

LESSONS ON LIFE AND LEARNING FROM A 93-YEAR-OLD GRADUATE

Written by Heidi STASESON, June 14, 2017
Another Athabasca University Convocation,
another resounding success.

**One of the star learner is ninety-three-year-old,
She is Louisa DALEY**



**Louisa DALEY, BGS graduate, 2017,
Athabasca University [photo by Stacy Swanson]**

Perhaps (so we've been hearing) even one of the better ones to date! From Thursday through Saturday last week, 400 of the nearly 2,000 graduates, from across Canada and beyond, descended upon the impressively festive Town of Athabasca, Alberta, to receive their university degrees.

Accompanied by their respective 'people' -the beaming friends and family members who cheered their loved ones on as they walked across the convocation stage, eyes smiling, pride intact, to receive the official parchment marking the final pay-off to their academic perseverance.

One of these star learners is ninety-three-year-old Louisa DALEY -proud possessor of not one, but now two AU degrees. And while she acknowledges last week's milestone was the essential cap-off to a life's history worthy of a memoir (a narrative she's been working on,

by the way, under the guidance of Assistant Professor Dr. Angie Abdou), this feisty and fierce nonagenarian says she has no plans to go soft when it comes to soaking up as many facts as she can- for whatever well-spent time she has left.

Louisa, or 'Louise' as she insists on being called -'otherwise you make me feel old,' she quips- is a resident of Calgary where she has lived since 1981 when, at the age of 58, she left her native England to be closer to her eldest daughter, Jannette.

History in the Making



Louisa Gertrude Claydon, was born March 18, 1924, in the village of Norton in Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham, where she lived until she was nine. In 1939, at the age of 15 (and after a few years spent village hopping), she and her parents finally settled on a home in Hartlepool, a neighbouring county on the North Sea Coast where, for 42 years, Louisa remained under one roof: 209 Raby Road.

It would later become the home for her own family after she and future husband, Thomas Daley, rented the place (her parents had downsized to a small cottage), paving the way for their four daughters: Jannette, Kathleen, Eileen and Miriam, in that order.

"You didn't go into hospital in those days — every child was born in the house: my four girls," said Louise.

The Hartlepool dwelling provided a proper setting for a doting mother and housewife (later, with her children grown, she would work briefly in insurance sales). It was a home enlivened with music, laughter and amateur talent shows that multiple siblings do best. Louise wrote the plays they performed, sewed the sisters' fashionably smart dresses and developed her craft and competitive edge for writing poetry and prose.

She recalls a period when she played consummate 'host' to myriad neighbourhood children -often urchin-like, scruffy and starved of adequate adult attention.

In one case, a couple- the father was a doctor- had simply dropped off their brood of seven, unkempt and unannounced, while the parents went to London for an undetermined period. It was almost akin to a private orphanage from the home: Louise, the 'trustworthy den mother of Durham County,' if you will. Such was the reputation she had unwittingly acquired in their Hartlepool neighbourhood.

But in January 1979, the proverbial, sweet music tinkered out. At the age of 58, Thomas succumbed to liver cancer. Louise had been care-giving for her beloved 'Tom' for just four months – the disease was that fast-spreading.

Seeds of Re-thinking

Back to the Canadian leg of her long life: It's 1983 and Louise is 60-years-old, living in Calgary for two years. She's been devoting much of her time to leisure activities like her artfully beaded greeting cards, tailor-made with verses she composes. Or knitting doll's clothes and dishcloths, like the ones you find at church bazaars. Of course, there is always her old-faithful Coronation Street on the telly (she doesn't miss it to this day). And one day she will even sprinkle some travel into the mix – going on faraway excursions, including a trip to Australia with daughter Jannette, to visit two daughters living there, and to finally meet her great-grandchildren (she has 15 of them, along with 17 grandchildren, and one great-great-grandson).

But her cultured mind craved more. For a few years, back in England, before moving to Canada, Louise had taken five courses at the Open University – a distance education institution based out of Milton Keynes, in the country's Buckinghamshire County. She had enjoyed that experience immensely. Harkening back to that time, she once again decided upon a change. After some initial research into post-secondary programs, she discovered Canada's equivalent open-and-distance program: Athabasca University.

With the clear goal of gaining her first degree, Louise traded in dishcloths for distance education and enrolled at AU. It became the pedestal for her word-smithing, caustic wit and standing among family members as hands-down champion of arguments. It was the perfect way to channel her passion for intelligent (and vocal!) thought.

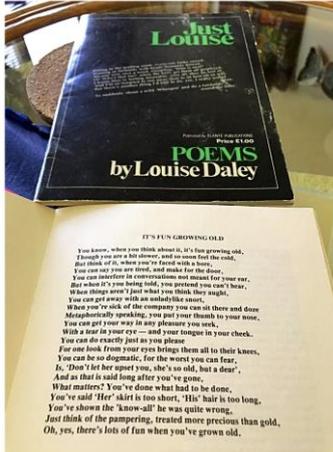
In 1999, 16 years later at the age of 75, Louise graduated from AU with her Bachelor of Arts degree. While it certainly was a moment of pride for the English lass of working-class heritage, daughter Jannette recalls something else: Her mother was slightly disgruntled to discover, at convocation, she wasn't actually the eldest graduate she'd always assumed to be.

Another gentleman learner had beaten her to the punch. He was 83. You can guess the rest.



"I remember that well," said Jannette.

"At the time I thought, 'Oh no. Here we go again!'"



And Louise decided to give the 'college try' another go. The next year she was back at AU. This time taking her Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) degree program.

Seventeen years later -with 34 years of AU under her belt- and four generations of female family members from across the Canada by her side, Louise wheeled across the Athabasca University convocation stage, her great-granddaughter, Alexis from Bolton, Ontario, proudly pushing her chair toward the degree in the presenter's hand.



Life On The Bright Side

*English-style biscuits and tea,
courtesy of Louise Daley
[photo by Heidi Staseson, 2017]*

Speaking with Louise in her home over English-style tea a week earlier, she was more unassuming about her AU achievement than the ear-to-ear smile would depict on convocation day.

"I'm pleased. I don't look at it as if it's a trophy, for some reason; I'm just doing what I've enjoyed doing," she said, candidly.

Louise's professor, Dr. Jane Arscott, says Louise is "the quintessential lifelong learner" - One with an open mind and a positive attitude.

"She's very lighthearted; you have to see the best in things," notes Arscott.

"Louise often refers to life as being like a long hallway with many doors: you have a chance to open them as you go along, and take a look around at what's inside. And even though there are terrible things that may happen (as they did in her life), she is somebody who looks on the bright side -and she encourages others to do that as well. That's Louise."

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This graduate-turned-AU-icon has some matter-of-fact advice for future learners: Keep looking ahead and live each day with gratitude.

"I did as much as I did because I'm always looking forward. I don't sit and moan about things that I can't help," she explains.

What's next for the wry woman from Norton who some say bears an uncanny resemblance to The Queen (even though she says the comparison has always been "a thorn in my side.")?

"I'm going to enjoy it right to the very end. I'm not going to sit and start crying 'oh I'm old – I can't do this, and I can't do the other ... The way I'm looking at it is: I want to go out with a big bang. But I'm not going to do anymore studying. I don't think."

Source:

http://news.athabasca.ca/news/93-year-old-university-graduate/?utm_source=Athabasca+University+News&utm_campaign=e93aec7bf0-NEWS_RSS_EMAIL&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3cf7d17bdc-e93aec7bf0-285026545 Written by Heidi STASESON, June 14, 2017.