



ACTIVE AGEING

Compiled and produced by members
of the Bradbury Active Age Centre

Bradbury 2009



*It's not the years in your life that count,
it's the life in your years*

INTRODUCTION

When Age Concern's Bradbury Monday Discussion Group sat down one day last summer, little did we know that a spark in our conversation would light a fire of enthusiasm that has resulted in this little book, and even a website link.

We were talking generally about old age and our approach to it. This lead on to what actually motivated us and gave us a positive attitude to ageing. One by one our members spoke up and we realised there were so many diverse reasons for keeping going, moving forward.

After the meeting several members expressed the same thought, that this subject had potential for something more for Age Concern rather than bullet points in the Newsletter, which was the original intention.

With the full support of Carol Marley, Bradbury Development Manager and volunteers Brian Irons and Pauline Lindsey, Editor of the Bradbury Bulletin, an open meeting was arranged whereby others could contribute their ideas and their own motivations. This meeting was so successful that a booklet was envisaged giving all these individual views on positive ageing. The result is a booklet of encouragement to those who were perhaps feeling age to be a burden, showing them how to pack every aspect of living life to the full within their personal boundaries for their remaining time.

In the pages that follow we hope you will be inspired. Each contributor has given a reason to be. Each contributor has reached an age when life has given them the best and the worst of experiences and here they emerge as triumphantly looking forward because

THANK YOU

**To all those who have contributed to this
publication.**

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Some Collected Personal Views on How to Age Positively

Write a daily journal! Writing a journal is a way of life for me. Not everyday, no specific time, but write I must. I have conversations with myself, I can say what I like knowing no one will ever read it. I can even laugh to myself at silly things that I have done (teapot in the fridge instead of milk for instance). But more importantly, irrational fears shrink to proportionate levels in black and white. Worrying situations can be discussed and sometimes conclusions reached. That is the therapy of keeping a journal and it really does keep life moving forward and relegating the past to archives (which sometimes can be a good record when needed of things that have happened).!

Don't give up on creativity! As eyesight fails and hands begin to feel a little less mobile, it's easy to give up on those creative impulses you once had. Don't let that happen - it's so important to keep that creative spark going. Computer software, colour printers, photocopiers, and digital cameras can combine to help you create some really pleasing results for your friends and family can all be very easy to use. How about making a resolution to send everybody a hand-made Christmas card this year and save a bundle of money?

Be gregarious! Easy to say, not so easy to do as one gets older and less mobile. However, it's more a state of mind than anything you physically have to do. If you're interested in people and interested in listening to what they have to say, then gregariousness just comes as part of the package.

Take charge of your own life! Don't allow 'stuff' to intrude or prevent you doing what you want to do! Even for the not so able, there are organisations and agencies that will be prepared to listen to what you want to do, the interests you once had and help you find the resources to continue them.

Shake things up a bit! Make a new habit of doing things differently. We are all creatures of habit and this can become more pronounced as we get older. Start simple - get up half an hour earlier in the morning and go for a walk along the river. Arrange to meet with some friends in Richmond Park and have a picnic with a bottle of wine. Particularly if you have lost a loved one, really make a point to change the old routine and find new friends to add to those you already had. It's your life - do what you want with it but do it differently!

Make plans! Give yourself objectives - write it down. All those little things (and big things) that you are always thinking about doing but somehow never get done - well, just make a plan and write them down. Somehow, just the act of writing them down on your 'to do' list will greatly increase the chance that they actually will happen. Make a plan each night about what you are going to do tomorrow or even over the next week. Then get up (that half an hour earlier!) and feel really motivated to see it through!

The magic of the THINGS TO DO List! Continuing with the theme of writing things down, It is a remarkable law of the universe that states writing a list of things to do on a thing-to-do list will exponentially increase the chances that they will actually get done. Not to be confused with the 'planning list' mentioned above, the TTD list should be used for all those rather mundane and tiresome jobs that you know should be done but you just keep putting off. The trick is, however, is to make sure the list includes a few no-brainers, the sort of thing you can easily do and then easily tick off. For some reason, the magic of the TTD list works particularly well on reluctant male partners who never seem to find time to get around to finishing all of those little jobs in the home. There must be a male gene that cannot cope with a list of things-to-do being posted on the wall waiting to be ticked off. Try - it's magic!

Stay active, keep mobile! Obvious stuff isn't it, but when you're on your own, it's not always so easy to do. Again set an objective each week to do some physical activity that really stretches you a bit. For example, why not get a group of friends together and set an objective to walk the Capital Ring - a 15 stage 75 mile walk around London all mapped out and documented and available on the web. Once you've done that you could then tackle the 250 mile Capital Loop! All sections of the walks are linked by tube trains and buses and all sections are within the ability of a moderate walker. Make your own plan to do something that interests you and will help keep you fit and healthy - but do it regularly and then feel really proud of yourself!

