



## BRIDGING AGES - LIFE STORIES

**Sixth Form Life Writing Project books now published**

*This article was featured in the Heathfield Community College December 2020 Newsletter.*

The fabulous Sixth Form Life Writing project, connecting older members of the community in Mayfield to aspiring sixth-form writers is now complete - with six wonderful printed hardback biographies as testimony to their success in bridging the generation gap and forging excellent partnerships across the years.

The books, written by six of our students, chart the lives of their older partners from their births in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to their present situation in Mayfield village - and cover some amazing episodes along the way, including memories of the first Beatles concert in America, of life in the diplomatic circle in Singapore, of meeting members of the royal family - and of more down to earth local scenes, including those remembered by a woman whose father used work for the railways and had to walk the Rotherfield railway line every morning to tap the bolts back in.

The scheme is organised by the charity Bridging Ages to combat loneliness in older people and to increase community cohesion.

'This has been one of the most extraordinary and moving projects I have ever been involved in,' says Ms Savage, who has co-ordinated the project in school. 'It has been such a privilege to meet those involved, and to be part of such a worthwhile endeavour to link the younger generation to the older members of their community.'

Shirley Holland, who leads the project for the Mayfield and Five Ashes Community Service (MAYFACS) has been delighted with the outcome. This is the first year that HCC have been involved and she is very keen to maintain the connection. Sadly, due to Covid restrictions, there will be no Life Writing this year, but she is hopeful that it will restart next September. 'Heathfield students have been brilliant,' she says, 'and we're very keen to work with the school again.'

For the students and their partners, it has been a hugely memorable experience with enormous benefits on both sides.

### **Jennie Boxall:**

'When I was asked to be the subject of "A Life Story" I was first surprised and then flattered! What's so interesting about my life, I thought. However, as the meetings progressed... I came to realise that my life had been quite varied, sometimes exciting and unusual.'

'My advice to any young person is to aim high, take disappointments in your stride, and don't give up. Too many people these days forget to use their brains and common sense.'

**Maezie Lane, Y13:** 'I've found the Life Writing Project beneficial in so many ways. Personally, it has allowed me to become more confident in my interviewing skills and, through hearing my partner's stories, I have been inspired to never give up on my dreams. The Project has also allowed me to develop my creative writing skills and the end result of having a book published written by you is something really incredible!

I also noticed the benefits that the Project has had upon my partner as she was able to recount some of the major experiences she's had in her life and reminisce with her husband. Also, the end result of having a book written about her life that she can share with her family and that will remain in her family for generations to come is something really special.

The Project was set up by the charity Bridging Ages to increase social contact between generations and combat loneliness and for me and my experience with the Project it has done exactly that!

**Ella Hatfield, Y13:** 'The experience of writing and finishing the book was so rewarding as there was a feeling of finishing something that wasn't for yourself. I would love to have the same thing written for me which makes it even more satisfying.'

**Maddie Porter, Y13:**

'The Life Stories project was a new and challenging task for me but I wanted to take part for that very reason. Getting to know my partner Janie was an amazing experience and one I wouldn't have had, had I not taken this opportunity so I'm grateful to both Shirley and Ms Savage for taking the time to tell us about it and support us throughout the interviewing and writing process. I learned so much about an initial stranger's life that I probably don't even know about my own family and I felt I was a lot closer to Janie in the end than before which is what the charity Bridging Ages aims to do. I'm also grateful for Felicity (our chaperone) who put Janie at ease as they were already friends and I got to know her a bit throughout the project as well. Writing Janie's biography was a truly rewarding experience and I hope she enjoys reading the book as much as I have.'