



milton keynes

university of the third age



August  
2017



## **Forward Planning as there will be no Open Meeting in August**

### **Open Meeting – Wednesday 27th September**

#### **Scribbles, Scrawls and Algai Balls**

Dr Cooke is a plant ecologist at the Open University, particularly interested in plant ecological strategies and plant silicon but she is going to tell us why she can't help being a Scientist.

The meetings are held in the Oak Tree Centre, Wallinger Drive, Shenley Brook End, Milton Keynes, MK57GZ

Starting at 2.30pm

£2 for members and £3 for guests

#### **Message from the Chairman**

##### **Introduction**

I'm writing this a few days earlier than normal as the end of July and beginning of August already look very busy, including the much-looked-forward-to week in Suffolk with our two grand-daughters (4 and almost 2). Will the elder appreciate the humour of the tin man peeing on Southwold pier? Or will it be just an ice cream experience?

##### **South East Regional Conference**

Just a note from me on this as it was one of the best value days I have had within U3A – a fascinating day for just £5 (including sandwich lunch). Please see the formal report below from Mrs. W. who accompanied me for the day. (Well, for a three-day break, actually, as we went via Hughenden Manor on the Tuesday, and the Sydney Spencer Gallery at Cookham on the Thursday – both fascinating visits). For me, this U3A gathering demonstrated the exciting life that can be found within our organisation, especially if there is a good university partner to share the project. Some of the work within MK U3A that our groups put together for their own presentations are as valuable as some of these projects and group leaders may wish to promote this good work further within the U3A universe. Please let me know.

##### **Open Meetings**

I've just had a look down the Open Meeting programme for autumn 2017 – what treats we have in store! Please get the dates into your diary – 27<sup>th</sup> September, 25<sup>th</sup> October and 23<sup>rd</sup> November. The first of these speakers I have heard before – Dr. Julia Cooke from the Open University – she is truly inspirational with her own inquisitive, nosy, enquiring, probing approach to scientific research in odd ball areas. She is a real bouncing ball.

Don't forget – no Open Meeting in August – time off for good behaviour!

### **Team Positions**

Good news, I trust, as we welcome three new members within our admin team. I will formally introduce them next month after they have had chance to look at the roles they currently are examining. However, this starts the process of load sharing within the current team.

We have some way to go, but for those amongst you who are afraid that life outside U3A cannot continue if you were to join the team, let me affirm that, whilst U3A has kept me busy, I continue with other activities, including decent holidays (see para 1 above) and other leisure pursuits (see para 2 above).

There are some team places available – if you have any skills that you could offer, please let me know. Anyone (or more than one) with discretion and one Monday morning per month particularly valuable.

### **Chair**

Having said that, we continue to look for one position of some particular interest to me. Now is the time for anyone to consider chairmanship for 2018. I will be stepping down in March and I would hope that anyone looking to take up this role will approach us now so as to get a handle on the position in good time – a luxury that was not afforded me.

Sithee, Nigel

## **Getting Involved in Research**

U3A S E Region Conference at The Royal Holloway University on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Nigel and I enjoyed a very inspiring day when we attended this one-day study conference at the Royal Holloway campus at Egham. After the introduction by Hilvary Robinson, the S E Region Trustee, and by Rona Hodges, Research Co-ordinator from Canterbury U3A, Dr Matthew Smith, Director of the Royal Holloway University Magna Carta Legacy Project, treated us to a fascinating illustrated talk on its origins and how U3A could contribute to the project.

He explained that after all the celebrations of Magna Carta in 2015, it was decided to create a legacy project called ***Citizens; 800 Years in the Making*** which will explore the history of liberty, protest, power and rebellion from Magna Carta to the suffragettes and beyond. The aim is to highlight local heroes and heroines and local struggles for our rights and liberty. The website developed, with Heritage Lottery funding, has a section devoted to U3A research projects and it supported by national and local museums. In the MK area, The Cowper Newton Museum at Olney is a partner in the project.

Topics under research by U3A members cover local heroes who had fought against the enclosure of local common land and allotments created by The Chartist Land Company. Anna Sewell, author of Black Beauty, is the subject of one project to investigate her campaign against poverty and ill-treatment of children. Modern topics like the Miners Strike and Greenham Common have inspired other U3As to look more deeply into their local history.

