

University of the Third Age Plettenberg Bay

Newsletter August 2022

Dear Members

Welcome to our third newsletter since the re-awakening from the Covid-19 lockdown hibernation. Below are reports on our recent activities. We welcome your feedback and suggestions regarding our programmes and events; contact: u3aplett@gmail.com.

Covid-19 and vaccinations

After two years, two months, and 26 days our Health Minister repealed South Africa's restrictive Covid–19 regulations on 22 June 2022. This resulted in the relaxation of mask mandates. As many of you know, Formosa Garden Village (FGV), the venue for most of our activities, required that U3A attendees must provide proof of their Covid vaccinations – hence the red dot on membership badges. Phillip Wentzel of FGV has advised that they are awaiting a ruling from the Department of Health as to whether Covid vaccinations are still compulsory in respect of institutions such as FGV. Until the ruling is made, we do NOT need to continue checking vaccination status. However, the FGV strongly recommends that everyone be vaccinated.

Membership matters

New member subscriptions are R180 for the year if you join between January and June, and half of that amount (R90) if you join after July.

Visitors are always welcome, the cost being R30 per event, unless you are a member of any other South African U3A branch. Please remember to wear your badges!

Note: there will be **no meeting at Formosa Garden Village on 22 August**, due to the FGV's AGM.

Best wishes from the Plett U3A committee members

Past activities

Wednesday, 29 June: 'Diamonds in the Sand': The story behind the story, by Maurice Robin

An accomplished raconteur, Maurice described how, during World War II, a packet of diamonds travelled from the Kimberley fields of South Africa to England, Belgium, Holland, then to Java and finally to Broome in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The diamonds were being transported from Amsterdam for safekeeping during the Nazi invasion.

Maurice spent many years researching the history of these diamonds - which today would be worth many millions of rands - thereby discovering the story of a couple and their trials as they coped with the ever-changing situations they faced during 1937 to 1943. In the process Maurice obtained documents and illustrations that provide revelatory details and information regarding the connection between the German and Japanese wars and the part that all the different countries played in the events that led up to WW II and how they all eventually became involved.

The result was a manuscript entitled 'Charlotte's Diamonds', which sadly no one wanted to publish, except Xlibris. However, this publisher does not publish non-fiction. Also, Xlibris did not like the title, so Maurice's annotated and illustrated research report became a work of fiction, in which some names have been changed, called 'Diamonds in the Sand'. The book is available as a paperback edition (2012) and also as an ebook. (Note: There are at least seven books and one unrelated documentary video by the same title.)

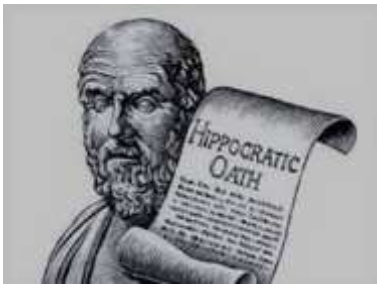
Monday 4 July: Prof J. Rufus Fears - Hammurabi and Hippocrates

Professor Fears not only vividly relates 36 events that changed history, but he also interprets the role and relevance of the event and how it impacted the course of history. Two events are shown each time.



Hammurabi (the ruler of Babylon - now modern-day Iraq -from about 1792 to 1750 BCE) issued a code of law containing fundamental elements that can still be found in today's legal systems. The 282 case laws addressed subjects such as commercial regulations (prices, tariffs, trade and commerce), family law (marriage, divorce and inheritance), civil law (slavery, debt, minimum wage), as well as criminal law (assault, theft). Penalties varied according to the status of the offenders and the circumstances of the offenses, an example being different types of compensation for specific injuries.

Hippocrates (ca. 460 – 375 BCE) was a Greek physician who is traditionally regarded as the father of medicine. Hippocrates separated Greek medicine from superstitions, magic and religion. He wrote more than 70 books in a scientific manner that described many diseases and their treatment after detailed observation. His scientific and observation methods form the basis of scientific research and clinical medicine as it is practiced today. Before being taught medicine, his disciples were made to swear an oath to help them understand what is expected from their conduct as healers. The oath set medical and ethical standards of conduct that became universal toward the early 19th century. One of the promises within that oath is "first do no harm", which is also a principle of scientific research today.



