

Welcome to a rather different update.

Top of the list is what the groups are up to, followed by some committee news and mention of the new Outreach group, designed to help new members find what they need and to keep in touch with everyone when we can't physically meet.

Group Information

As our lives have changed, so may your engagement with the U3A. Below is a brief summation of the group activities that are, or are not, taking place. At the end of the newsletter there's also a piece about what the committee have been up to and what may affect you.

This may be a good time to join another group or help set up a new one online. There is nothing holding you back from joining a group through the website if something interests you and starting the dialogue with the group leader.

I'm taking names for a book group that several of us will share the running of if you email pippa.boardman@staustellu3a.org

Beginners Family History have had 4 meetings remotely and Carol Foley has email info on how to get started for new members.

Digital Camera Club: Peggy and the group regularly share pictures with each other.

Digital Photography: Regular homework and critiquing of photos continues with hints and tips from Steve. Recently they had a competition and the Gold Prize winners shot is attached.

Environmental Group: Jill reports that individually members are making face masks, shopping for others and making jams and chutneys.

Gardeners are digging out a way forward and hope to meet in August as a small group, although not under the U3A umbrella as we cannot yet approve that.

General Computers have now not only met each other on Zoom but also have met household pets. They are meeting regularly on line.

Quiz Group are sharing and circulating questions but missing getting together

Spanish: Both groups are active, with beginners doing weekly homework including cookery challenges and have now started Zoom classes. The advanced class have a number of resources from Teach-It that Jo and Rosemary are keeping everyone on track with.

Theatre Group: Linda sends out a monthly newsletter with reviews of members favourite films/plays/shows. This makes entertaining reading and a good prompt for things to watch on a rainy day.

Travellers Tales or VSS (very short stories) Keith has been circulating stories within the group, one of which is attached from Sally Hayward. Sign up to Keith's group if you'd like more of these.

Finally, perhaps saving the best 'til last...

Wine Appreciation

Amanda has kept the wine group members entertained with monthly newsletters containing reviews of what people are drinking. Some group members have been sharing wine tasting events on Zoom, either with the Sunday Times, Naked Wines or at each others homes. Other group members have shared wine reviews of tastings they have been doing.

Pietro's Quiz group

An unofficial group, that sounds to be very entertaining. Thank you Pietro for all the time you are putting in to make this work.

Other Information

Zoom Offer

If, as a group leader, you would like to try to run an online class we will pay for your first months usage to get your group going. Normally the first 40 minutes are free, but any longer is chargeable. Please let either Chris Scott or myself know if you would like this. We can both be contacted through the website.

Electronic payments

Chris is looking at alternative ways for us to pay in the future and he is making good progress with an electronic system. If there is any member with relevant experience of setting up or running this type of system your advice would be gratefully appreciated.

Data Protection, Equality and Diversity statements and Beacon

All the above are going to become cornerstones in our U3A. Training, familiarisation and usage are taking time. The policies are starting to appear on our website and Sue Brown will be contacting you when she can do the training for the group leaders.

Until we meet again

I keep hearing how many of you are missing the social chat and vibrancy that our large and small groups enjoyed.

There are many groups that are inactive due to the current regulations but we will be meeting again when allowed and look forward to meeting up and sharing time together. The guidance we have received is still that we are unable to re-start as the insurance does not cover us.

The new Outreach group is planning to try to speak to most members over the next few weeks so you have at least a phone call to look forward to.

With warmest wishes for all your safekeeping

Pippa

Traveller's Tale (VSS) Proposal in Peshawar

It all started when a bomb went off in the next square to where we were looking around Peshawar.

Here's the context. In October 1988, I set off with 21 other people I'd never met before to travel by Bedford truck from London to Nepal. Camping all the way. I'd just left a job as a management consultant, staying in 4 star hotels every night. The group was diverse and, sadly, didn't click particularly well, unlike other groups we met. One guy jumped ship to hook up – and later marry – a girl on another truck.

We had driven through Germany, Austria, Turkey (a few tales here), Syria (fascinating, now destroyed) and Jordan (yes, we visited Petra before there were any hotels or public transport). In those days, Britain was always falling out with either Iran or Iraq. This time it was Iran. I'd have loved to have seen Isfahan – has anyone else been? – but our British driver couldn't go through. They sent in an Australian driver to take a second truck through Iran on his own and meet up with the group in Pakistan. Most of the group had to backtrack from Jordan all the way back up to Istanbul. Food supplies were scarce in the markets and the weather was cold and miserable so their spirits were low.

My tent-mate Ethel, a Canadian teacher, John, a British doctor and I had a few more resources than the others and decided to make a detour to Egypt. Two fantastic weeks in the sun seeing the most amazing sights and adventures. Another VSS for you one day...

So, as we landed in Peshawar two weeks later, most of the group were fed up and bored whilst we were tanned and enthusiastic to experience the next country. I remember being awed at the street stalls selling false teeth – big, clumpy things made out of clay. And we were taken to watch a group of eunuchs dance. Yes, eunuchs actually existed in 1988, men with their bits removed, dancing for money.

The next day, Ethel, a girl called Philippa and I were wandering round the square when a Pakistani man approached us and told us we had to get out of there as a bomb had gone off in the next square. They took us to a place of safety. And, I figured, we had safety in numbers. The man's name was Shah Jahan, the same as the man who built the Taj Mahal. For the next couple of days, he and his brother took us to places we wouldn't otherwise have seen, such as a gorgeous jewellery shop which sparked my love of the lapis lazuli stone, and to a local restaurant where we ate in the back room, as women weren't allowed in the main restaurant. We sat on cushions on the floor and ate out of bowls. The men took a shine to us, gave us garlands of flowers to wear and asked to sleep in our room at the foot of our beds to worship us – nope, we weren't that gullible!!! I did find it hard to turn down the offer of a trip over the Khyber Pass. All the stories of the old hippie trail came to mind but these guys made their money selling refrigerators on the black market and even I knew it wasn't a very clever thing to do, plus we had the rest of the truck trip through India to Nepal to do.

Shah Jahan invited me out in the evening to the cinema and I thought I'd take a chance. The film was some romantic Bollywood-style thing, not very interesting. What did shock me to the core was when the lights went up (we had arrived late). Not only was I the only woman there but all the men seemed to be engaged in acts of solo gratification, if you know what I mean...Yuk! I couldn't get out of there fast enough.

Undeterred, Shah Jahan asked me to marry him in the car after the film. He said he could get me a job as an English teacher at Peshawar University. He really seemed to mean it whereas I was just on an extended holiday and not the slightest bit interested.

The next day, when I'd returned to the group, there was a vote as to whether to stay in Pakistan or go to India as you could only cross the border on three days of the month. I had the casting vote. I voted to stay. The driver over-ruled me and decided to go as they'd had enough of my disappearing act by then. Reader, it got worse and I left the group, along with Ethel and Philippa, at Agra, in India. A wise decision and we went on to have a great time in Nepal and then Thailand. I soon moved on mentally from Pakistan.

I phoned home for the only time on Christmas Day. I'm sure you will all remember that that's how it was in those days, no emails or Skype, just poste restante postcards and letters. My mum told me they had received a very nice Christmas card from someone called Shah Jahan!

Gold Winner Digital Photography Competition



Best wishes

Pippa