

Fall 2009

## **Your personal renaissance: 12 steps to finding your life's true calling by D. Dreher**

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# The *Review*

Fall 2009

The Annual Journal of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

Volume 4

Explorations by and  
about older learners



## In this issue:

- Research and Theory
- Life Stories
- Best Practices
- Poetry
- Learning Resources

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# *The LLI Review*

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## Welcome

**W**elcome to Volume 4 of *The LLI Review*. This 2009 edition is the largest volume we've produced thus far and consists of research articles, descriptions of promising practices, stories, essays, poems, and book reviews. I believe this selection will offer readers a good sampling of the excellent work being done in older adult education across the United States both within Osher Foundation-sponsored lifelong learning institutes and elsewhere.

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people who help to produce *The LLI Review*. The well-known comment that "It takes a village..." applies to raising children and publishing a journal. Without the people who serve on our editorial board, production staff at the University of Southern Maine, OLLI directors across the United States who promote this journal among program leaders, faculty, and members, and the individuals who write and submit manuscripts *The LLI Review* would not exist.

The most difficult part of this job for me is writing letters to authors whose essay or poem has not been accepted for publication. I suppose it is both good and bad news that each year I am writing more of these letters with an ever-burgeoning number of manuscripts arriving in my mailbox. There is no specific formula for winning acceptance. The editorial board and I seek manuscripts that generally fit the mission of the journal, which is to explore issues in older adult education. We want to see good writing. If an article is reporting empirical research we want to be sure the study is on a topic related to older learners and is communicated in an accessible manner to a reading audience that consists primarily of non-researchers. The genre in which we receive the largest number of submissions is poetry, which may be explained, at least in part, by the myriad of creative writing courses offered at OLLIs and other LLIs. Selecting a handful of poems from the more than 100 we receive is especially challenging and our poetry editor, Pat Budd, chooses those that are especially well-crafted and are perceived to have wide appeal. In at least one case this year a poem has been published which was inspired by one that appeared in last year's journal (see "Appetizers").

Please share your print version of Volume 4 with a friend or colleague. I also want to remind you that this entire edition, like the three which preceded it, is fully available online at [www.osher.net](http://www.osher.net). If you have comments about *The LLI Review* or are considering an idea for contributing a manuscript I welcome an e-mail ([mbrady@usm.maine.edu](mailto:mbrady@usm.maine.edu)) or phone call (207-780-5312).

Thank you and be well.

**E. Michael Brady, Ph.D.**

*Editor*

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## Getting Ready for the Working-in-Retirement Generation: How Should LLIs Respond?

**Miwako Kidahashi and Ronald J. Manheimer**

### Abstract

*The future of lifelong learning institutes will be different from the past and present, in part because of changes in employment status among participants. In this article two scholars with wide and deep experience working with older learners explore five models in later life and their implications for older adult learning and LLIs. Many leaders of LLIs have thought about attracting members of the “Baby Boom” generation but may not have anticipated that working in retirement would become such a powerful trend.*

We had an inkling this was coming but when the data analysis from our online membership survey conducted in the fall of 2008 got processed through Survey Monkey, we had a few surprises. First, we learned that participation in University of North Carolina at Asheville’s NC Center for Creative Retirement (NCCCR), with an annual membership of 1,800, was decisively made up of those nearly and firmly Baby Boomers (43% age 64 and under). Second, we noted that 27% of the 479 respondents (of the 1,229 e-mail addresses to which the electronic survey was sent) reported they were working for pay either “occasionally,” part-time or full-time. And third, that we had a well-educated group with 59% holding master’s and doctoral-level degrees. There is more in the survey findings about course preferences as linked to gender and age, motivation for participation, annual household income, etc. Readers can review the full report at <http://www.unca.edu/nccr/Survey08/Survey2008.pdf>.

