(image excerpt from Out of the Box cards)

Re-imagining (our) birthdays
by Dave Martin, June 2023

This digital workshop took place on 24th May as part of the Age of Creativity Festival 2023. It was led by Meg LaPorte and Jordan Evans, co-founders of Art against Ageism and Dave Martin, associate with Canopy and co-founder of Better Birthdays.

We all have birthdays, it's the one time when we'll connect with the fact we are ageing; the session was a playful opportunity to creatively reflect upon ageing and ageism prompted by birthdays.

So where did birthdays come from? Apparently it all began back around 3,000 BC when ancient Egyptians started to celebrate birthdays, although the Romans were among the first people to celebrate birthdays as we know them today. The interesting thing about the origins of birthdays is that the time of a birthday was considered a time of change and people are vulnerable and anxious at times of change.

It seems these rituals – lighting candles, making lots of noise, offerings such as cake – weren't really about celebrating but rather friends and family gathering to ward off evil spirits and to support the birthday person. A kind of intervention if you will, perhaps with our ageist attitudes to our ageing we could do with such interventions to create more pro-aging birthday experiences?

The workshop included exercises and discussion highlighting our internalised ageism. If we aren't careful, birthdays can become heart sink moments; here's some of the comments made in the workshop:

I didn't want to look at any of my cards from my 30th I kept them up for a day and then threw them in the bin.

When I turned 40 - I did not celebrate it really - I wouldn't let my partner plan a party for me

My mum said she felt like an invisibility cape covered her the day after her 60th birthday

Could birthdays be opportunities for everyday conversations about attitudes to ageing? We considered ideas on how to be proactive and set the scene for pro-ageing birthday celebrations with family and friends, in the work place and of course for ourselves.

If you would like to hear more about the ideas for creating Better Birthdays or if you would like to host a conversation about ageism which uses birthday cards to explore how ageism shows up in our everyday lives, then we can help with that too.

Please share the Better Birthdays site, complete the survey, read our blog, learn the guidelines, use cards as tools for change, help create Better Birthdays for all ages and embrace ageing!

Join us in the movement to support Better Birthdays by spreading the word to everyone you know who has a birthday (i.e. everyone), and buying age-positive cards.

We all have birthdays – let's celebrate and embrace ageing at any age!

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