

A letter to my younger self



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As we age, we often find ourselves reflecting on the past and all those 'what might have been' questions.

To try to explore what ageing in Gateshead means and what we can learn, we commissioned a writing project, supported by Equal Arts. The project asked local people to consider what advice they might give to their younger selves.

The key messages which were repeated over and over related to the value of finding and sustaining friendships, to remaining active, keeping in contact with others and to living in the present. It was clear that participants were saying that 'the past is over and done with' and that 'we can't change it'.

A reflection by Ceinwen - artist in residence

It has been a privilege to work as resident artist in the 'Ageing Well in Gateshead' project. My brief was to run writing workshops with groups of elders who live independently in Gateshead and to discover what advice they might give to their younger selves regarding how to live well as they advanced in years.

Our workshops were characterised by the participants' open attitudes, trust, friendship and humour (sometimes refreshingly wicked). It was also evident that, at times, people were sharing aspects of themselves, and their lives, that had previously remained under wraps. People were prepared to take risks in front of each other, revealing feelings, memories and insecurities and this was met with kindness and understanding.

I witnessed, again and again, the strength of people's acceptance of their life circumstances, rather than rumblings of grudging resignation. Our participants were people who continue to embrace life and I am humbled by their trust in me as the facilitator, and by their commitment to the process. I witnessed many extraordinary moments, moments of recognition, connection and joy. These were often accompanied by gales of laughter, occasionally by tears.

What started as a journey to discover acquired wisdom about health issues often developed into a celebration of lives lived, resilience and love. In one session, a woman in her late eighties stated,

"Would I do it all again - no I wouldn't - I'm happy now. I've had a good life."



Friendship

You can trust your friends,
tell them things in confidence
know it won't go any further.
Friends are there to lend a hand
when needed. We need friends.
Friends make a big difference

By Maureen, Susan, Dawn, Brenda
and Bev (helped by Winnie)

Company

Company is important
if you get alone you need family
and friends
yes, time with other people -
you get lonely on your own
coming here is lovely
joining in
McErlane Square
knits our community together

Poems by Irene, Joan, Brenda, Eve,
Mary, Margaret, Betty, Rita, Laes

I love
to learn new things, to fill my time and not be bored and I get to spend time
with other people

I love
retirement but I still need to get up and go
life without work can be boring and lonely
I love pets, they're company - a different kind of company
I love to watch Olympic sport, tennis, athletics and football too
I love exercise - we do our own chair exercises and keep fit
I encourage the others it can be hard work mind

I love
music - we've got wide tastes here,
we also like the theatre, but it's so expensive
I love to read - I could sit and read all day, but I don't always get the chance
I love weekdays - weekends can be long, there's loads on in the week
I love peace and I need time to relax time to switch off.
I love to talk - to get it all out
I try not to worry about small things, when I chat I feel so much better
I love my community - everyone joins in, people are friendly
and we talk out our problems

I love
to be handy and always make things, I'm creative
I go to groups, I'm out more than the gas
I love to be positive - I don't think anyone should regret getting older
so many didn't get the chance, health is more important than money
and the NHS is very, very important
I love to have some control over my life - and not be told what to do
or be dominated by my partner, it's important to learn to say no
I love to share - time/chat/experiences, even clothes
I love to laugh - have fun and enjoy life, my last thirty-five years has been my
best time

Poems by Irene, Joan, Brenda, Eve, Mary, Margaret, Betty, Rita, Laes

friends are very important

you need friends round you
to be honest and make memories together
to tell your secrets to
it's good to talk about old times
with old friends you quickly pick up
even after long absences

chat to your friends and be positive
new friends give you different perspectives
pick your friends carefully
you need close friends
and nice acquaintances too

friends help each other out
you feel sad when your friends aren't well
you get close to people you laugh with
it's great to share a good laugh
be young at heart
socialising is good for you
friendship shows you the bright side of life

By Molly, Sheila A, Sheila B, Terry, Anna, Margaret, Collin

Rock My Rocking Chair

Walk in the park, breathe fresh air,
say nice day to people you meet.
Remember we all need others.
That rocks my rocking chair.

Be with my lovely girl and sing,
Let me call you sweetheart,
and I am with her again.
That rocks my rocking chair.

Chocolate for breakfast
and chocolate for dinner,
as well as chocolate for tea.
That rocks my rocking chair.

Lots of peace and sleep,
and quiet to calm my questions.
Be still my overactive mind.
That rocks my rocking chair.

by Tommy, Elizabeth, Joan and Susan

What You Need to Know

Remember, things change when
you're older.

Time goes faster,
you have to know how to
change as well.

In my thirties, I became the
breadwinner and everything
altered.

I learnt be careful who you
trust - and who you don't.

You never know what's lurking
around the next corner.

By Susan

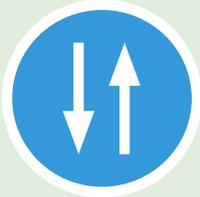
Friendship

Sometimes you meet someone, and know in five minutes that you'll get on.