The critical issue for our staff and member-leaders is that the long-predicted trend of a lengthened work life has surfaced in our midst, as it may also have surfaced in the ranks of hundreds of other LLIs. This is especially salient because the vast majority of our members are relative newcomers to the area and Asheville is not an especially attractive labor market unless you are a physician, herbal healer, craftsperson, or hypnotherapist. We should not have been too surprised. After all, the current chair of our governance group has to travel one week per month to conduct financial audits of energy installation for a major international accounting firm and several others travel for consulting work. LLIs located in less transient communities will likely see much higher percentages of people employed beyond the traditional retirement age.

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## Getting Ready for the Working-in-Retirement Generation: How Should LLIs Respond?

Like most LLIs that are more than a few years old, our founding members some 21 years ago were almost all fully retired. That was also the case through our 10th anniversary and probably our 15th. But things are changing. It may be helpful to LLI leaders and planners to consider how the “new retirement” is shaping up and what emerging trends may imply for the future of our programs.

### New Working Stage

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Although retirement used to mean simply stopping work both “working after retirement,” and “continuing to work without retirement” are becoming increasingly common. In fact, a number of studies and surveys conducted in recent years consistently show that a majority of people in the baby boomer generation and others in their 60s plan to keep on working beyond normal retirement age. A quick check with the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI), for example, revealed that in 1998 12% of adults ages 55+ expected to retire at age 66 or later. That percentage went to 38% for those surveyed in 2008 (EBRI, 2008). According to the EBRI study, 65% of workers under age 55 expect to work for pay “after retirement,” and 54% of those age 55 or older plan to do likewise. Their motives, in rank order, include staying active and involved, keeping health insurance and other benefits, enjoying working, and wanting money to make ends meet.

Recent increase in intention and actual behavior of workforce participation among older people is attributable to a combination of a number of factors; most notably the recent financial turmoil and financial insecurity found among the baby boomers in general, expanding availability of part-time and more flexible forms of work, laws and initiatives to encourage older workers to remain longer in the workforce, as well as a widely embraced ideology of “productive aging” (Butler, 1985; Bass and Caro, 2001). In reality some people opt to continue to work while others cannot afford to retire. Whichever the case may be, as Hirsch points out, “older workers are not a separate group within society; later working life is a stage that most of us will pass through” (2005, p. 3). There is no doubt that working after the traditional retirement age is quickly becoming a norm rather than an exception and a “new working life stage” after midlife is being socially constructed. From a macro point of view, Maltby insightfully describes the shift toward work in later life: “Whereas the 20th century was the century for the creation of ‘retirement’, it is suggested that the 21st century will be one of changing working patterns, incorporating lifelong learning, increased leisure and an *absence* [sic] of retirement as we currently understand it (2007, p. 176).

