Keeping in Touch

The President’s Greeting

Winter is upon us in all its glory, some sunny days, a touch of rain and the occasional gust of wind. And so, the theme for this month’s newsletter is by the fireside - focussing on things we can enjoy indoors.

Stephanie Forsyth introduces us to the world of collage creativity. Her ‘Covid-19 Series’ covers the 30 days of April (the first month of ‘lockdown’) and a visual reminder of what was happening in our world at that time. For some twenty years Stephanie has participated in a prestigious International Collage Exhibition & Exchange and her wonderful collages reveals an extraordinary talent.

For anyone interested in playing cards, the articles on Canasta (Pam Floyd) and Cribbage (Karin Canty) give a brief overview of each game and the opportunity to learn these games in good company. And for the movie buffs, Judith Hall tempts us with some suggestions of various genres to explore until the Movie Group resumes.

Meanwhile, Judy and Rob Mitchell regale their travels through the Outer Hebrides in recent years and as you read this article perhaps some seeds sown to consider exploring these Islands in your future travel plans.

And as always, Keith Stockall’s Joke of the Month is not to be missed. No doubt it will have the men on high alert speed dialling their bank, hanging onto their wallet and cutting up credit cards. As for the women among us, we’ll be in peals of laughter thinking – ‘my lucky day’ or ‘if only it were that easy’!

Don’t forget, if you’d like to have something included in the August edition, please send this to the Secretary by July 10th at: secretary.probuscbp@gmail.com

Until next month - Stay safe and well, and enjoy some sunshine if you can.

Kathy Beresford,
President

Member Support

Don’t forget, if you or someone you know in the Club needs some support or perhaps a friendly call, please contact Helen O’Neill our Member Support Officer

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Quote of the Month

Life must be lived and curiosity kept alive.
Eleanor Roosevelt

Photo: John Poczyneck, Sculptures by the Sea, 2019
30 Collages in 30 Days

Stephanie Forsyth

As COVID-19 cast its nasty shadow over the world, we were advised to look after our mental health as much as our physical health.

To create my own order and discipline in these difficult times, I decided to revisit the vast array of ephemera and vintage stuff I have stashed for creating my collages (which I've been doing for a couple of decades). I do however, prefer the euphemism “hunting and gathering” rather than “hoarding”! I know, there’s a fine line.

I began a quest of creating one framed assemblage a day for 30 days, commencing April 1st and ending on April 30th. I have been collecting, creating, exhibiting, exchanging and selling for so long now, I recognize that I have found my own “happy place” when creating my pieces.

Day 1 Music from the Past

Each day in my Covid-19 Series was a visual reminder of what was happening in our world via the media and our links to the past, using vintage and antique pieces (the stash I mentioned) and as one day rolled into another, came the realization that nothing in our world would be quite the same for some time, if ever, normality returned.

Day 18 Social Distancing

I purchased “Click & Collect” Ikea 25cms x 25cms Collage frames, very different from the usual professional frames, though a great deal cheaper this time and a first, each with its own Dymo label, as I was beginning to forget what day of the week it was!

It’s said creativity is a great distraction and a balm for the mind when anxiety becomes overwhelming in one’s life. I think this is true, and it is also worth remembering, it’s the process of creating which matters, not necessarily a productive outcome.

For 20 years I have participated in an International Collage Exhibition & Exchange. Beginning in 1999 in Cecil Touchon’s original “Baker’s Dozen”, Museo de Collage, Mexico, and sadly, the final 20th “International Collage Exchange” last year with the generous and creative genius Dale
Copeland and the International Collage Exchange in New Zealand.

As a Baker’s Dozen implies, 13 pieces (think art not bread), roughly A4 size are created, 11 of the Collages are swapped with other collage artists around the world, 1 is hopefully sold and the other resides in a Museum or Gallery in another part of the world.

Links to some of Stephanie’s works in the exhibition follow: Sphinx; 10 Easy Pieces; Song of India; Black and White and Red All Over; and Through the Lens

So I’m happy to know that though I won’t be going anywhere soon, my work is lodged in places I would have liked to visit, such as Museo de Collage in Mexico, Santa Fe, in France in ArtColle, Sergines and Plemet, (with the young and talented) in the National High School of Fine Arts in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, happily closer to home in Melbourne and New Zealand and in interesting places such as Amarillo, Appalachia, Durango, South Taranaki, Wisconsin, Puke Ariki, New Plymouth amongst others.

