

“THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING ACTIVE IN RETIREMENT”

**AN ADDRESS BY MRS FRANCES UNDERWOOD TO THE
SOUTHERN REGION OF PROBUS CLUBS’ LUNCHEON**

“HANDCLASP”

GLENORCHY FOOTBALL CLUB KGV

THURSDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

Thank you for inviting me to your “Handclasp Luncheon.” What a great name for the concept, of representatives from the 22 southern region clubs, coming together to socialise, to share information and to celebrate; or to put it another way, coming together for Friendship, Fellowship and Fun. I have been invited to speak to you today about the importance of keeping active in retirement. Clearly, it is something you already believe in because you are all here today, doing just that. Since the Governor took up his appointment in 2008, both he and I have been very impressed with the options available for retirees to do just that: keep active; intellectually, socially and physically. Two organisations immediately come to mind, Probus and U3A. There seem to be *so many* opportunities in both these organisations to learn, to socialise, and basically to have fun with other people of similar interest and background for, of course, *we are social animals* and our lives find meaning by relating to others.

Although we talk about growing up, we never really stop growing, up! We are all a work in progress until our last breath. It’s not as if one day we wake up, sit back and say “Now I’m grown up I can relax.” Rather we are constantly at it – growing; finding a balance when we find ourselves in new

situations, such as retirement; dealing with, adjusting to, and learning from life's unpredictable lessons; experiencing moments of deep happiness and gratitude and moments of sadness, but, perhaps mostly, just engaging on a daily basis, in a positive way with life. Psychologist Professor Martin Seligman PhD, of the University of Pennsylvania, who works on learned helplessness, depression, optimism, and positive psychology, suggests that there are certain things that contribute to a feeling of happiness, well-being and optimism at any age and that these things can be learned and measured.

¹ He has been widely recognised by several Distinguished Scientific Awards from the American Psychological Association² for his lifetime contribution to Psychology and the application of psychological knowledge. He suggests that the core elements for a feeling of happiness are: *Positive Emotion*; *Engagement* (that is a love of learning and pursuing personal interests); *Positive Relationships and Meaningful Purpose* (feeling that what you do is worthwhile).

If you would like further confirmation, *from the horse's mouth*, as it were, in 2008 a poll of 100 US Centenarians found that their most important tips for healthy aging were: Stay close to family and friends, keep your mind active, laugh and have a sense of humour, stay in touch with your spirituality, look forward to each day, and keep moving and exercising. In the poll report, centenarian Maurice Eisman asserts;³ “If I could leave any

¹ Seligman, Martin *Flourish* Pub. Simon and Schuster, New York 2011

² They include the William James Fellow Award, the James McKeen Cattell Fellow Award and the Wiley Award of the British Academy

³ www.webmd.com/healthy.../10-healthy-aging-tips-from-centenarians

message, never stop learning. Period.” Or as Abraham Lincoln put it “I don’t think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday”⁴

So it seems that Probus is certainly on the right track for providing opportunities for the things that are important in later life. As experienced *former professional and business people*, we all know that learning is interesting, stimulating, energising, purposeful, useful, empowering and above all fun! It has a lot going for it! Lifelong learning is critical to surviving, as a new born human being; critical to thriving in personal, business and professional life; and, especially at our age, critical to flourishing as a human being. Learning does for the brain what exercise does for the body. It keeps you actively engaged in life. My husband said to me that being a lifelong learner and pursuing a personal passion makes me an interested and interesting person and, he added, encouragingly, that’s a great substitute for fading beauty in later life. I am sure he is right but I am still thinking that maybe it’s time I got a new husband or got the one I have to see me with new eyes.

As one does, in preparing for today, I looked up the word retirement in the Oxford Dictionary. Retirement: “The action of leaving one’s job and ceasing to work; the period of life after leaving one’s job and ceasing to work; Synonym; seclusion, withdrawal. How can seclusion and withdrawal be active I wondered? My grandfather belonged to the era when retirement was seen as a golden age of leisure when one was rewarded with lifelong

⁴ www.forbes.com/.../abraham-lincoln-10-quotes-to-help-you-lead-today/

rest and a gold watch (which I still have) after a working life. It was really regarded as the end of meaningful life.

But with increased longevity and better health care we have moved on *from those days of retirement being the end of a meaningful life*, don't you think? Life is seen more as a continuum, rather than blocks of time. And learning is now seen as lifelong and *the key to a satisfying life at any age*; a pre-disposition and willingness to learn results in a fulfilling and stimulating life. It is essential to the maintenance of warm and interesting relationships with others. It is essential to a feeling of well-being and optimism and it is even essential to the maintenance of good health. And at the very least it is very helpful to good relations with members of your family, many of whom may be, or soon will be, younger than you.

