ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

July/August Newsletter

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Elders Commitment

I promise that from this moment on, I will live my life with unabashed delight and confidence, using my full wisdom, creativity, love, and energy to ensure that the world around me proceeds exactly the way that I want it to and envision that it can.

I will do this by inviting and encouraging others to join with me, think with me, and act in all of our best interests. as a basis for living this fully, I will pay loving and thoughtful attention to the needs of my body, mind, heart and soul, and welcome other people's love and attention when it is freely given.

I will respect and honour other elders and never permit anyone, including myself, to invalidate or stereotype elders again.

Harvey Jackins.

Geriatric Cyclopaths on Tour!

Walshy and I have been friends for 53 years, he turned 70 this year and I turn 72 in October. He went to St Aloysius, Hornsey, and I went to St Ignatius, Tottenham. We're proud members of the London Irish diaspora. He had been very unwell for some years and yet had made a prodigious recovery.

'Well' I said, last October, 'fancy going cycling on the Camino?' 'How far is that?' he inquired, 'I haven't cycled for 40 years.' 'That's perfect' I said, 'and it's a thousand miles.'

'Let's do it!' he declared.

That's how two septuagenarians decided on the road trip of a lifetime!

Two weeks before we got the ferry to St Malo, Walshy turned up at my flat in Archway; he'd got two flat tyres and his front wheel was loose! We'd chosen his bike six months earlier but he hadn't used it once. He hadn't cycled since the Miners' Strike and during our only practice run of 25 miles up around High Barnet, through quiet streets and parks, I chuckled as he groaned in posterior pain. 'OOh me arse!', was a constant refrain.

'You'll hear me groan Conn, but you won't hear me moan.' It was from these slender inklings that I was reassured that Kevin Walsh had the minerals needed to make it through France and over the mountain ranges in Spain.

Camino de Santiago

My obsession with the Camino de Santiago began in 2001. On a whim, I'd cycled 600 miles south through France from Calais marveling at the vast swathes of beautiful and seemingly endless countryside. France is 2.3 times larger than the United Kingdom with a comparable population, so there is SPACE. Cycling is their national sport, France is a cycling paradise. Unlike the U.K., cyclists are respected, encouraged and lauded. London motorists take note!

I'd visited the Cirque de Gavarnie, a huge natural amphitheatre with beautiful cascades in the Pyrenees National Park. I found I was only a few miles from the Spanish border so I left my bike and hiked up Mount Perdido into Spain. In the distance I saw a man leading a donkey and, curious, I scrambled down to see him. His donkey was saddled

and I asked ‘Ou allez-vous?’ he replied ‘St Jacques de Compostelle’. That was the very first time I had heard of the ‘Camino’, the Pilgrim road to the bones of St James in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, north eastern Spain. He was journeying over a thousand kilometres to get there! I was hooked.

When I came back to London I immersed myself in the history of the ‘Camino de Santiago de Compostela ’ or in French ‘le Chemin de Saint Jacques de Compostelle’. I joined the Confraternity of Saint James in London and availed myself of their excellent library in Blackfriars. I was amazed at what I found. There is a huge spider’s web of ancient pilgrim roads across the French and Spanish landscapes leading to the tomb of St James the Apostle in the crypt of Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela - St James in the Field of Stars. On these roads are magnificent buildings and incredible works of art. The churches, monasteries and castles were built to protect and sustain the pilgrims on their journey. A pilgrim infrastructure established over thousands of miles and a thousand years.

The pilgrimage is 1100 years old and began in the early 10th Century. The Church offered ‘remissionem peccatorum’, forgiveness of sins, to anyone who completed the journey to the tomb of St James. It was called the ‘Long walk to Heaven’ and as many as a half a million pilgrims made the journey every year in medieval times. This when the population of Europe was at least ten times smaller and the pilgrims faced many dangers.

French Way

The most popular route, the French Way, begins in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port on the French side of the Pyrenees and continues 500 miles to Santiago de Compostela. In 1993, the French Way was the first route of the Camino de Santiago to be recognised as a Unesco World Heritage site on account of its historical and cultural importance.

On April 14th Walshy and I got the overnight ferry from Portsmouth to St Malo and the next day began our Camino. I was determined that we have a safe route for Walshy to complete his cycling apprenticeship. Brittany is sumptuously green and rural and for the first two hundred and fifty miles we were completely traffic-free along canals and riverbanks.

We then headed west for the Atlantic Coast where the scenery was glorious sun, ocean and sand. Everyday I waited until the afternoon to book hotel rooms or AirBnB’s. Only once we were stuck and had to cycle 55 miles to get a bed for the night! The French call the Atlantic Route the ‘Velodyssey’.