Often when I was working at the dining table with our music on and the sun shining through the windows, I wondered what the empty streets and the night held for the thousands of lonely, homeless and desperate people outside in a hostile world, and how blessed we are, food in the cupboard, a roof over our heads and in a place of safety.

Day 19 We’ll Soon Be Out of the Nest

Day 30 Everything in Moderation

Art and creativity are for sharing, so I am sharing my thoughts in the form of Collages that came to mind during April 2020 as we all learnt to look for other things to occupy ourselves in these challenging times.

You are most welcome to come over to Putney for a peek at my work and a cup of tea.

Stephanie Forsyth
Stay safe, keep well.

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Canasta
Pam Floyd

Overview
The Canasta group started in 2014 when our Club first started. It has grown considerably over the last five years.

The game is a bit like learning English - as explained by Ingrid Kaschik, relatively easy to get started, but reveals itself to be more complex the more familiar you become. You also learn to apply different strategies according to the number of players. And now might be a good time to work on your two-handed game: deal 15, minimum of two canastas to go out.

And just when you thought you could play Canasta, our group created our own rules, also known as Phil's Rules (thanks to Phil Canty). We pass 3 or 4 cards only across the table to our partners to give the game more rigour. Otherwise, it's too easy a game.

Players are usually in groups of 4, in pairs of 2, i.e. 2 players are partners. However, groups of 3 can play, but without a partner, it is called cut throat!

COVID Safe Canasta!

Clearly, we have a sense of humour and haven't lost this in recent times!

Comments from some Canasta players

Can't do without it. That's the problem!
Jenny Hennell

I love Canasta as it is such a relaxed atmosphere, lots of fun and wonderful friends.
Jenni Crosby

It is a joy and something to look forward to on Monday afternoons. Just fun.
Jo Duncan

I love playing canasta. It's such fun and a great way to exercise the brain. All the members who play are so lovely with a great sense of humour. It's a group I really look forward to every week.
Jenny Viglianti

Our group consists of around 24 players and met each Monday at 2pm at the Country Club. And woe, betide anyone who arrives late! The ding a ling bell is rung promptly at 2pm.

A winning hand!

‘I’d give up a dinner with Tom Cruise for Canasta’
Laughter! Lots of lovely, loud, laughter.

*Gilda McRobert*

Now, I’ll put my cards on the table. I’d give up a dinner with Tom Cruise for our afternoon with you folk playing Canasta. Just love the fun and friendship.

*Marg Vella*

Meanwhile, until we come back together as a group, or at any time, members can play online, via this [link](#).

And then it won’t be long before we celebrate another Canasta Christmas! If you are interested in joining the Canasta group, please contact [Pam Floyd](#).

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**Cribbage**

*Karin Canty*

The game of Cribbage is over 400 years old. It uses a standard card deck and a score board. Playing involves 2, 3, 4 or 6 players. That’s the bare bones of it. But it is really unlike any other card game. There are no suits, bowers, tricks, bids or collections.

So, what happens you may ask? There are three parts to playing. Firstly the ‘deal’, then the ‘play’ and lastly the ‘score’. You can also be ‘Skunked’ which needs another level of explanation. Paul Barnes, seen here with Phil Canty, has a special relationship to being ‘skunked’!

You can learn this game by downloading the *Cribbage Classic* App onto your iPhone, iPad and iPod. Go to the App Store or Google Play. The *Cribbage Classic* app uses the same rules as played by the Cribbage group. This app is also useful if you have played in the past and want to refresh your memory.

If you need more help to learn this interesting game, drop an email to Karin Canty using the link at the end of this article.

There is no cost to play Cribbage. However, it is envisaged that members may wish to segue to dinner at the Country Club after the game.

There is another incentive for playing lots of Cribbage - you can achieve the look of an ‘awesome cribbage player’ just like the handsome model on the following page.
The Group will meet on second and fourth Thursday of each month at 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm when the Breakfast Point Country Club allows us to gather again.

If you want to know more, contact Karin on our Probus website.

In Vino Veritas

John Langley

New Testament, Timothy 1, Chapter 5, Verse 23.

Drink no longer water but use a little wine for thy stomache's sake and thine often infirmities.

The King James version is:

Stop drinking only water and use a little wine because of your stomache and your frequent illnesses.