After the coffee break, three groups shared their research project

findings. Wokingham U3A had investigated the Historic Footpaths of the Thames Valley. Meopham (Kent) U3A, following a talk by a Bee expert, decided to plot the populations of bees in their area as part of their walking

group activity and Portsmouth U3A had looked at the effects of the Battle of Jutland on the people of Portsmouth. With the help of local, family and naval records they had managed to trace the families of those lost in the battle and to identify the correct birthplace of one of the fallen who had received a VC. With the co-operation of digital cartographers from the university, they had produced a detailed map plotting the address of every one of the seamen lost in the battle

Lunchtime was an opportunity to view the displays by these and other U3A research projects, which covered topics as diverse as Virtual Reality, Snails, Street Names and Local River Habitats.

In the afternoon, Dr Zara Bergstrom from the School of Psychology at Kent University gave a talk on The Cognitive Neuroscience of Remembering and Forgetting. She was an inspirational personality and had been instrumental in helping Canterbury U3A members create a Study of Memory that was then presented by Karen Evans in the afternoon. After a workshop session covering topics on Research Ethic, Archival Research, Curious Minds and The Journey from Interest Groups to Research, we were privileged to hear of a project looking at the experience of interviewing end-of-life patients in a hospice. The members involved had obvious been moved by their involvement and had been grateful for the opportunity to enhance their empathetic skills.

After a farewell speech and vote of thanks to all the speakers, we returned home (via Runnymede where Magna Carta was signed!) to reflect on the enthusiasms and applications of all that we had learnt, buzzing with ideas as to how, in Milton Keynes, we could enlarge and develop our interests.

For more information on the Citizens: 800 Years in the Making Project and to see the U3A dedicated section, go to <http://www.citizens800.org/> Pauline Wright

### **Beds Plus Network—Pre-Retirement Seminars**

One small part of the MKU3A Strategy for future development is to ensure that all the major employers in the area are aware of the U3A and the benefits available to those planning to and actually retiring. The Regional Trustee for Northumbria asked me to deliver a seminar to Nissan employees. Whilst the major production unit for Nissan is in the North East they have a European Design and Technical Development Centre sited on the Cranfield Campus. It was good to get back into a large corporate environment and to use the presentation facilities available in their conference rooms. Five large screens helped to enhance the prepared slide show. The presentation went well together with the distribution of a pack of U3A information leaflets. The opening slide is shown below together with one of the leaflet images.

#### Pre Retirement Seminar Cranfield – July 2017



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE



If you have links to Corporates HR functions please let me have details and better still an introduction. I will be promoting this form of development activity across the Beds Plus Network

Brian Baldwin Email: [coordinator.bedsplus@gmail.com](mailto:coordinator.bedsplus@gmail.com) Tel: 01908 670579

## News from the Groups

### Exploring World Faiths Group



**6th September at St Peter & St Paul Parish Church, Olney.** Come along to learn about **John Newton** who wrote 'Amazing Grace' and **William Cowper**, the poet who penned such quotes as 'Variety's the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour.' and of course the world famous **Pancake Race**.

Please allow adequate time for parking nearby or in a town car park. There is no parking at the church.

If you wish to join us, or want more details, please look at our group webpage. Thank you

### The Third Age Players TAP—Ode to the Mature Actor

Our name, Third Age Players, is a bit of a give-away but, as the subject of age rarely gets a mention during rehearsals, I can only surmise that the actors' ages fall into the range of early 60s to late 80s. In common with other U3A groups, TAP enthusiastically puts a lot of energy into their group's activities. For the drama group, this includes presenting a full length play each autumn at the Chrysalis with the U3A membership forming a large part of our loyally supportive audience; an audience who may like an insight into an actor's lot!

Mature actors, whether amateur or professional, put in many extra hours to play the mature individuals they are usually asked to take on. Drawing on their own experience of having lived full lives, they know these individuals will have possibly experienced not only life but also death; not only success but failure, kindness and unkindness, happiness and sorrow, failure as well as success, gains and losses. In modern parlance, they bring a lot of baggage!