Monday 18 July: Prof J. Rufus Fears – Adam Smith) and Karl Marx; The stock market crash

Adam Smith (1776-1790) and Karl Marx (1818-1883): Separated by almost a century, Adam Smith and Karl Marx could not have been more different in their economic views. Their respective works—Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (regarded as a precursor to the modern academic discipline of economics) and Marx's *Das Kapital*—established two conflicting views of capitalism that are still with us today.

Smith laid the foundations of classical free market economic theory. He developed the concept of the division of labour and expounded upon how rational self-interest and competition can lead to economic prosperity. Smith's laissez-faire economics created the broadly liberal economic model of open markets, and relatively barrier-free domestic and international trade that still operates in most Western countries today.

Marx's critical theories about society, economics and politics (collectively understood as Marxism, which underpins communism) hold that human societies develop through class conflict. In the capitalist mode of production, this manifests itself in the conflict between the ruling classes (known as the bourgeoisie) that control the means of production and the working classes (known as the proletariat) that enable these means by selling their labour-power in return for wages. Marx predicted that capitalism would lead to its self-destruction and replacement by a new system.

The day the stock market crashed (29 October 1929): This devastating economic event shattered the lives of millions and created a tidal wave of effects around the world, which still reverberate today. The event is told from the perspective of an everyday American family. Prof Fears describes the causes (e.g. buying on instalment, buying on margin, speculation and borrowing money to buy shares and other factors) and the effects of the crash, such as the Great Depression, World War II and tighter financial market regulations.

Monday 11 July: Joanna Lumley's Greek Odyssey - **S1E1: The land of the ancient Greeks**

Joanna begins her journey at the Parthenon in Athens, which was built two and a half thousand years ago by the ancient Greeks in only ten years. She views the painstaking restoration of the Parthenon, where marble statues are cleaned with dental tools and marble cutters use the same tools as their ancestors to recreate columns for the Acropolis.

From Athens, Joanna travels around the southern region of Greece to the Peloponnese, visiting mythical and historic sites which were integral parts of ancient Greek society, such as the stadium of Olympia (where the first ancient Olympic Games took place almost 2,800 years ago), the Gate of Hades (the underworld where the Ancients went when they died), Mount Olympus and ancient Greece's most sacred place, Delphi. At the amphitheatre of Epidaurus (the greatest of ancient Greece; seating capacity 40,000) Nana Mouskouri sings for Joanna to demonstrate the theatre's acoustics. Off the tourist trail Joanna finds barren landscapes and meets villagers who communicate by whistling, finds abandoned settlements and a lady who lives a solitary life in an almost deserted village, surviving by eating wild plants, a practice that has remained unchanged for centuries.





Corfu

Monday 18 July: Joanna Lumley's Greek Odyssey - **S1E2: Greece's Borderlands**

This episode concentrates on the diversity within Greece resulting from the invasions and long-lasting occupations by various rulers over the past centuries, such as Venice and the Ottoman and British Empires, Greece being on the crossroads between West and East. Joanna visits Corfu and finds a cricket pitch in the main square of Corfu Town. (Greece has 21 cricket clubs and 20 brass bands.) From Corfu she travels overland to the far Eastern corner of Greece on the border of Turkey. On the way she tours a monastery visited by Lord Byron (who participated in Greece's War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire). In the town of Nigrita she witnesses oil wrestling, a traditional Turkish sport; at Philippi she visits a baptistery where St. Paul preached the gospel for the first time on European soil. She learns about the forced migrations when the current border between Greece and Turkey was set in 1923. In this ethnic cleansing process, where people were forcibly made refugees and were denaturalized from their homelands, about 1.6 million Greek Orthodox people were moved from Turkey to Greece and 400,000 Greek Muslims were sent to Turkey. This episode ends with a visit to a military base along the sensitive Greco-Turkish border.