At the Movies - Movie Group

Judith Hall

My love of the movies began as a young girl growing up in a small country town, where the highlight of the week was Saturday afternoon at the pictures. This love has continued throughout my life, and is still a favourite way to spend an afternoon.

So, when the original Probus movie group disbanded, it seemed a perfect opportunity to contribute to our club by convening a new group, and at the same time doing something that I really enjoy.

I enjoy different genres, so I had planned to select both mainstream and what some may consider “Art House” movies – those that some members may not usually choose to see but perhaps, enjoy given the opportunity.

Unfortunately, we only managed to come together twice before the dreaded pandemic hit and we were forced to disband. We had a really good attendance on both occasions.

We go to the Palace Norton Street Cinema at Leichhardt as it offers such a wide selection of movies and is readily accessible to all our members.
We meet in the foyer around mid-day to early afternoon on the third Sunday of the month and catch up for a coffee or light lunch, and hopefully a coffee afterwards to share our thoughts on the movie we have just seen.

For me nothing beats a darkened theatre and being thoroughly engrossed for a couple of hours, so movies at home don’t hold the same appeal. However, there are so many avenues available and here are a couple of movies you might like to try.

The first is “Parasite”, a South Korean movie and winner of last year’s Palme d’Or at Cannes Film Festival and an Oscar for Best Film in 2020. You can watch it by screening on Stan. This is a black comedy about two very different families from the opposite ends of the social scale, and an insight into another culture and form of entertainment. Certainly, very different viewing!

The other is “The Trip to Greece” for rent on YouTube, with Steve Coogan and Rob Bryden. These two British comedians have also done “The Trip to Italy”, available on Stan and YouTube. Even if you’re not into the continual comedy prattle between the boys, which is the essence of these shows, the amazing scenery alone is worth a viewing. You can relive your trips to both these beautiful countries.

However, it remains to be seen if we will feel comfortable enough by then to again join with other movie goers. Let’s hope it’s not too far away anyway. Hope to see you there, when we are once again able to safely watch movies together. If you have any further enquiries about our Movie Group, go to our Probus website.

The Armchair Traveller

A View of The Outer Hebrides from a tourist point of view.

Judy and Rob Mitchell

The Outer Hebrides, also known as The Western Isles, is a chain of islands off the west coast of Scotland, washed by the mighty Atlantic Ocean on the western side and separated on the eastern side from the Inner Hebrides and the Scottish mainland by a stretch of water known as The Minch.

The Outer Hebrides from south to north consists of Mingulay, Vatersay, Barra, Eriskay, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, Harris and Lewis. Both English and Gaelic are spoken there.

It has to be one of our favourite destinations due to its remote, rugged beauty and our family connection through Rob’s great grandfather, John Mitchell, who emigrated to Australia in 1880 from the Isle of Lewis in the northern part of The Outer Hebrides, like many others, seeking a better life.

We have visited the Outer Hebrides twice. The first time was a brief stop in Stornoway, the main town on The Outer Hebrides situated on Lewis in the north. The second time was a more comprehensive visit which involved Australian descendants of John Mitchell who gathered in Stornoway for the launching of a book about the Mitchell Family Garage which serviced the whole island with cars and buses, and was
established by a distant cousin. The Australian descendants also visited the burial site of their great, great grandfather, a crofter, also named John Mitchell. This site is on a hill overlooking one of the beautiful beaches in the Isles.

To reach Stornoway in the north, we caught the car ferry from Ullapool, a quaint Scottish village situated on The Minch on the west coast of Scotland. On our second trip, we decided to travel from Oban on the Scottish mainland and arrived in the south at Castlebay, Barra.

The ferries are often cancelled due to wild weather and we experienced what we thought was wild enough weather to cancel but the hardy ferry masters just kept on going.... I wonder what they classify as wild weather!

Car ferry to Stornoway.

Castlebay is the main village on the island of Barra and its harbour is dominated by a statue of the Madonna and Child.

Approaching the wharf at Castlebay

Barra is the location for the book and film ‘Whisky Galore ’ by Compton Mackenzie, a true story about a cargo ship that lost hundreds of thousands of bottles of whisky when a ship ran aground in a fog in 1941. There is also a light plane that services Barra departing Glasgow twice daily and is tide dependent. It is fascinating to watch the plane coming in to land on the beach and unload its passengers and their luggage.

Plane landing on Barra beach

The southern part of the Outer Hebrides is staunchly Catholic, and in the north, the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church are the dominant religions, their worshippers being very pious with a reputation of observing the Sabbath strictly – as seen below.