The character description that actors receive from the writer is brief, so the first task for our intrepid thespians is to trawl through the script looking for clues: the better the actor, the more well-thumbed the script. They will not only note the words they have been given but will research, in this case, the lives of people born in the late 1900s and early twentieth century. They will certainly realise that, following the 1914 blood bath, many of the mature female characters will have been widowed. Education, such as it was at the time, will have covered the domestic skills needed to run a home, care for children or take on menial work. Few will have been prepared for the task of how to earn their living in a man's world.

Once they have got into the skin of their character, our actor must learn lines. This can get harder as years roll by, as can keeping concentration honed and adjusting unwilling muscles to undertake moves that were once easy to master. What has happened to that strong core youngsters work at, that allows them to jump up from the chair (no hands!) or even to elegantly arise from the floor?

Eventually, characters established, lines and moves ne-a-r-l-y there, the fun bit begins, choosing hairstyles, makeup and costumes, all leading to the Photoshoot! The clock is ticking. What has been an amusing past-time suddenly becomes real. Anguished cries may be heard, "I knew my lines at home!" -" Where was I supposed to move to?" - "Never again! Why do I put myself through this!"

Vera Roper - Author and Director of 'When the Lights Go on Again'

Why don't you Join the Third Age Players in 'When the lights go on again' at the Chrysalis theatre on Thursday 7 and Friday 8 September at 19:30, Saturday 9 September at 14:00

Tickets are available from [www.ticketsource.co.uk/tap](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/tap)

The full price is £12. Concessions £1 discount, Early bird: £1 discount until 24 August. There is no fee for booking on line.

Enquiries phone 01908 887387.

### **The Photography for Fun Group's July '17 Outing**

Each summer we plan to meet for a social photoshoot instead of our monthly session at Kingston.

This year Stoke Bruerne was the chosen destination for the July meeting.

Marilyn arranged a pub lunch at The Boat Inn to be followed by a photoshoot recording canal atmosphere & activities.



It was wet for the journey from MK but by the time we had finished our meal the weather had improved, giving us some interesting skies for our photos.

A presentation consisting of three images per member will be shown & a friendly critique conducted during our August meeting.

## Folk Dancing – Marlene Harrison Jones, Group Leader

### Photos submitted by Pat Allen

A selection of photographs taken at the Strawberry Tea when the Folk Dancing Group were joined by members of the Towcester U3A Country Dancing Group



## Groups Looking to Increase their Membership

### Poetry

Do you Enjoy POETRY?

Come and join our Poetry Group which meets in Bletchley  
on the first Tuesday afternoon of the month

September's topic is "Regrets & Loss" on Tuesday 5th

Bring a couple of poems along or listen to others

Tea/Coffee/Cakes/Conversation

Contact Pat Hodges 01908 644785 or [missquiz@sky.com](mailto:missquiz@sky.com)

### Gardening 1 Group

We are looking for new members to join our very friendly Gardening 1 Group which meets every 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month at 10.00 am. In Fishermead except when we go out to visit gardens.

Some our activities during the year include talks on gardening topics and gardens.

We also visit a few gardens; this year we have been to Poplars Garden Centre, a lovely garden in Steeple Claydon and an interesting one in Soulbury on different levels.

We will be visiting Twigs Nurseries, Park Trust Linford Nature Reserve and a Parks Trust talk on the history of Willen Lake at Howe Park Wood. During December, we finish off the year with a Christmas lunch.

If our Group sounds like something you would like to be involved with please contact me.

Czesia Eales-Johnson & Jean Newcombe

Tel 01908 506706

[Czesia46@hotmail.com](mailto:Czesia46@hotmail.com)

## MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE WITH MUSIC .....

..... join us, forget all the bad news and leave the outside world behind for a couple of hours. You'll feel so much better.

We all meet twice a month (2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday morning) in Two Mile Ash.

Some of us will take it in turns to create a playlist, some of us just want to come along, chill out and listen to other's choice of music – or maybe just meet new people!

So, whether you are a jazz lover, an opera or classical buff or whether you just enjoy relaxing to different styles of music, we'd love to know you.

New folks are joining us each month, but we still have enough room for more.