Once we crossed the border at Hendaye the scenery changed dramatically and we were now heading up to the mountain plateau of Northern Spain. We joined the French Way and cycled through the incredible cities of Pamplona, Burgos, Leon, Ponferrada, Sarria on to Santiago de Compostela. We met pilgrims from all over the world and shared humour, adventure and encouragement with them. Everywhere was the scallop shell, the symbol of the Pilgrimage. On the way we struggled up Mountains like Foncebadon which at 1500 metres is 500 feet higher than Ben Nevis.

Pilgrim Mass in the Cathedral

We reached Santiago on the 22nd of May and gave ourselves five days to explore the amazing old city and its Cathedral and Churches. We also collected our prized scrolls from the Pilgrim Office and attended the Pilgrim Mass in the Cathedral. We returned at the end of May and I'm already planning a walking Camino with my wife Jackie. It is such a special journey.

Cornelius McAfee

Film Club and meal meeting at IPF office, 1A Providence Place, N1.

Date: Wednesday 23rd July at 12.00 noon. Call Lydia 07804693461 to book.

Moving Home

Moving is a chaotic dance of packing, lifting, and the inevitable breakage of cherished items. It's a whirlwind of cardboard boxes, discarded memories, and the lingering scent of furniture polish. The sheer volume of things we accumulate – often deemed "essentials" – becomes hilariously overwhelming during a move. The process is a comedy of errors, a testament to human resilience (or perhaps, the lack thereof) in the face of relentless unpacking.

It’s October 2024 and the Housing Association that has housed me for eighteen years has decided to sell the block of flats and put its tenants at the mercy of Islington’s Housing Services. Section 21 eviction notices all round!!! I am eighty years of age and more than a little frightened by tales of temporary accommodation, storage of my possessions gathered over this time and the need to experience a new neighbourhood. Friends offered rooms, beds and sofas to rest my weary body with love “but I needed my own nest” I cried.

Registering with Islington statutory agencies with the knowledge that Housing Services in the borough are overwhelmed with demand, I completed application after application, rebelling against demands for Income proof and bank account detail since this info had sat with the Council Benefits team for nearly eighteen years. But heigh ho! thems the rules.

This has been my experience, the packing of belongings the stripping of my old home of its character, my identity, and a final farewell to its forlorn bare walls some eight months later. Well despite my fears, despite my anger and misgivings and despite myself I have now been resident for three weeks in my new home. Just in time for the hottest Summer Solstice in my memory. I had been advised to apply for Sheltered Housing and toiled through yet another process which challenged the senses of my elderly conditioned mind of what is right and just.

And yes, out of all proportion I blew the issue. There was help and guidance from the most unexpected of sources. The Council services themselves were the least of the hurdles with 222 Upper Street being a 2025 positive experience. Thank you, guys. The Sheltered Housing Services projected a caring attitude despite there being a never-ending demand and me being just another statistic and not as important as I sometimes felt I was. And then the chaos. Two weeks before the move my desktop crashed. No computer, no data, no hyperspace and no connection. My automatic reliance on technology failed me with no back up despite contracting for a monthly secure service. Oh! this Windows Ten jobby is no good, worn out and due to be replaced by an upstart

Eleven, distraught and discouraged I set my sons the task of identifying a new one since the well-known supplier of my eight year old sicky machine could not provide me with the technology, despite their claims to be the biggest and best in the High Street. Grrrrr.

Note I am partially sighted and used a 24 inch All In One desktop, with Touch screen technology to do my volunteer work. Nowhere, no longer in their product range and their large screen desktop offerings zilch Touch Screen All-in-Ones. Twentieth century tech for a 21st century world. Grrrrrrr.

My boys came good, and I am now whizzing away on my new Touchy desktop screen but this Eleven stuff is clumsy. It no longer talks to my TV without a cable nor my all-in-one printer. Both have grown old with me and whilst perfectly fine with Windows Ten (due for burial later this year, it is rumoured) this Eleven does not support them so they may well have to be retired well before their time. Expensive data recovery costs, frantic worries and resigned to spending more money on "Cloud" coverage, despite its contribution to climate change, I now commit myself to letting people know where I am.

I have paid for a one-year postal redirection service to pick up any failed Move notifications which I have probably missed. But I have swopped N19 for N5 and whilst with fond memories of the past the chaos and emotional carnage encourages me to embrace N5 with relish and I love it!!!

Mike Sanderson

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

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Alan McDonald
Irma Gomez
Philip Richards
Cornelius McAfee
Jan Pollock
Pam Zinkin
Irma Gomez

Staff:
Lydia Batchelor: Outings/events organiser

Committee Meetings on the first Monday of the month at 10.30am at the IPF hall

Forum Meetings on the third Thursday on the month at 10.30 am in the Town Hall