Friends might have a laugh or go on a good night out together.

Friends look out for each other.



Friendship is a two-way street, friends are there when you need them - it feels good to be trusted and to be told what's on your marra's mind. You can have a good moan enjoy companionship.

You have different friends for different conversations but family aren't always friends.



Some friends love shopping therapy

Golfers play with friends - It's good to banter and best to beat them.



Good friends share time, make memories together.

Good friends don't have to talk - You can listen to each other's problems, or relax and sit in silence.





Lifelong friends, they're very special.
With good friends, you can pick up from
the place you left off after months
or even years.

So many shared memories of going
around together.



Friends might play bingo
- you win some, lose some
maybe lose a canny few!



Friends can be a pain in the backside,
everyone has a different character
so friends learn about each other, come to
an understanding - make allowances.

Friends are thoughtful,
when needed they'll feed your pet.
Some friends are furry,
like Ivan, Albert's cat.



Here I am at 50 years old and all I am really in a good place. Life has been good to me which I can't believe. I started going back in the past had a great husband who was kind and considerate. My children came along and we became a real family.

Then moving up to my life now at 78 years all children have their own families. We moved to a bungalow in sheltered accommodation, it suited my husband and I.

Bill died in 2014 life changed.

But you find a new life for myself now which I have found which has worked.

With love
Margaret

Dear Younger Me

Elizabeth heed your mothers advice to help people as you never know when you will need good advice as well.

Being nice costs nothing but your time and patience.

This comes to mind when I walk through Saltwell Park. It is a great leveller, and maybe you will just make someone's day.

With love
Elizabeth

Wish I knew then what I know now.

Think for myself, not worry what others think. I should not have got married so young.

3 children in 2 yrs 9 months, good catholic no birth control. Went to South Africa and came back with a fourth. May not have chosen so quick or even married same man. Never took tablets for 79 years, never ill, kept healthy with herbs, took blood pressure tablets fell twice through low blood pressure.

Now Gateshead is a good place to live.

Millenium bridge, Baltic, Sage, Shipley Art Gallery, Saltwell Park, Library, Swimming Pool, Little Theatre. Great bus service 53,54. Metro to seaside, country, to towns. Cheap pass £12.

Bus pass enables meeting people on buses.

With love, Joan.

I write this letter with love and a wish your life will develop into a happy successful future surrounded by people who care and love you. Friends who are loyal and supportive. I know you will have a great deal of kindness to offer and a willingness to learn and achieve.

Choose your partner carefully. You need to know they appreciate you and that you are willing to listen and work with their interests, 'give respect' never be critical of others.

Eat well and keep as fit as possible to ensure health throughout life. Laugh dance and travel while you can. 'Never miss breakfast'. Widen your horizon, go out and try new interests. I do puzzles to maintain brain power.

Love life, praise the lord. Prepare for the future by enjoying the present.

Love from me to you, Jan

Good news its 2019 and your still alive.

Things have changed a bit in the future.

Some advice, computers rule everyone's lives, so take computing courses.

Try to take more attention to family and friends don't worry about things too much all turns out well.

Money is everyone's god in 2019 so look after family. lock doors. Be careful don't drink too much its unhealthy. eat well no curry.

With love George

As you get older don't start thinking about your age and how you should act. Live life to the full, enjoy new challenges, spread your wings, meet new people, value your friends. Form opinions but listen and respect the opinions of others.

Changes are going to be forced on you so meet them head on and turn them to your advantage as much as you can.

In short don't give in to old age, get out of the house, try new things, make new friends. Join any or all of the groups the council offers, you'll have the greatest time of your life and find out that you never grow old.

With love
Carole

Memories from the corners of my heart

Dear Tommy

My thoughts go back thirty years which was when Irene was taken ill. I nursed her and I cared for her and my love for her grew for twenty years until she died I found no social life. I spent every bit of my time with her and admired her on courage. I left my job to be with her.

The last years were the most unhappy time of my life but I am now happy and enjoying life. My wife's been dead for 10 years but I still talk to her occasionally.

With love
Tommy

Dear Younger Me

You've been a fool. You should have done things took chances took opportunities that offered themselves and not covered away from them. Been more responsible for your own happiness.

My past is full of regrets but in life you blindly fumble on and forgive yourself. Hoping that you gain acceptance of who you are and learn. Life is about love seeking it and giving it, loving and being loved -

Reading Bertrand Russell's the 'Conquest of Happiness' helped me enormously and music, art, nature and 8 out of 10 things in life are rubbish anyway so don't worry uselessly.

With love Walter

PS. Nourish the inner child!

Dear younger Me

I live very near to Saltwell Park which is a great place for meeting people. Walking around the lake is a lovely social place. The park is a place you could visit on your own .. strike up a conversation with someone else. If Dad was out and about and someone said "hello, nice day" it made his day, this is what I like to do. Sometimes someone says "You are the first person I've spoken to today".

Remember this when you walk around even a smile can make their day.....