Give us a call or email us and we can tell you all about our group.

Contact: Sally Saunders 07948366778

Or email us at: [musicapprec@mku3a.org](mailto:musicapprec@mku3a.org)

**The Biology Group - Group Leader:** Liz Padfield, tel: 01908 282375,

e-mail: [biology@mku3a.org](mailto:biology@mku3a.org)

*From a modest beginning, this Group continues to expand in coverage, interest and membership. **We are still keen to welcome new members to this, currently the only group studying sciences in MK U3A***

The study of Biology inevitably leads to discussions ranging widely over related sciences, and includes the social and political climate in which scientific research takes place. This makes it suitable for either those with a science or technology background in any discipline, or those simply with a curiosity to explore the significance of science in the modern world.

In 2017 the Group has covered diverse themes, including:

- Options and action in Anti-cancer drugs
- Origins and nature of mitochondria
- Origins and history of HIV/AIDS
- Animals of the meso-pelagic layer of the oceans

Statistics and function of red blood cells

### **Autumn Programme**

After a break in August, Autumn meetings open with:

**7 September 2017**, an introduction to **Enzymes**.

**5 October** we shall consider **Air pollution, its effects on breathing and the body**.

## Future Topics

The group would welcome suggestions, questions or requests for sessions on further topics of public interest.

**Dementia** had been proposed but is considered a wide topic, which might be covered by contributions from all those present, whether from experience or research. **Epigenetics** has been proposed. Let us have your ideas.

Newcomers are always welcome to join us or bring along any other U3A member who just wants to come and listen. Whatever your background, we are sure you will find our discussions informative and stimulating.

**Meetings:** The group meets at Furzton on the first Thursday of every month at 10.30 in the morning, hosted by Graham Stanley ([grahamstanley@outlook.com](mailto:grahamstanley@outlook.com))

As numbers are reaching capacity at this venue, please let Graham or Liz or me know whether you intend to come on 7 September. Liz does not often look into her U3A e-mail account, so you might prefer to use one of mine instead: [cilay@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:cilay@yahoo.co.uk)

Christina Lay on behalf of Liz Padfield, Group Leader.



## Tuesday Afternoon Intermediate 4 Bridge Group

We have places available for this group. The standard is generally intermediate with a good range of skills among the current membership. We usually draw for partners and play either rubber or Chicago depending on numbers, the group also plays some duplicate. Playing skills can be improved by joining in with this friendly group.

Please contact Judith Exter, the group leader for further details

tel: 01908 976058, e-mail: [bridgeint4@mku3a.org](mailto:bridgeint4@mku3a.org)

## Upcoming Theatre Trips—Aide Memoire

Date	Show	Pay by
Wed 6th Sept	The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Night	Passed
Thurs 19 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Ballet	Passed
Wed 25 <sup>th</sup> Oct	The Addams Family	Passed
Wed 1 <sup>st</sup> Nov	Cabaret	Passed
Thurs 23 <sup>rd</sup> Nov	Glynebourne	Passed
Thurs 30 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Sunset Boulevard	Passed
Tues 9 <sup>th</sup> Jan '18	Cinderella	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept
Wed 30 <sup>th</sup> May '18	Legally Blond	22 <sup>nd</sup> Nov
Wed 18 <sup>th</sup> July '18	Flashdance	22 <sup>nd</sup> Nov
Wed 3rd Oct '18	War Horse	Passed

## Upcoming Outings

Date	Venue	Last B'king Date
Thurs 3rd Aug	Countryfile Live	Passed
Thurs 17th Aug	Penshurst Place & Gardens	Passed
Thurs 7th Sept	Black Country Museum	10th Aug



Wed 20th Sept      Berkeley castle & Dr Jenner's House      10th Aug

Please refer to the website for further details or contact the organisers on [theatre@mku3a.org](mailto:theatre@mku3a.org) 07867978585 or [outings@mku3a.org](mailto:outings@mku3a.org) 01908 506706 as appropriate

**Booking Forms for both these groups can be found on the relevant pages of the website or on the individual postings in the Diary**

