the website include:

▶ The Open Age one-mile fundraising walk in summer 2020. Walkers of all abilities and ages chose their own routes – from Hyde Park to Ruislip Lido! The most popular age category was 66, while those aged 70 and 74 were also well represented. Our super-active Locality Manager (South) Hervé Bessieres decided to run a mile or more each day for seven days to form the letters OPEN AGE.



Between them the 60 participants managed to raise over £2,500. The highest fundraiser was Emma Cohen with her team, the Ferry Quays Boaters, and the walker responsible for the most recruits was Jade Dalton. The award for the wackiest mile(s)

went to... Hervé!

- ▶ A 12 Days of Christmas You Tube video featuring members and staff singing the popular carol with actions.
- ▶ A Lockdown Cookbook produced by the Outreach and Link Up team with recipes from phone groups.
- ▶ A writing competition reviewing the year 2020. The winner was David Lennon, who in Lennoesque style entitled his piece *Imagine All The People*.
- ▶ A Dance-a-Thon to mark Silver Sunday in October 2020. Six one-hour classes in different dance styles allowed those taking part either sitting or standing to create a fun video and enjoy movement and exercise. The Silver Showbiz event was organised by Open Age and London-based Step Change Studios, and featured many easy ballroom and Latin dance moves. Step Change was set up in 2017 by former dancer and ice skater Rashmi Becker to provide opportunities for disabled and non-disabled people to dance – having been inspired while helping her brother, who has autism and learning disabilities.

Check out the Open Age online art gallery website, showing work done in recent years. Look out too for Lockdown Art stories, Lockdown Poetry and details of creative and community activities.

Editor Kay Shelley. **Contributors** Iain Cassidy, Ivan Gibbons, David Devore, Margaret Porta, Jenny Marshall, John Edmunds, Hannah Munns, Judith Steuart-Corry, Lynn Bellamy, Daphne Morgan, Louise Hooper, Colin Angwin, Sara Ferreira, Yonita Macgregor, Hervé Bessieres. **Designer** Jennifer Iles

The **Open Age Members’ Newsletter** is written, edited, designed and distributed by volunteers and staff of Open Age. Please send in your news! Email: kayonhold@hotmail.co.uk or text Kay on 07748 662213.

Open Age connects older people for a fun, active and fulfilled life. Open Age is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No: 1160125).

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