**President’s Address**

**May 18, 2017**

**Synergy: “The combined power of two or more agents or forces is greater than the sum of the individual elements.” The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.**

And that has never been shown more clearly by Elsenham WI, than in the past year.

In the last year Resolutions and their resulting campaigns have attained the high profile and importance they deserve across the WI as a whole, at Federation and particularly here, in Elsenham. This has been due in no small part (especially at Federation and here) to the work put in by our very own Lindsey Peters. Lindsey uses two straplines with the Resolution information – **“It Starts With You”** and **“Together We Make A Difference”.** I think these messages highlight exactly what synergy means at Elsenham WI.

**So where have we made a difference together in the past year?**

Not only do we take part in Resolution Meetings and vote, we put these Resolutions into action – and these are not always the resolutions adopted at National Level. T42 continues with our support, not only helping carers and sufferers from dementia but is now being re-launched to include anyone in our village who may be feeling the effects of loneliness. We continue to support the plight of homeless women and have now extended this to provide the same support to a women’s refuge answering a call for help from our new District Councilor.

We had a stall at Santa 2016. Members and friends worked all year to build up our stock and we had an excellent time raising money for special projects and good causes.

We took part in the MillionWomenRise March from Oxford Street to Trafalgar Square. I went with Gill and our two Lindsey/Lynsey’s and we met up with a great group of women including a group from Somerset Federation where we waved our placards, handed out leaflets and even learned a few chants – some never to be repeated but all with a very strong message condemning violence, particularly to women. Our favourite: “Whatever I wear, wherever I go, Yes mean yes and no means no!”

Our Cinema Club is coming along nicely with Sandra Smith at the helm, guiding us through the latest releases and must-sees. These outings are arranged by email so if you would like to join in please make sure Sandra has your email address.

We are even more active on Social Media having added Instagram to our portfolio and Lynsey Jackson has joined our Media Team. The team continue with the website, press reports, Facebook and Twitter. More workshops are being planned at this very moment. Thank you, Girls, for the hours of work you put in – but we do have a lot of laughs!

We made blankets for Addenbrookes – over one hundred so far making a difference to troubled and grieving parents at a heartbreaking time in their lives.

Caryl’s poppies (and this year they really were Caryl’s as she made almost every one of them herself) raised £2,000 with every penny going into the British Legion Poppy Appeal collecting tins.

Our book club started – ‘Bookworms’ formed after a conversation on the allotment one day with Joan Weyers and we have been reading a book a month since it began. We have a regular group of attendees and those who can’t make it to our meetings still read the books we all select and comment on Facebook.

**And what about our other regular events**?

Our meetings continue to be extremely well attended with a variety of speakers and activities.

In 2016 we had our first Bake-off judged by Petrina Lees and Elaine Terry with Trish Burrin winning the cake-slice for her amazing Owl cake.

We had another fabulous Garden Party hosted by Val and Hussein Shaida. It was with great sadness that we had to bid Val and Hussein a fond farewell as they moved on to pastures new – but we hope that Val will visit us soon.

We also made pottery, played skiffle, Tricia and Jan ran an excellent Christmas arrangement workshop and we listened to (and cried) when Emily Yarrow sang at our Christmas Party. 2017 has had us line dancing with Denise, playing games and hearing about the medicinal properties of Tim Wreghitts plants and we had the most amazing Members day organized and delivered by Sue Johnson and her wonderful team who fully embraced the ‘Show the Love’ initiative and its environmental message. The Members Day committee continued to ‘Show the Love’ and our village will benefit from the money they raised as it will be sponsoring perennials in the flowerbeds.

Our New Year Party was at Hunters Meet – lasting memories? Those desserts and sore feet!! Ladies – we certainly know how to party!

We are still represented at County – Lyn Brister is editor of the Essex WI News and a WI Advisor, Lindsey P is very active on the Public Affairs Committee and I am on The Cookery and Creative Crafts Committee (doesn’t that just roll of the tongue! Or CACK as my husband calls it) and our WI continues, through our extra Resolutions Meetings and our Resolutions Champion to lead the way and we are used as an example to others WI’s. Our Federation had its centenary this year and many of us joined the ranks of almost 2000 Essex Girls to celebrate at the Annual Meeting, held this year at Five Lakes in Colchester.

**So what’s in the pipeline?**

Poppies, Trauma Teddies and Octopuses (Octopi?) keep us busy at Natter Nights plus more stock for Santa 2017 – and teaching all of Elsenham to crochet. We will be entering ‘Diverse Essex’ next month at Hatfield Peverel. We will be stepping up with the big girls by having our own merchandising with the beautifully painted logo Catherine Hall designed for us. Our ‘Posh Frocks and Hats’ Garden Party will be hosted this year by Gloria and Tony – new location, new day, same fun.

We have shown pride in our community and supported our village everyway we can. Remembrance day refreshments and of course Caryl’s poppies are now an established part of village life. Avril and I gave a talk at the history society in November and we are still being talked about – for the right reasons, naturally! We have an even bigger role to play at the Fete this year (we need lots of help – please see Gloria and Sue J.) and we were well represented at ‘What Elsenham Offers’ grabbing every opportunity to talk about our WI.

Natter Nights, Bookworms and our Resolutions meetings have all been held at Elsenham Bowls Club. On behalf of us all I would like to thank Colin Peters and his amazing committee for the fabulous welcome they have afforded us. Our home continues to be here in the Memorial Hall and I would like to thank Allan Hathaway and his team who keep the hall in the excellent order it is in and put up with our little quirks and strange requests.

I would like to thank our hardworking committee. We started the year with Gloria, Janet, Anne, Caryl, Avril, Tricia and Barbara. Some months ago our committee increased in number to 12 – the increase in our membership generated more work and we needed help and Sandra, Penny, Verity and Sue Everett stepped forward and have been fabulous. As you’ve already heard three of our committee are stepping down. I am amazed and delighted that we have 14 nominees this year for committee – an extremely healthy position to be in.

My grateful thanks go to the merry band (sometimes very merry) of men who assist, support and keep the bowls club going on our meeting nights. Of course we could do the chairs ourselves - but they like to be involved!! Apparently they are looking for new recruits – especially for the tug o’ war team that I entered into the Village Fete. Membership of the Bowls Club would help all prospective applicants!

I have only one group of people left to thank – and that is every member who comes along to meetings, supports our resolution and craft initiatives, makes tea and coffee for us, provides refreshments, enters our competitions, welcomes our visitors and puts up with even more of my hair-brained schemes. Elsenham WI would not exist without your support and it is you who make it what it is today.

96 years old, 60 members – and still growing. That’s 60 individuals each bringing their very different skills and life experiences together – and that gives us a power much, much greater that the sum of it’s parts. A power to be reckoned with I’d say!

I’ve been very happy and proud to serve as President this year. A position I could not hold without the support of my lovely family, our Committee, the Media Team – and most of all you, the members, my friends who make this sometimes challenging but always rewarding role worthwhile. Thank you all for your help, guidance and continued support.

That was our year and a little taster of what’s to come. The excitement and momentum within the Women’s Institute continues as it grows and reinvents itself. Our Federation is looking good at 100 years old. And what about us in Elsenham? Well, I think that can be summed up just as I started: It Starts With You and Together We Make A Difference.

Thank you for your kind attention and for keeping heckling to a bare minimum!!

I would now like to propose adoption of our Annual Report.