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### Dates for Your Diary

#### **Monday 21 August - New Members Induction Sessions**

We run monthly meetings for new members aimed at outlining the background to the U3A movement, explaining how to get the best out of your membership with MKU3A, and showing you how to use the website and join groups. The next meeting will be at 2.30pm on 21 August in the Great Linford Parish Office meeting room, next to the Co-op in the Great Linford local centre at 1 St Leger Court, MK14 5HA. If you are a new member just come along – any queries to Claire Naismith on [membersec@mku3a.org](mailto:membersec@mku3a.org)

### Personal Recommendations by Members - None this Month

#### Other Items of Interest

#### **Libby has sent in the following tip.**

I read that if you have a spot, crush an aspirin and mix it to a paste with a little water and apply to the spot. Remedy tried and tested - it has done wonders for my rosacea! Long may it continue.

**FREE EVENT! The Workers' Educational Association**, Milton Keynes Branch, invite members of the U3A to join us at Stony Stratford Library on Monday, 18 September at 2.00pm, for a talk by the Parks Trust on Wildlife in Milton Keynes. This is a free event preceded by a short AGM. All welcome! Light refreshments will be provided.

For further information, please contact Jeannine Golding, 7 Latimer, Stony Stratford, MK11 1HP. Tel: 01908 567869 Email: [Jeannine.golding@btinternet.com](mailto:Jeannine.golding@btinternet.com)

Please note the talk is on a different aspect of the Parks Trust than the recent excellent presentation at the June Open Meeting

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#### **Do you like Quizzing?** If so these two events might be for you

**Saturday 2nd September** at 7.00 p.m. in Simpson Village Hall – Quiz Night & Fish & Chip Supper proceeds to Willen Hospice. 7.00 pm start, maximum 8 people on a table, £10.00 p.p. bring your own drinks, teas served at half-time, raffle prizes gratefully accepted, if possible please park down by the Church and walk up to the hall. All suppers MUST be booked with Pat Hodges [missquiz@sky.com](mailto:missquiz@sky.com) or tel: 01908 644785

**Saturday 7th October** – Quiz/Night & Fish & Chip Supper, proceeds to T.L.C. – Children in Vietnam Charity. All details as above.

## Turkey and Tinsel

One of our members, Bob Coleman, who lives in Newport Pagnell is the organiser and contact for an annual 'Turkey and Tinsel Break' which includes food, entertainment and outings. This year the trip is to Eastbourne leaving Newport Pagnell on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November and returning on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November. The coach goes directly to the venue and remains with the group for the whole trip for the inclusive outings.

There are a few places available. The cost is £259 pp

If you are interested and would like more information please contact Bob directly on 01908 612470



**Hilary Beckett** has sent in a photograph taken with 'Dottie' from Age Uk Milton Keynes. We walked together at Newport Pagnell Carnival to raise funds and awareness.

## Memories of John Greenall



John joined Milton Keynes Athletics Club in October 1996 and made his debut in the Wolverton 5miles road race placing 3rd in the men's 60-65 age group with a time of 33mins57secs.

John's iconic year was 2006 where he set the following and current men's 70 records for the Club AND his marathon time ranked him second fastest for his age that year in the UK.

Banbury 5	35.33
MK 10km	44.43
Grunty Fen Half-Marathon(Ely)	96.30
Oakley 20miles	2:37.19
London Marathon	3:29.58

One of our members commented - "I fondly remember seeing John go past me in the 2006 London Marathon. I was trying (and failing) to run sub three and a half hours at the age of 50 and he did it at the age of 70!! "

### **And running with a pacemaker**

John had had a pacemaker fitted and often experienced comments that he was gaining artificial assistance!!

Thoughts on the run.....On one of our Thursday evening runs I can remember John “interviewing” Barry Hardwick for a role in a play that he was directing. Barry made his debut as the waiter in Harold Pinter’s “Betrayal”.

### **A team of M70’s completes the Greensand Ridge Relay Race**

Although John was not too keen to run cross-country he very enthusiastically joined the team of 70-year-olds who were planning to run the Greensand Ridge Relay Race in 2010(each team member running between 5 & 6 miles) along with Brian Graves, Brian Gilks, Brian Daniells, Jim McKellar and Milford Callow the team finished 22nd out of 30 finishers. The team made a bit of history that day and were roundly applauded at the end.

