

PROJECT 7 - THE OLDEST GENERATION: EVENTS, RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITIES IN LATER LIFE



The oldest generation project is concerned with older people's relationships and identities. Its aim is to explore how and why certain family relationships endure or change over time, and how these processes affect the lives of older people.

The project included twelve families, who were followed over a period of 18 months. In each family, one member over the age of 75 years, 'the senior', was interviewed and another person in the family, 'the recorder', was asked to keep a diary and take photographs. There have been two waves of data collection to date, one in late 2007 and the other in Summer 2009.

The research has found that key events, such as birthdays and Christmas, as well as life-changing moments (births, marriages and deaths) are very significant to the oldest generation. Such events mark the passage of time and can highlight continuities or changes in relationships.

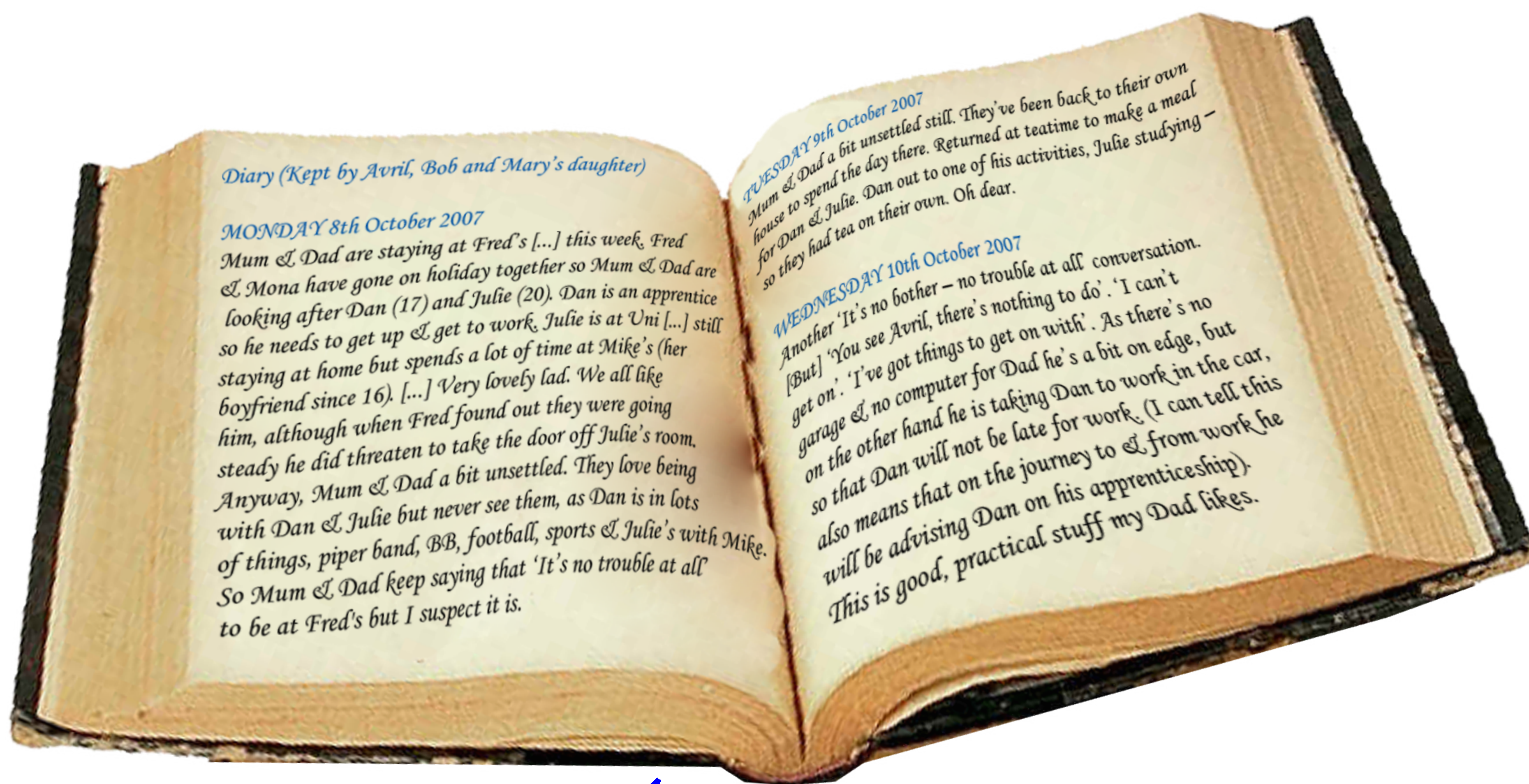
KEY POINTS FROM THE STUDY

- The oldest generation has a key role in sustaining a family's sense of who they are.
- Within each family, there is a continuing and complex history of how care is negotiated between people of different generations.
- Families develop ways of caring for and supporting each other as family circumstances change when people move through life-stages and change location. These patterns continue into later life.
- Relationships with siblings and friends are some of the most enduring and most important in older people's lives.
- People continue to face major challenges in later life particularly when their health and wellbeing is threatened. Families expect to be partners in care with the NHS and care services.
- Older people who are not eligible for care services depend on their own and family resources when dealing with needs and risks
- This study, using in-depth interviews over time, provides insights into how people make choices over the course of long lives.

RESEARCH TEAM

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DOCUMENTING OLDER LIVES



ALBERT RICE

Albert Rice was 79 when he was interviewed in 2009. He grew up in Jamaica and was the youngest of seven children in a farming family. Whilst at school he worked for his father on the farm. In 1955, he met his future wife, Vera, when he was 23 and she 18. He decided to leave Jamaica and come to England. Five years later, Vera came to Britain, they married and had three children. When he first arrived in the UK Albert worked in heavy industry in the West Midlands. Later he worked in market research, interviewing people in their own homes. At first when he arrived the only room he could find meant sharing with four other men:

MOVING OUT

