

Book review: *Growing Older Dancing On* Jenny Czulak-Riley, (2003) Council for the Aging, \$32 Review by Kim Dunphy



Jenny Czulak-Riley's book, *Growing Older Dancing On* is a most beautiful publication, full of inspiring ideas for dance classes for older adults. Czulak-Riley writes authentically from the perspective of an older adult (she was approaching her 80th year as the book was published!), offering valuable insight for those working in the field without personal experience of older age. Like this gem; *'The thing about old age is that on the whole, one doesn't feel old. One feels as one always did; content, curious, fearful, optimistic or desperate according to the circumstances'*.

The author's training is in dance/movement education and therapy, and her extensive experience is also very evident.

Czulak-Riley argues for the desirability of older adults as group leaders for their peers. Her evidence for this includes an amusing list of **Idioms of the Ancients**:

words and phrases that some young aged carers may never have heard of, including *'a lick and a promise'*: a quick wash, *'barney'*: an argument, *'91 in the waterbag'*: very old or very hot. She does concede however that *'we elderly cannot do without the young. They are so refreshing- lovely to look at, so well-trained, clever and cheerful'*!

Also apparent is the author's erudition - the book is sprinkled with literary references to the challenges and joys of old age, scientific research into gerontology, dance therapy and more, which add much to the enjoyment of reading. Her considerable literary talents are also evident. Many of the poems in the book are original, like this snippet about sleep;

*How deep, how soft, the darkness feels,
Down drifts its softness to my heels
Wrapping me soft in drowsy folds
And oh! How soft the dreamer holds
The cloth of sleep*

Insightful and inspiring tips for group leaders who are managing older adults, managing themselves and managing the complexities of working in an organisation as an outsider are spread throughout the book. Like this piece of advice to carers, *'Be kind! Ripe fruit bruises easily'*. And this one, for group leaders dealing with the challenges of working in institutions, *'There's always a way around obstacles, even if you suspect some of them have been deliberately put in place.....Never leave the premises defeated'*.

The book's layout, large clear pages with lots of white space and a spiral binding make it very useful as a reference that could lay open and flat during a session. This makes it ideal for prompting of the not-so-confident or inexperienced group leader. Original drawings by well-known Melbourne-based artist Kate Durham enliven the text and add much to the appeal for readers.

The book's advice relates not only to dance but also to life values, lifestyle choices, life philosophy and positive attitude. A hilarious list of **Survival Strategies** includes these beauties:

- *Break a habit*
- *Hang a 'Do No Disturb Sign' around your neck*
- *Pay compliments*
- *Chew brandy*
- *Smile when you offer an opinion*
- *Smile anyway*
- *Don't apologise for being old*

And my very favourite- a great life lesson.

- *Never express disapproval (of anything) to your immediate family. Instead, write a letter to a newspaper and sign "Disgusted".*

Growing Older, Dancing On is a wonderful example of how rich a life well lived can be. A lovely read, a great resource and a testament to the wisdom that comes with age.

Order from www.dtaa.org.au \$32