



Acts of Kindness

No man is an island

An article in the newspaper this week caught my eye. It was concerned with avoiding dementia. Much has been written about this topic and in my senior years, I am still a passionate student, only the subject-matter has varied!

The article by Sarah Berry in The Age May 1, 2023, makes the case that “For a longer life, being engaged in our community is what matters most.” What being engaged in [the] community looks like, varies a great deal, as it should, because we as humans vary a great deal! What we have in common though is the need for connection. As a former English teacher, the words of John Donne come to mind:

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;*

If you are a regular reader of these blogs, you will know that my daily walks are not only a way to keep active and stretch out my limbs after long sessions seated at my desk or in my reading chair, but they are also a source of connection. I have ‘met’ many of my neighbours while walking the streets of our neighbourhood and *The boy in the window (Blog 3)*, *You just wait there (Blog 7)*, *Lindsay and the magpies (Blog 11)* are some of the stories arising.

Another way I have chosen to connect is through a *Movement for Life* class that I have enrolled in with U3A. This class has been a lovely way to combine exercise with connection. I went along to the class with few expectations, and I have been rewarded handsomely. The teacher – a volunteer senior herself – is as passionate and committed to her offering as any teacher I encountered in my 46 years of teaching.

The nature of the class is movement of all the joints – the whole body – to ensure that we are able to move them when pursuing our daily activities. It is so much more than that though. The teacher has chosen inspiring music for us to move to, and the type of music in genre, culture and pace is extensive. With the music, we are guided through movement centring on each joint in a controlled and focused way. Gradually we begin to join up the movements so that we are moving in a fluid way with the music. To conclude the class, we are invited to move to the music in any way we choose; movement that is respectful of the others around us and is in response to the music played.



Over the course of some classes, we have gradually become freer and more expressive. This has occurred because of the trust that has been built between us at the instigation of our teacher.

In building this trust, she stresses that the class and the space is open to us all. We must try to come to each class even if we are not feeling 100% in the mood or are physically below par. It is a safe space. We begin each class with one snippet of news from each of us. We are then invited to complete exercises in our own way and according to our capabilities. We are discouraged from looking around and comparing. However, we do some interactive movement where we mirror each other's movements; we sign our names in silent swirls in the air to conclude the session.

I began this blog with an article on avoiding dementia; I skipped over small ways I maintain connection in my neighbourhood and in an inspiring class I attend. I conclude with an understanding that being engaged in our community may simply be remaining open to all that is around us – the people and the opportunities, the readings and the kindness extended – all within reach. If this gentle way of being also aids in holding off dementia – which I understand does not necessarily accompany ageing per se – then it is rewarding manifold.