Any yours

With love
Elizabeth

I enjoy being old

But I don't half feel the cold

I do wear purple and a red hat that
doesn't match

I enjoy looking at men's bums

But I don't touch cos I don't want to
catch

I wear odd socks

I no longer wish to fit into societies box

I do what I want to do

Well what I can

I love to dance, but I can no longer do
the can can

I sing when I feel like it

Well make odd noises

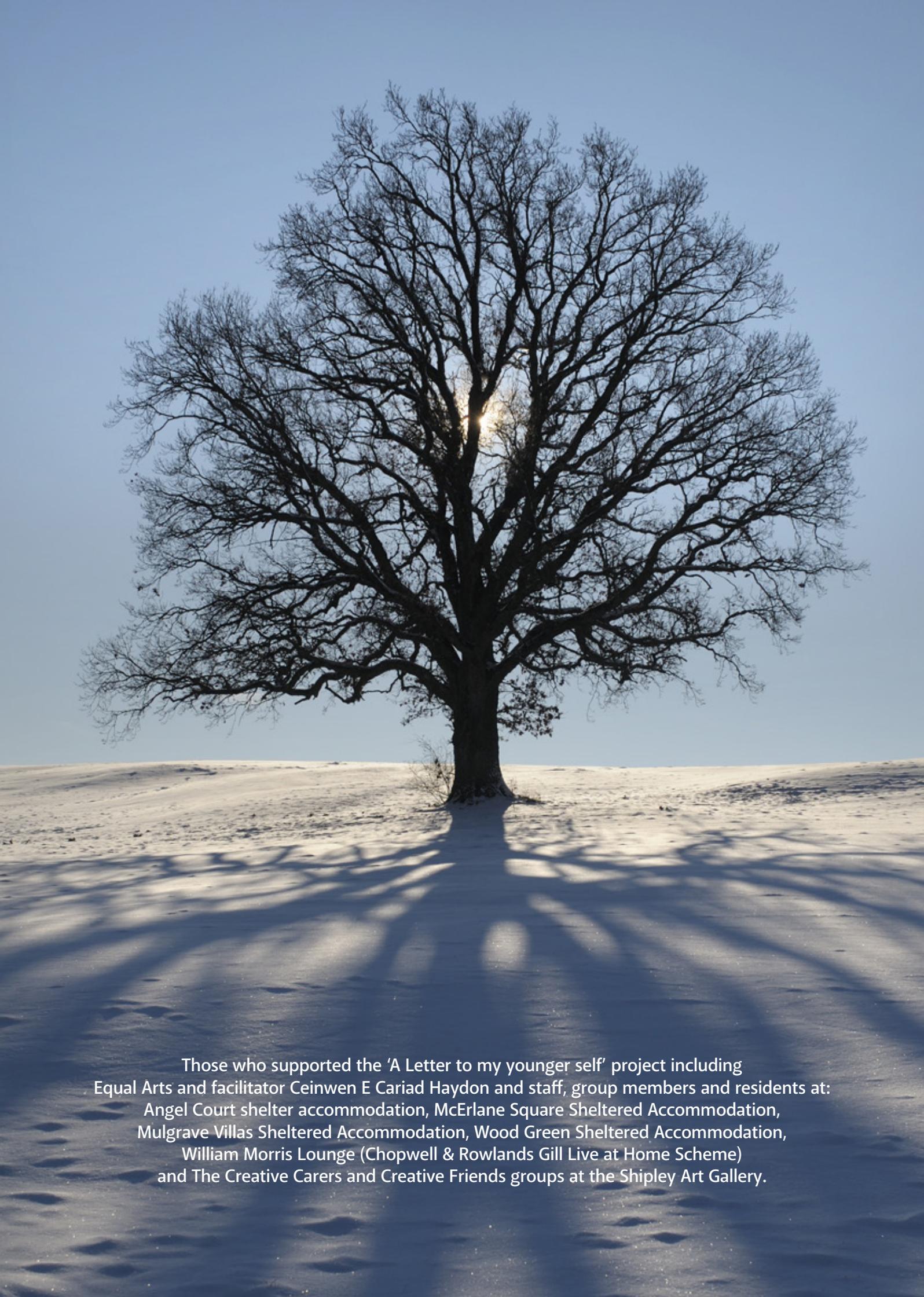
I dance up and down the kitchen when I
feel like it and I make tea

I like being me.

Joan

- Be happy and good to your friends
- Have a good laugh
- Eat well exercise well and have lots of laughs and friends
- Enjoy music and think positive, always be creative
- Don't give up and stop peeing over high walls, you can't change things
- Be good to friends, be happy

By Terry, Anna, Sheila A, Molly, Sheila B, Collin



Those who supported the 'A Letter to my younger self' project including Equal Arts and facilitator Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon and staff, group members and residents at: Angel Court shelter accommodation, McErlane Square Sheltered Accommodation, Mulgrave Villas Sheltered Accommodation, Wood Green Sheltered Accommodation, William Morris Lounge (Chopwell & Rowlands Gill Live at Home Scheme) and The Creative Carers and Creative Friends groups at the Shipley Art Gallery.