### **An Observation – Spain and The Spanish by David Sutton**

If you really want to make a new life in a country, you need to understand the people who live there. Here is a guide that will give you useful and interesting information about culture and history, people, traditions, customs and more.

Who are the Spanish? What are they like? Let’s take a candid and totally prejudiced look at the Spanish people, tongue firmly in cheek, and hope they forgive my flippancy or that they don’t read this bit.

A typical Spaniard is courteous, proud, enthusiastic, undisciplined, tardy, temperamental, independent, gregarious, noisy, honest, noble, individualistic, boisterous, jealous, possessive, colorful, passionate, spontaneous, sympathetic, fun-loving, creative, sociable, demonstrative, irritating, generous, cheerful, polite, unreliable, honorable, optimistic, impetuous, flamboyant, idiosyncratic, quick-tempered, arrogant, elegant, irresponsible, an *aficionado*, hedonistic, contradictory, an anarchist, informal, self-opinionated, corrupt, indolent, frustrating, vulgar, voluble, helpful, friendly, sensitive, a traditionalist, insolent, humorous, fiery, warm-hearted, chauvinistic, bureaucratic, dignified, kind, loyal, extroverted, tolerant, macho, frugal, self-possessed, unabashed, quarrelsome, partisan, a procrastinator, scandal-loving, articulate, a *bon viveur*, inefficient, conservative, nocturnal, hospitable, spirited, urbanised, lazy, confident, sophisticated, political, handsome, chaotic and a football fanatic.

You may have noticed that the above list contains ‘a few’ contradictions (as does life in Spain), which is hardly surprising as there’s no such thing as a typical Spaniard. Apart from the differences in character between the inhabitants of different regions, such as Andalusia, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia and Madrid, the population also includes a potpourri of foreigners from all corners of the globe. Even in appearance, fewer and fewer Spaniards match the popular image of short, swarthy and dark, and the indigenous population includes blondes, brunettes and redheads.

### **A complex class structure**

Although not nearly as marked or rigidly defined as the British or French class systems, Spain has a complex class structure. The top drawer of Spain’s aristocrats are the 400 or so *grandees*, who are followed at a respectable distance by myriad minor nobles, all of whom tend to keep to themselves and remain aloof from the *hoi polloi*. Next in pecking order are the middle-class professionals, the lower middle class white-collar workers, the blue-collar working class and the peasant underclass.

These are followed by assorted foreigners, a few of whom have been elevated to the status of ‘honorary’ Spaniards (usually after around 100 years’ residence). At the bottom of the heap, below even the despised drunken tourists, are the gypsies (*gitanos*), Spain’s true aristocrats. Gypsies are treated as lepers by many

Spaniards (except when they're celebrated flamenco artists or bullfighters) and are even less desirable as neighbors than the *Moros* (Moroccans).

Spaniards are often disparaging about their compatriots from other regions. Nobody understands the Basques and their tongue-twister of a language, the Galicians are derided as being more Portuguese than Spanish, and the Andalusians are scorned as backward peasants. However, the most widespread antagonism is between the cities of Madrid and Barcelona, whose inhabitants argue about everything, including the economy, sport, history, politics, culture and language. Catalans claim that *Madriileños* are half African, to which they reply that it's better than being half French. However, although they're proud of their regional identity, most Spaniards aren't nationalists or patriotic and have little loyalty to Spain as a whole.

### **In harmony with the foreign population**

Most Spaniards live in harmony with the foreign population, although many foreigners (colloquially dubbed *guiris*, from the word *guirigay* meaning gibberish) live separate lives in tourist 'ghettos', a million miles away from the 'real' Spain. The Spaniards don't consider the concrete jungles of the Costa del Sol, Costa Blanca, Majorca and parts of the Canaries to be part of Spain, but a plastic paradise created for and by foreigners so that pasty-faced tourists can fry in the sun and get drunk on cheap booze.

However, although the Spaniards aren't generally xenophobic, they're becoming more racist and many would happily eject the gypsies, Arabs and North Africans from their country. They don't care much for the Portuguese either, who are the butt of their jokes (when they aren't about the Andalusians). It's an honor for a foreigner to be invited to a Spaniard's home, although it's one rarely granted. Nevertheless, Spaniards do occasionally marry foreigners, much to the distress of their parents.

