



DON'T STOP ME NOW

Grandmothers in 2015 are more likely to be Skyping and Googling than shunning technology



Angela Gallagher

The traditional grandmother has always been depicted as a cosy, warm woman who resides at home – usually in the kitchen, but sometimes by the fireside. She was happy to spend her days baking, cleaning and knitting and

“I would advise anyone who is worried about retiring to relax”

wouldn't dream of getting involved with any 'new-fangled' gadgetry.

But oh, how times have changed. Grandmothers today are more likely to be going away for weekends with their friends, hiking in the mountains, spending their well-deserved pension on a spa treatment or surfing the net.

So modern are the new 'pensioners' that a new survey has revealed that many older people have as many, if not more, friends than their 20-something counterparts and enjoy full and active social lives; keeping both their minds and bodies in good shape.

The research, from investment company Standard Life, revealed that 94 per cent of retirees had a youthful outlook on life and didn't feel like a pensioner. On average they had five or six close friends – the same number as people in their 20s. But while just ten per

cent of 20-somethings had more than ten close friends, 12 per cent of retirees did and 89 per cent of them met up with their friends at least once a month.

Angela Gallagher from West Limerick is the perfect example of an older woman living life to the full. Since her retirement from the civil service two years ago, she has kept herself busy, despite initial misgivings about having too much time on her hands.

“I really loved my job and was sad to give it up,” says the 67-year-old. “But after a few months wondering what to do with myself, I have become someone who is always on the go. My daughter, Lara, moved to Australia with her three children and initially that was a huge loss for me. But I went out there for six months and did the same thing again this year – so that has been wonderful.

“My son, Damian, lives in Cork and before Lara left, he encouraged me to learn how to use the computer. I started writing a blog which has totally opened up a new world. I have met so many people online from all over the world and even met some of my followers in Australia last year. I also went to stay with another lady in America.”

Aside from writing a blog, Angela, (whose husband Vincent died in 1997), also keeps in touch with family and friends from the comfort of her own home.

“After getting to grips with the computer,

Real life

"I realised I could either feel sorry for myself and let life pass me or I could get on with things"

Marie O'Gorman from Dublin has five grown up children and at 81 is still very active - she has no intention of 'acting her age' any time soon.

"As far as I am concerned, age is just a number," she says. "I didn't wake up the morning after my 81st birthday and worry about the fact that I was another year older. I was just delighted to be able to get up and about and get on with my life.

"I am always on the go - I have friends who I have known for 50 years or more and we meet up regularly either for a coffee, a bit of shopping, a weekend away or just a general get together. Of course, some of the group is no longer with us, but that makes me even more determined to enjoy my life as who knows how long we have left."

Marie's husband, Liam, passed away 23 years ago. And while she still misses him, she has 20 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren to keep her on her toes - and says even if you are on your own you should make the time to get out and create a social life for yourself.

"My family live all over the country and also abroad but I get to see them all regularly," she says.

"My granddaughters live in Armenia and I taught them to knit on Skype - they are very advanced now and have moved on to making their own dresses, so it's a great way of keeping in touch and passing on some of my skills to them.

"It broke my heart when my husband died but I quickly realised that I could either feel sorry for myself and let life pass me by or I could get on with things. Sometimes I have had to go places on my own, but I discovered that isn't so bad either as you will always have a chat with someone and may end up making a new friend.

"That's the thing about our age group - we're not self-conscious anymore and have free time to meet up with friends and do things we like doing. And that is exactly what I intend to do for as long as I can."

Justin Moran of Age Action says people like Marie and Angela are typical of the older generation of today and are much



Marie O'Gorman

I learned how to Skype and now speak to my daughter and grandchildren in Australia all the time," she says. "It's funny actually as sometimes the kids will Skype me just to tell me that their Mum isn't allowing them to do something and they want me to tell her off - I have so much Face Time with them that it seems like they live just down the road, rather than the other side of the world."

Being computer literate has opened a new world for Angela but she also has plenty of real friends and a busy social life to boot.

"I set up a group a few years ago which was a bit of a cultural club where a gang of us would go to the theatre, the opera or a concert or even for days out in Dublin," she says.

"This was great and comprised of people I had met on some of the many committees I have been part of over the years. It has dwindled a bit of late, but I fully intend to get it back up and running shortly.

"I think retired people like me have as much or even more friends than younger people because they aren't self-conscious anymore and don't suffer from peer pressure, they have more time to do their own thing and are more comfortable in their own skin. I will often fire off an email to a group of people and there could be 18 of us heading out to dinner - so it's great fun.

"On that note, I would advise anyone who is worried about retiring or getting old to relax and enjoy the change. I thought I would be lonely when I retired and I also worried about money, but it's all been fine - in fact it's more than fine and I can reassure people that it's actually a good place to be."

more active and social than their parents or grandparents might have been.

"There are a lot more options out there these days but there is no such thing as a typical older person and there is no such thing as a typical retirement," he says. "Some people take up new sports or interests, others have more time to devote themselves to things they have been passionate about all their lives, some want to stay quietly at home close to friends and family while others want to travel and explore the world."

Age Action has coordinated a network of lifelong learning groups called the University of the Third Age. These have been growing rapidly in the last few years and are a way for people to pursue their interests and meet new people.

But some older people still feel isolated and Justin says it's important for society to recognise this and to be aware of the positive aspects of ageing.

"Loneliness and isolation are still very real problems for older people, especially those who are living alone or in areas poorly served by public transport - so there are still problems about the visibility of older people in society," he says. "That is the reality for many older people, but there are more who are active, working, engaged with their communities and that positive image is very much missing in our society." **WW**

If you would be interested in more information about Age Action's lifelong learning groups, please contact Sam at u3a@ageaction.ie