Wednesday, 13 July: Talk on the James Webb Space Telescope by Case Rijsdijk



"Cosmic Cliffs" in the Carina Nebula (NIRCam Image)

The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is the most powerful space science telescope ever built. It can probe farther into space and back in time than has been previously possible. The James Webb was conceived in 1996 as the successor to the Hubble telescope and was originally scheduled to launch in 2007, but suffered delays up to a week before its launch on 25 December 2021. The spacecraft is now on station at about one million miles (1.5 million km) from Earth and is able to see objects 13.1 billion light years away, giving a window into the very earliest era of the universe and new insights into the evolution of stars, which has caused some scientists to call the JWST the Just Wonderful Space Telescope.

NASA released the first of the James Webb images on 12 July (one day before Case's talk) that present humanity with a ground-breaking new view of the cosmos, which shows us "how Webb will help uncover the answers to questions we don't even yet know to ask; questions that will help us better understand our universe and humanity's place within it".

We were held spellbound by Case's description of the complexity of the James Webb project, but more so by the sheer awesome beauty of its images. What a coup for Plett U3A to have a talk by an astronomer of Case's stature just one day after the release by NASA of the first mind-boggling James Webb pictures.

To see high-resolution images of the JWST click here.

This tool compares Webb images to the Hubble space telescope images.

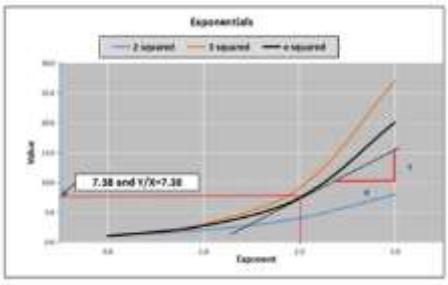
Interest group activities

Computer Basics (Contact: Peter Grube, 083-381-5929)

The first two sessions held on 7 and 21 July covered the subjects of computer hard- and software, personalising computer setups, malware, settings, keyboard specials and the internet.

Science (Contact: Henri Timme, 078-877-5829)

On Friday 15 July the topic was the origin of ***e*** or Euler's number (named after Leonard Euler) and its importance in many fields. The theoretical and practical applications were demonstrated by Henri's mathematical calculations, graphs and other relevant scientific illustrations.



Euler's number (***e*** = 2.71828182845904523536028747135 27) is one of the most remarkable constant numbers in mathematics, although it is less well known than π. It appears in nature in many places like the shape of a catenary, radioactive decay and the behaviour of the current when we discharge a capacitor into a resistor, or the build-up rate of voltage across a resistor in an inductive circuit. In finance, Euler's number is used to calculate how wealth can grow due to compound interest. Euler's number is the base for natural logarithms. It cannot be expressed as the ratio of two integers. It is thus irrational and it is also not the root of a polynomial equation, so it is not an algebraic number but a transcendental number.

Outings

20 July: La Carla Mask Atelier

We visited La Carla Masks where Venetian-style costume masks have been created since 2007. Carla started this venture with her daughter Charnelle after falling in love with Venice and the beautiful masks of that city. Today masks are still worn at the Venice Carnival and other carnival events worldwide, as well as at balls, theme parties, corporate events and functions. The masks are also used as interior décor items.

Carla took us through the history of her business using her large handmade photograph album to illustrate the various masks she has made over the past 15 years. Using a papier-mâché base, each mask is custom-designed, handmade and signed by Carla, who has never had any formal art training. She has no helpers - other than her husband on occasion. (Charnelle left about a year ago to start a new branch of the business in Turkey.) The masks are only made to order, based on customers' specific requests. Occasionally these requests extend beyond masks, such the flying pig with turkey-feathered wings that span 2.20 metres.

Carla provided a fascinating historical overview of Venetian masks and how they were used over the centuries. Nobody knows when the Venetians actually started wearing masks, but they are mainly associated with the Venice Carnival (or *Carnevale*) of which the first documented story dates back to 1094. The first law regulating the use of masks in Venice dates back to the 13th century. Masks were banned by the government in 1798.