Usually when Spaniards and foreigners come into contact (conflict), it concerns official business and results in a profusion of confrontations and misunderstandings (few foreigners can fathom the Spanish psyche) and does little to cement relations. Spain has among the most stifling (and over-staffed) bureaucracy in Western Europe (even worse than the French!) and any encounter with officialdom is a test of endurance and patience. Official offices (if you can find the right one) often open only for a few hours on certain days of the week; the person dealing with your case is always absent; you never have the right papers (or your papers and files have disappeared altogether); the rules and regulations have changed (again) and queues are interminable (take along a copy of *Don Quixote* to help pass the time). It's all part of a conspiracy to ensure that foreigners cannot find out what's going on (and will hopefully therefore pay more taxes, fines, fees, etc.).

Official inefficiency has been developed to a fine art in Spain; where even paying a bill, or using the postal service (a world-class example of ineptitude) is an ordeal. The Spaniards are generally totally disorganized and the only predictable thing about them is their unpredictability. They seldom plan anything (if they do, the plans will be changed or abandoned at the last moment), as one of the unwritten 'rules' of Spanish life is its spontaneity. Spain has been described as part advanced high-tech nation and part banana republic, where nothing and nobody works.

### **The Bumbling Bureaucracy**

Almost as infuriating as the bumbling bureaucracy is the infamous *mañana* syndrome, where everything is possible (*no problema*) 'tomorrow' – which can mean later, much later, some time, the day after tomorrow, next week, next week, next month, next year or never – but never, ever tomorrow (the Spaniard's motto is 'never do today what you can put off until *mañana*'). When a workman says he will come at 11 o'clock, don't

forget to ask which day, month and year he has in mind. Workmen (especially plumbers) don't usually keep appointments and, if they do decide to make an appearance, they're invariably late (and won't have the right tools or spares anyway). The Spanish are good at starting things but not so good at finishing them (hence the numerous abandoned building sites in Spain).

The Spanish are dismissive of time constraints and have no sense of urgency, treating appointments, dates, opening hours, timetables and deadlines with disdain (it's said that the only thing that begins on time in Spain is a bullfight). If you really need something done by a certain date, never tell a Spaniard your real deadline. It's significant, however, that the Spanish have a much lower incidence of stress-related disease than north Europeans, which is somewhat surprising in the noisiest country in Europe and the second loudest in the world (after Japan).

Over half the inhabitants of Spanish cities endure noise levels well in excess of the World Health Organization's 'healthy' limit of 65 decibels. Most noise is caused by traffic, lustily supported by pneumatic drills, jack hammers, chain-saws, mopeds (usually without silencers), car horns, alarms, sirens, radios, televisions, *fiestas*, fireworks, car and home music systems, discos, bars, restaurants, incessantly barking dogs, loud neighbors, screaming children and people singing in the streets.

In Spain, a normal conversation is two people shouting at each other from a few feet apart (not surprisingly, Spaniards are terrible listeners). Spanish cities are the earthly equivalent of Dante's hell, where inhabitants are subjected to endless noise. Maybe creating a din is the Spanish way of releasing tension? Spaniards don't care to waste time sleeping (except in the afternoons) when they can party and cannot see why anyone else should want to.

### **The World Champion Hedonists**

Spanish men are world champion hedonists and are mainly interested in five things: sex, football, food, alcohol and gambling (not necessarily in that order). The main preoccupation of the Spanish is having a good time and they have a zest for life matched by few other peoples. They take childish pleasure in making the most of everything and grasp every opportunity to make merry. The Spanish are inveterate celebrants and, when not attending a *fiesta*, family celebration or impromptu party, are to be found in bars and restaurants indulging in another of their favorite pastimes: eating and drinking.