Live for the present and laugh! I have always thought that having negative thoughts brings me down morally. So, I always try to do my best in having positive thoughts in the majority of cases. Not living in the past is so important because there is nothing you can do about it and you are just wasting time. I regret very little of what I have done in my life as I feel it's served as an experience and has made me the person I am. Having a good sense of humour helps and being able to laugh at silly things. I love laughing and even when I have pains and I groan, even then I laugh. I feel that you don't stop laughing because you grow old - you grow old because you stop laughing!!

I'm not alone, I'm just by myself! It's interesting how some words, which can appear to mean the same thing, can have such different connotations and thinking one way or the other can quite dramatically affect one's own state of mind. For example, the simple act of thinking that I am not 'alone' but just by 'myself' can really help me create a much more positive state of mind. Being alone is something I do not enjoy but being by myself is something I positively relish. It is 'me time' - time to do those things that I really like doing without having to take other people into account. I love playing the piano, taking long walks by the river and Tai Chi exercise, and I have learnt to love the freedom that comes with just simply be able to do these things by myself.

Hello house - it's so nice to be home again! I'm one of those people who actually does enjoy being on their own. However, that does not mean I don't enjoy meeting people, hearing what they have to say and learning from them. I love walking around London on my own and discovering all those little back streets and eating stops that are away from the normal tourist routes. And, this is often a wonderful way of having chance meetings with fellow travellers. The National Theatre coffee shop is a favourite venue. I know that if I get into a chance conversation there in the early evening with someone, it will come to a natural end at say 7.30pm when they have to go off to the performance. That suits me very well. But, the thing I enjoy most of all after these excursions is just getting home again. When I walk in, I always say "Hello house - so nice to see you again!" and despite anything that may have happened during the day, that just makes everything OK again.

Join a choir! Singing is really good for you! It's a great way to keep in shape because singing exercises the lungs and heart. Not only that, your body produces 'feel good' hormones called endorphins. It also increases lung capacity, will improve your posture, clears those tubes and sinuses and is even proven to increase mental alertness! So, what are you waiting for?

London is such a fantastic city! On the subject of London, I could write a book about all the 'alternative and free' places there are for us to discover. Free concerts on the South bank, the borough markets, the John Soane's Museum, The Wallace Collection, the Courtauld Institute, the Bank of England Museum, Greenwich Village, Holland Park just for starters and as mentioned before all of the wonderful back streets just waiting to be explored. I say alternative because many of these places are not even known about by Londoners. But, even though you may be on your own, I must add how important it is to visit and explore these places in sympathy with the people around you. You will be jostled and crowded but think of everybody you meet as a fellow traveller in this fantastic metropolis, all sharing and participating in the same fantastic experience of just being there and a part of it.

Travel as far as you can and as often as you can! Of course, disability can slow us down a bit as we get older but this is even more the reason that, while we are able, we should explore the world as far as our budget and interests will allow us. It does need a plan though - for example a top twenty list of all the places we want to see before we depart this mortal coil. And then, of course, this list would need to be prioritized into those things we are able to tackle now (like the Mach Pichu Inca trail for example) and those we might want to save until a bit later (like the cruise around the Caribbean). I think we also owe it to ourselves to continually find ways of 'being interesting' to our friends and in particular our families. If, for no other reason than I hope they would look to us to set some kind of example. Also, it is equally important to be surprising! Will telling your family that you are going off for a back pack around Vietnam surprise them? If not, think of something that would - and of course something that would surprise and interest you as well!

Learn something new, simply for the fun of it! What a wonderful opportunity we have as we get older to choose those subjects we want to learn about - simply for the joy and fun of it. Over the past couple of years I have undertaken courses in Egyptology and Mesopotamian archaeology and Roman architecture simply because I have found these subjects fascinating. It was really good not to have to write essays or sit exams at the end of the courses. There are interesting spin-offs too as, if I return to Egypt or Rome I shall certainly have more to appreciate. There are hundreds of different courses to choose from and it's a great way of meeting people sharing similar interests.

Pushing myself out of my 'Comfort Zone'! When an opportunity or an occasion arises to do something, which isn't necessarily something I would choose to do, or am comfortable doing, I try to push myself to do it anyway. This could be something as simple as trying a strange new food, going to a concert which is really 'not my thing' or doing something which I know I'll find physically challenging. It may be something more personal like going to an event which I really don't want to go to or even making that very difficult telephone call to a friend with a problem. But, when I do it, I find that almost always something good comes out of it and I certainly feel better for having made the decision to 'push myself out of my comfort zone'!

The 'Armchair' Test! Through the years there have inevitably been times when a 'big' decision' had to be made and usually this would be a choice between the safe and sensible answer or even the more risky answer which can often cause that slight 'giggle factor'. When testing feelings on a decision, we have always asked ourselves "When we are old and armchair bound, which decision will we look back on and be most pleased to have made, even if it doesn't turn out quite as planned". I would like to think that we will carry on giving things the "armchair" test, even when we're in one!