There are several types of traditional Venetian masks, of which Carla showed us some examples:

Traditional Venetian Carnival masks

- **Bauta**: Considered to be the traditional Venetian mask, it is always white and used to mostly cover the facial features. It is always worn with the black hat with three tips (tricorno).
- **Columbina**: One of the first actresses in the *Commedia dell'Arte* felt her face was much too beautiful to cover completely, and so she instead wore a half-mask especially designed for her. The mask type quickly became popular and nowadays is highly decorated with gold, silver, crystal, and feathers.
- **Moretta** (also known as *muta,* or the mute mask): a black oval mask worn exclusively by young girls destined to be married off soon. The mask was held in place by biting on a button attached to the back of the mask, which prevented the wearer from speaking and thus rendered her mysterious and alluring to the man trying to guess her identity.
- **Gnaga**: Similar to a cat-face, this mask was traditionally worn by homosexual men who dressed as women. Gnaga masks contributed to such an increase in competition for the prostitutes of Venice that they sent a petition to Bishop Antonio Contarini 1511 seeking his help. Contarini allowed – although never formally sanctioned – prostitutes to show off their physical attractions from the first-floor windows of brothels. The Ponte delle Tette (Bridge of Tits) and Fondamenta delle Tette (Canal Path of Tits) date from this time and still exist today.



Commedia dell'Arte Masks

These are the masks of the characters of the improvisational theatre *Commedia dell'Arte*. Each character was defined by a particular mask and costume, such as the Arlecchino (Harlequin), Pierrot (the sad clown), Scaramouche, Il Dottore and Pantalone.

Medico della Peste (Plague Doctor): This birdlike mask was not a carnival or theatrical mask. It was worn as part of an outfit invented by the French physician Charles de Lorme in the 16th century as a protection against the plague. Carnival goers started wearing a decorated version as a remembrance of their mortality.

It's astonishing to think that our mask makers in the forest (only 7 km from the centre of Plett) have to date custom designed over 38 000 carnival masks, of which 30% have been exported to all parts of the world - including Venice itself!

Visit La Carla's Masks website (lacarlamasks.co.za) to view the gallery of masks.

Thank you, Carla, for a captivating talk and demonstration, especially whilst working to fulfil an order for 500 masks to be sent to Mauritius in 38 days' time.









Programme for August

COURSE CALENDAR : AUGUST 2022

NB: All courses start at 10:00 at Formosa Garden Village (FGV) unless otherwise specified

Monday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 Film - The World was Never the Same Rufus Fears Great Courses	**3** Counselling for the UN Henrietta de Vries	**4** Know Your Computer 14.00 Peter Grube	**5** 10.00 : French Conversation - various venues 14.30 Bridge with Chrissy Hay
8 Film - Joanna Lumley's Greek Odyssey Part 3	**10**	**11** Know Your Computer 14.00 Peter Grube	**12** 10.00 : French Conversation - various venues 14.30 Bridge with Chrissy Hay
15 Film - The World was Never the Same Rufus Fears Great Courses	**17** Outing to Cheese Factory Details to follow	**18** Know Your Computer Peter Grube	**19** 10.00 : French Conversation - various venues 14.30 Bridge with Chrissy Hay
22 NO MEETING	**24** Travel – Provence David and Marsja Hall Green	**25** Know Your Computer 14.00 Peter Grube	**26** 10.00 : French Conversation - various venues 14.30 Bridge with Chrissy Hay
29 Film - Joanna Lumley's Greek Odyssey Part 4	**31**		

Mondays: documentaries (videos) currently alternate between history and armchair travel.

Tuesdays: Currently no activities.

Wednesdays: Devoted to live presentations and outings.

Thursdays and Fridays: Used for U3A special interest group meetings.

Contacts for programme events

Programme calendar	Lynette Timme	079-313-9641
Outings	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
Bridge	Chrissy Hay	083-648-0306
Computer basics	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
Science group	Henry Timme	078-877-5829
French conversation (full)	Merle Decot	

Forthcoming events

3 August: Henrietta de Vries has provided stress and trauma counselling to UN staff across the world. In her career she has travelled to more than 60 countries. She will share with us her unusual personal and professional experiences in a wide variety of cultures and circumstances.

17 August: We will be visiting a cheese factory near Nature's Valley. Details are still being finalised.

24 August: David and Marsja Hall-Green, who lived in the Provence for many years, will be telling us about their experiences there. They will also show us their films of the Provence.

Brain games

Easy	Hard
Hairline	onmlkjih

Solutions will be in next newsletter.