Spaniards have a passion for food, which consists largely of *paella* and *tapas* and is always swimming in garlic and olive oil. Like the French, they eat all the objectionable bits of animals that 'civilised' people throw away (e.g. pigs' ears and bulls' testicles) and will eat any creatures of the deep, the more revolting-looking the better (e.g. octopus and squid). They're particularly fond of baby food (baby suckling pig, baby lamb, baby octopus), which is preferable to 'grown-up' food as it's easier to fit into the ubiquitous frying pan (when not eaten raw, like their ham, all food is fried in Spain). Contrary to popular opinion, the Spanish are a nation of animal lovers: they will eat anything that moves. They do, however, have an unsavory habit (at least most foreigners think so) of 'playing' with their food and can often be seen chasing their steak around a ring before dinner (*¡Olé!*).

### **Latin Lovers?**

When not eating (or playing guitars or flamenco dancing), the Spanish are allegedly having sex – Spanish men have a reputation as great lovers, although their virility isn't confirmed by the birth rate, which is one of the lowest in the world. In any case, most of their conquests are drunken tourists (only too keen to jump into the sack with anything in trousers), so their reputation doesn't bear close scrutiny. (A recent survey found that the

average Spaniard makes love badly and infrequently: just 71 times a year compared with the world average of 109 – how do they know these things?) Their macho image has taken a further pounding in recent years as women have stormed most male bastions and today are as likely to be found in the university, office, factory, professions or the government, as in the home or the church.

Most Spaniards are anarchists and care little for rules and regulations, generally doing what they want when they want, particularly regarding motoring (especially parking), smoking in public places, the dumping of rubbish and paying taxes. Paradoxically they've taken to democracy like ducks to water and are passionate Europeans, firmly believing in a united Europe and the euro (so would you if you'd had to put up with the peseta!). However, like most sensible people they care little for their politicians, whose standing has plummeted to new lows in the last decade following a spate of corruption scandals.

### **Beware of Criticism!**

The Spanish are sensitive to criticism, particularly regarding their history and traditions. Whatever you do, don't ask an old man 'what he did in the Civil War' or mention Franco, the Falklands or Gibraltar. Spaniards are intolerant of other people's views; criticism of Spain is reserved for the Spanish (who do it constantly) and isn't something to be indulged in by ignorant foreigners.

Since throwing off the shackles of dictatorship in 1975, Spain has resolutely turned its back on the past and embraced the future with gusto. In the last quarter of a century, the country has undergone a transformation influencing every facet of life. However, although most changes have been for the better, many people believe that the soul of traditional Spain has been lost in the headlong rush towards economic development.

The modern Spaniard is more materialistic than his forebears and has taken to the art of making a fast buck as quickly as any North American immigrant ever did. Progress has, however, been purchased at a high cost and has led to a sharp increase in crime, drug addiction, alcoholism, poverty, begging, and the devastation of unspoilt areas by developers hell-bent on smothering the country in concrete and golf courses. Despite being hard hit by the recession in the '90s, the country has made a strong recovery in recent years and has one of the most promising outlooks of any EU country.

### **To conclude**

Despite the country's problems, the Spanish enjoy one of the best lifestyles (and quality of life) of any European country and, indeed, any country in the world; in Spain work fits around social and family life, not vice versa. The foundation of Spanish society is the family and community, and the Spanish are noted for their close family ties, their love of children and care for the elderly (who are rarely abandoned in nursing homes). Spain has infinitely more to offer than its wonderful climate and rugged beauty and is celebrated for its arts and crafts, architecture, fashion, night-life, music, dance, gastronomy, design, sports facilities, culture, education, health care and technical excellence in many fields.

For sheer vitality and passion for life the Spanish have few equals, and whatever Spain can be accused of it's never dull or boring. Few other countries offer such a wealth of intoxicating experiences for the mind, body and spirit (and not all out of a bottle!). But the real glory of Spain lies in the outsize heart and soul of its people, who are among the most convivial, generous and hospitable in the world. If you're willing to learn Spanish (or at least try) and embrace Spain's traditions and way of life, you will invariably be warmly received by the natives, most of whom will go out of their way to welcome and help you. Spain is highly addictive and, while expats may occasionally complain, the vast majority wouldn't dream of leaving and infinitely prefer life in Spain

to their home countries. Put simply, Spain is a great place to live (provided you don't have to do business there).

To be continued in the September Edition of the Newsletter.



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