

Meet ELLA Member: Writer Wendy Davis

Fifteen years ago Wendy Davis attended her first Spring Session for Older Adults (the precursor to ELLA). According to Wendy, attending the 3-weeks each Spring “*changed my life. Being retired and single can drive you berzerk . So many retired people just talk about their physical problems and it can be so depressing. At ELLA we have stimulating conversations about all the new things we’ve learned*”.

At 88 years young, (we think that Wendy is the youngest of the three 88 year olds attending Spring Session 2017) Wendy is still taking a full day of classes including Eunice Scarfe’s writing course *The Blank Page*. Getting to and from campus is easier thanks to a ride each day from fellow ELLA Spring Session registrant Henriette van Hees.



Wendy Davis at ELLA’s Spring Session 2017.

Wendy was born in London, grew up in India, and was an occupational therapist in England. In her mid-forties she met two physiotherapists from Calgary who suggested she apply for a teaching assistant position at the University of Alberta. She immigrated to work at the University of Alberta, and had to requalify to gain Alberta credentials. Her thesis work became her first published book - *Aids to Make You Able: self-help devices and ideas for the disabled*. Her publisher wanted a “name” to write the introduction to the book and Wendy wrote Prince Philip who was then the Chair of Rehabilitation for the UK. His introduction is included in the 1979 edition. Wendy later met the Prince when he asked to meet her when he was in Edmonton for the Commonwealth Games. This book is still available online through Amazon and is praised for its practical and inexpensive solutions.

Eunice first taught Wendy writing in 1995, when Wendy attended the Women’s Summer Writing Week offered by the Faculty of Extension. Wendy took subsequent writing courses through Spring Session. Wendy credits the writing courses and Eunice’s encouragement to form a writing group for facilitating her completion of her book on her childhood in India – *Dal and Rice*. *Dal and Rice* was published in 2002 by McGill-Queen’s University Press. It is described on the publisher’s website as “*an affectionate portrait of a childhood spent in India during the last days of the British Raj*”. Her most recent published writing is “Cross country Skiing to Work” in the anthology *40 Below* (2013) - a collection of works on living through Edmonton’s winter.

Although she has had to give up work and cross-country skiing, in addition to ELLA and writing, Wendy raises exotic birds and has an active social life with a photo club, concerts, theatre and other activities with her many friends. Wendy says: “*I can only tell you positive things about ELLA. The teachers are wonderful. I have so much respect for the Board and all the volunteers that make ELLA possible*”. The benefits of lifelong learning are clearly evident in the energy, active mind and life of Wendy Davis.