Heading north from Barra, we passed though Eriskay (listen to Judith Durham singing the Eriskay Love Lilt). Eriskay is famous as the landing place of Bonnie Prince Charlie when he arrived from France to regain the British throne resulting in the Jacobite uprising. Charlie was later assisted in his escape from Scotland via South Uist by Flora MacDonald who lived there.

We then travelled through South and North Uist and across The Sound of Harris by ferry to the Isles of Harris (famous for its tweed which is very expensive even over there)
and Lewis which are not separate islands but joined by a narrow isthmus.

A distinctive feature of the islands is the lack of trees creating the panoramic open spaces which are magnificent. Peat is abundant and is used for fuel and housing construction. The exteriors of houses and churches on the islands are quite austere being built to withstand the weather, icy blasts and winds from the Atlantic and frequent rain; but the interiors of the B&Bs that we stayed in were very attractive, cozy and comfortable. Several of the B&Bs we stayed in, were owned by English people looking for a change in lifestyle. One host had whisky on the menu for breakfast with porridge .... why not thought Judy and enjoyed the wee drop. It is a habit I haven’t maintained in case you are wondering.

Black houses were once the norm in the islands housing both people and livestock, separated by a partition, and, with no chimney, the thatched roofs absorbed the smoke and were eventually removed and used as fertiliser. The houses were rethatched...nothing was wasted by these poor and thrifty crofters.

The roads are generally narrow and suitable only for one car so there are frequent laybys.

The pace is relatively slow in the Outer Hebrides not seeing a billboard or advertising space along the roads and you can often miss a shop because it was not obvious, no visual pollution just beautiful wide-open spaces.

Stornoway, the capital of Lewis, is a harbourside town with plenty of fishing trawlers, eateries and interesting shops and is dominated by Lews (not Lewis) Castle built by James Matheson who bought the island in 1844. Matheson and a fellow Scot, today is still relevant around Scotland for other purposes.

The beaches along the Atlantic, particularly Luskentyre in Harris and Berneray, are magnificent and marked by huge tides and white sands and turquoise water.
William Jardine founded Jardine Matheson now one of Asia's biggest multinationals.

Lews Castle, Stornoway

In 1917 the Matheson family sold Lewis to Lord Leverhulme of Unilever and Sunlight soap fame.

Another 'famous' citizen of Stornoway is Donald Trump's mother who migrated from Lewis to the US and well, ...the rest is history.

Some of you may remember the story of a young Prince Charles, 14 years old, who was visiting Stornoway on a sailing excursion from his Scottish boarding school and was served a cherry brandy in one of the harbourside hotels. The barmaid pleaded ignorance not knowing who Charles was or his age. A plaque on the hotel wall proudly acknowledges this occasion.

Lewis is famous for the discovery of the 78 Lewis chessmen.

This is a collection of chessmen, carved from walrus ivory and discovered in a sand dune in 1831 by a crofter and thought to be of Norwegian origin from the 12th century. They now are on display in the British Museum and the Museum of Scotland.

The photo below shows two Mitchell men with a Berseker, one of the Lewis Chessmen berserkers who worked themselves into a frenzy before going into battle.

Lewis Chessman, British Museum

Meanwhile, The Callanish Standing Stones (think Outlander – a favourite of many!) are located on Lewis and are easily accessed. They beat Stonehenge given the stones there are unfortunately “see but don't touch” these days.

A photo of the Callanish stones appears on the following page.
The Callanish Standing Stones

If this article piques your interest, you may like to read further:

1. The Lewis Trilogy, three crime books by Peter May set on The Outer Hebrides, The Blackhouse, The Chessmen and The Lewis Man

2. Whisky Galore by Compton Mackenzie

3. His Bloody Project by Graeme Macrae Burnet (not set in the Outer Hebrides but giving you an insight into the poverty and suffering endured by crofters in the 19th century).

There is so much history and so many famous people associated with these islands it is impossible for me to know where to begin and end. For more information read: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outer_Hebrides

PS: John Mitchell, who migrated to Australia from Lewis, became a policeman in NSW and was posted to Coonamble where he was shot by a prisoner trying to escape and died two days at later at age 29, leaving a wife and two small boys. His name is on the honour roll of NSW policemen who have died in the line of duty. What a long journey from Lewis to Coonamble where a statue in his memory has been erected outside the Coonamble police station.

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