Counting one's Blessings! I find that I seem never take it for granted that I have a mattress to sleep on at night, I can keep warm and I have clean water that comes from a tap inside a my own house - a house that I have been able to buy myself because life presented me with an opportunity to do so. It really is counting ones blessings and, always remembering that you are loved and have been loved by so many people in your life - parents, husbands, partners, friends, children and grandchildren. We could take this so much for granted but so many have never experienced it.

Break free - get rid of the clutter! It is a sad memory that when my in-laws passed away within a short time of each other, most of the things in their home had to be thrown away. Family members were asked if they wanted anything but, generally speaking, most of them had too much stuff themselves! One year ago, we rented our own house out to allow us to do some travelling and 90% of our home was put into a storage locker. Since then, we haven't opened the locker once and certainly haven't missed a thing apart from an album that was needed for a family occasion. I know now that when that locker is opened again, a lot of the contents will given or thrown away - it will save someone else having to do it for us!

Enjoy being a child again! Is it the same with everybody that are just some things you do that can immediately transport you back to being a child again. For some reason, for me that kind of moment can take hold when I am feeding the birds and especially the gulls at the pond on Ham Common. It must be a half-forgotten childhood memory but when I see them wheeling around my head and feeding on the crusts I am throwing, I immediately feel like a five-year old again. I think it's important to really be aware of such moments and enjoy them to the full.

My dog - my best friend! It is not easy to describe how important it is to me to have a dog in my life - a best friend who seems never to tire in taking me out for long walks. It is also the best way I know of meeting other people - of all ages, of all genders, with all kinds of different interests. It is just so easy to stop and have a chat with other people, very often whether or not they have a dog themselves. I know they can be a restriction at times but I can't imagine life without my faithful old friend.

Smile and the world smiles with you! I'm sure it's not just my imagination but when I go out and really make an effort to smile at the people I meet, it seems that within a short period of time everybody seems to be smiling back at me.

Is smiling really that infectious? For me, finding something to smile and laugh at everyday is really important - it could be your last so make the most of it! Starting the day off with a really positive thought helps and I do try to think happy and positive thoughts all day long. And, I never forget to thank the Good Lord for all the help he has given me in the past - and hopefully in the future!

Trust your own judgement! Don't be put off when someone says or implies, whatever their motive may be, that something is impossible, that you're wrong, that it's a bad idea etc. Look for information and advice, trust your OWN judgement, instincts and commonsense and go for it if that's what YOU want!

Learn to be a fly on the wall! I have two grandchildren and if I could give them just one piece of advice it would be to try and be like that fly on the wall and attempt to look at things from the outside. It is so easy to leap to a judgement on someone else's behalf but, as we all know, there are always two sides to a story. Learning to listen properly to what is being said and really trying to understand another person's point of view are I think the most valuable of gifts. I wish I was better at it but it's a skill I really do try and aspire to.

Do some financial planning! When I retired, obviously on an income that I knew wasn't going to increase at the same rate as before, I quickly realised that some serious financial planning and budgeting was going to be needed. Sounds a bit boring doesn't it, but I quickly learnt that a really useful by-product was that I began to start organising and planning my activities in a much more productive way. I also found that having a budget to do something, which maybe was rather extravagant, greatly increased the chances me actually doing it. Having a budget is like having a plan for living - it has helped me enormously in getting far more out of both!

A problem is a wonderful opportunity not to be wasted! We all have times when everything goes wrong and negative thinking sets in. But the core of us knows it is not forever and somehow things do get better. It is then that we can look back and learn from how we have survived the bad patch. It is the ups and downs of life that make us who we are. We must learn to accept that there will be down times and use the experience as a stepping stone towards a wiser, brave approach to whatever challenges are thrown at us as we move on.

Give up something - then take up something! A good friend of mine in our local church was getting to a stage in life where she felt things had to be given up. First went the outings to the theatre, then driving and then various activities she had been involved with in the church. This went on for a little while and one day we had a chat about it and it seemed that my observation that if you give up something then you should take up something to fill its place seemed to have a transforming effect. Now, my lady friend is engaged in so many different activities that I'm having difficulty keeping up with her myself!

Develop a passion, have a purpose! When I retired from full-time work, I found it was really important to find a new activity and purpose in life which really engaged me - something to become really passionate about! I have always been interested in environmental matters and now I found I had the time to really pursue them in depth - in many different ways. Love life, love the environment and love doing something about it is something I have grown to feel really strongly about!

There's always someone worse off than me! However busy we are, I always try and remember that we really should put time to one side to help other people as well. Since losing my husband recently, I have become so much more aware of how much we are part of the same community and how there is so much we can do to help each other. I work with the St. Rafael Hospice and also a local nursing home and I don't do it for entirely unselfish reasons. I'm pleased to be involved because I get so much from it as well.

Have something to look forward to! During the year, I always try to make a point of pencilling into the diary a number of things that I can really look forward to. This might be a holiday break a few months ahead, some outings to the theatre or maybe just a celebration for a special occasion. It might even be something more ambitious like a plan to set time to one side to write a personal journal - or even that short story that I have always thought I would write and get published one day! Whatever it is, I know that having a few things lined up to think about and plan for in the future keeps me feeling very focussed and positive.