So what is meant by lifelong learning? I came across this definition: "Lifelong learning is all purposeful learning, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence.⁵" Perhaps you might agree with this quotation; that the aim of lifelong learning is "for those engaged in it ... not to arrive anywhere but to travel with a wider richer more elevated perspective."⁶

Far from being the end of a meaningful life, leaving one's job and ceasing to work offers liberation and the freedom and independence to re-engage with passions from the past; to re-engage with learning and to recreate oneself, or as someone put it the other day to re-tyre oneself. And

⁵ Foundation and Skills for Lifelong Learning (from European Commission 2000) value@aacu.org

⁶ Lifelong Learning: concepts, theories and values Aspin and Chapman 2001 leeds.ac.uk

this is what today's seniors are doing in style. They are smarter than the last generation at the same age, use the internet more than other age groups, travel widely, exercise more, engage in continuous learning, live longer, enjoy better health and according to the author of *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, generally ***do not behave as oldies should.***

They are smarter than ever

According to Danish research published in *Lancet* and reported in the *London Times*,⁷ people now in their 90's, scored higher on mental performance tests and daily tasks than did a group who were *born a decade earlier but tested at the same age*, suggesting that factors such as nutrition, burden of infectious diseases, work environment, intellectual stimulation and general living conditions play an important role in maintaining mental agility. Examples of spritely nonagenarians are the Duke of Edinburgh, 92, Diana Athill, now aged 95 who won the Costa biography prize for her memoir *Somewhere towards the end*, written when she was 91 and I'm sure we could think of lots more examples.

They use the internet more than other age groups

Internet use among people 65 and over has grown faster than any other age group since 2006⁸. Across the adult population internet use has doubled in the last 8 years but in the over 65's it has quadrupled. Today retirees want super quick broadband and yoga classes according to research done by the Skipton Building Society and published in the *Times*.⁹

⁷ Quoted in *The Times* London UK 11 July 2013

⁸ Quoted in *The Times* London UK 12 July 2013 *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

On average, retirees take 3 holidays a year and take more exercise than they did in their twenties. One in 10 is learning something new whether in evening classes or higher education. The accommodation needs of this powerful demographic, that refuses to be marginalised or underestimated, are changing. Many people now not only live longer but also enjoy better health until a year or two before they die rather than go through 6 or 7 years of ill health because there is greater awareness now of how to protect and maintain good health. Except for specialist nursing care, institutional living facilities and care homes will be a thing of the past. Even the language of retirement is changing. Words like *sheltered housing* and *nursing home* are out ... now it's all about *later life*, *active living*, *flexible living spaces*, and *nursing centres*.

And finally according to an article I read in London's *The Times* entitled "*Love Liberation ... and plenty of undignified middle aged sex*,"

Over 60's are not behaving like oldies should

Deborah Moggach, author of *Heartbreak Hotel*, otherwise known as the film *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, says and I quote: "the lives of the 60's and over are changing profoundly. That hideous word retirement - which used to suggest a total withdrawal from life - seems nowadays to imply just the opposite. I'd rather call it liberation. We are simply not behaving like old people should. A female friend of mine has just been riding a motorbike across Rajasthan. She's learnt Italian. She's been trawling the internet searching for romance. When I was young, 72 year olds were little old ladies with perms and knitting; the thought of them riding a motor bike or – horror – having sex was beyond one's imagination. But as I

said at the Telegraph, *Way With Words* festival earlier this week, the older generation of today is more likely than ever to be experiencing love, joy and undignified middle aged sex”¹⁰.

Moggach continues “My generation is reinventing ageing. We grew up in the 60s when anything was possible. We felt part of the huge reinvention then, and I believe we have carried this with us, changing the landscape as we travel through it. Just think of our role models, Joanna Lumley, Helen Mirren and Keith Richards still rocking away. They certainly haven’t hung up their spurs ... Old age is not for sissies - Yes it’s about getting older, but it’s not just focusing on impending death. ...Whatever our age we still have the same hopes, joys, jealousies passions as we always did, we’re just a bit more wrinkly.” She said, “We’re still people and we’re not on the scrap heap yet.”

I rest my case for the staying active in retirement, for the rewards are clearly many and varied. It seems to be a good time to be a retiree!

I leave you with a thought from Shakespeare: “With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come”. (Merchant of Venice)

It’s not wrinkles that make us old, anyone, at any age, who stops learning, is old. Thank You

¹⁰ Moggach, Deborah Quoted in *The Telegraph* London UK July 2013