“Well I was the first one to move out ... a friend of mine had bought a house and I was able to secure a room for myself from there. That was maybe just a year after we were living together. As a matter of fact it became six room because my elder brother was coming over and I had to pay for a bed space for five weeks before he got here...”. He got out as soon as he could because: ‘... lots of people living together and some of them you could get on with and some you couldn’t so ... Things like, you know, sort of people telling you it’s your turn to clean the house, it’s your turn to clean the cooker, it’s your turn to clean the kitchen and that sort of thing. And I thought, “Well I’m not going to take this for long” Although I always do my duty what I thought I had to do. But it was always at the back of my mind that you really have to get your own place, your own house, sort of thing.”

In 2009, Albert and Vera now live in a new town in the East Midlands, where they’re actively involved in church activities. Their three children live close by and they have four teenage grandchildren, the oldest is just starting university. Albert keeps in close contact with his sisters; two live in the USA and the third, having lived in England, has returned to Jamaica. Albert supports younger members of the family in Jamaica out of his pension and savings.

BOB HILL

Bob Hill was 78 when he was interviewed in 2007. He was living with his wife Mary in a bungalow in the suburbs of a Scottish city where he’s lived all his life. They have three children, two sons and a daughter, all living in Scotland and two teenage grandchildren. Bob worked as a mechanic all his life, in small and large workplaces. He still likes to help out family and neighbours with odd jobs. He comes from a large family and a working class background and is proud of what he’s achieved. However he regrets that there is far less freedom for children today. They can’t play out: too much traffic on the roads. The biggest change has been for his own grandchildren’s generation. He’s a big believer in the importance of education and the message he’d pass on to his great grandchildren is ‘Always be understanding’.

REMEMBERING HIS OWN GRANDPARENTS

“Aye, my granny Hill used to mind me, and both the grannies minded me at different times, my granny McFee she, they were called ma and pa McDade ... here is the thing, they both wore bonnets and they both smoked pipes (laughs) aye! ... My granny used to have a big black shawl on and a bonnet and a pipe. Oh yes, and my grandda McFee,...they never worked, well in as much I say they didn’t work, they didn’t work for anybody else, they worked for themselves, my grandda chopped sticks...Aye, they used to go and get wood and er it was sawed up for them, they must have got it from sawmills or something, and they used to bring it into the house, and they had a bit of a tree trunk which they called the chopping block which they kept under the bed so they used to bring it out, and we used to chop sticks with hatchets, and they used to pay us so much a batch of kindling, or we used to bunch the sticks, which they call a bunch. And put the sticks in a can, tie it and we used to get I think a penny, if you bunched a 100 you got a penny, and then you used to go out selling them, and you got I think a penny if you sold 36 something like that. So that is how they made their living,”