## The Reinvention of Retirement: Five Types

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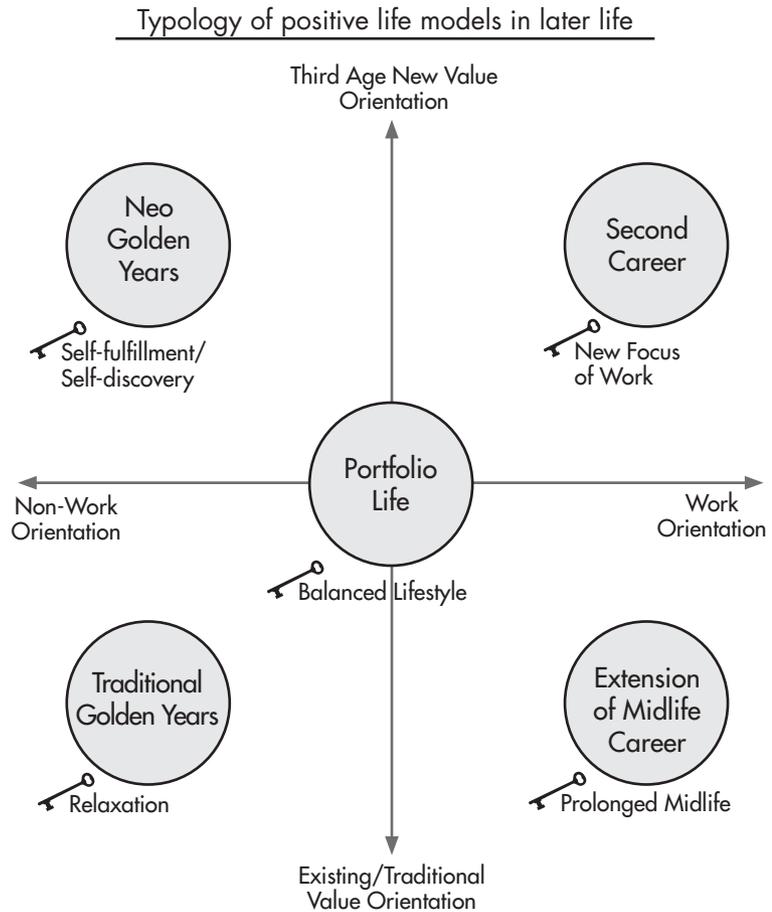
The “golden years” filled with leisure activities has long been considered an ideal post-retirement life model and retiring in one’s 50s or even 40s was often envied or admired as a symbol of success. However, this one-size-fits-all retirement ideal has given way to more diversified options as the very definition, purpose, and actual practice of retirement have become increasingly ambiguous (Atchley, 1982; Schulz, 2001; Cahill, Giandrea & Quinn, 2006; Moen and Altabelli, 2006).

A survey conducted by Merrill Lynch (2006), for example, found that while three-quarters of adults age between 60 and 70 consider themselves “retired,” 23% are still working for pay and only 27% are sure that they will not work again. Thus the survey concludes that “the ‘new retirement’ is already well established among 60-to-70-year olds and older boomers.” Another study co-sponsored by MetLife Foundation and Civic Ventures (2005) revealed that 53% of Americans age 50 to 70 agreed that “retirement is a time to begin a new chapter in life by being active and involved, starting new activities, and setting new goals.” These surveys, along with many others, suggest that various new types of life models after the traditional retirement age are emerging.

One way to conceptualize the diversity is to identify and organize prevailing positive life models by using key factors which are considered to contribute to the diversity. The following typology was developed based on analysis of sources such as market surveys, research studies, media reports, observation of social phenomena and interviews. The typology is constructed around two axes as defining factors; “work-orientation”—the degree to which an individual finds significance in formal paid work (or other forms of formal work considered equivalent to paid work in terms of commitment), and “value-orientation”—the degree to which people are engaged in either exploring and aiming at a new focus and meaning of life (Third Age new value orientation) or prefer to maintain tried and true values (existing/traditional value orientation). As is shown in the figure below, the typology yields five distinct life models which individuals might pursue after the traditional retirement age: (1) Traditional Golden Years, (2) Neo-Golden Years, (3) Portfolio Life, (4) Second Career, and (5) Extension of Midlife Career. These are simplified conceptual models and in reality many individuals will shift from one model to another as circumstances change and as they grow older. Still others will find wide-ranging intermediate models along the axes (Kidahashi, 2009).

In fact, a number of studies and surveys conducted in recent years consistently show that a majority of people in the baby boomer generation and others in their 60s plan to keep on working beyond normal retirement age.

Getting Ready for the Working-in-Retirement Generation: How Should LLIs Respond?



The model of *Traditional Golden Years* denotes a lifestyle in which leisure is highly valued. One may think of advertisements for retirement communities that emphasize relaxing activities such as golf, fishing, tennis, bridge, etc. (Freedman, 1999; Costa, 1998). Earlier generations were encouraged to retire by age 65 through both public and private sector inducements (e.g., mandatory retirement, Social Security thresholds, pension ceilings). Expectations for a new life in retirement that held the promise of personal transformation were low to non-existent. By contrast, what we call the *Neo-Golden Years* points to an emphasis on searching for meaning in life and pursuing self-development, whether by joining informal learning groups, enrolling in credit-bearing college courses, or becoming involved in spiritual activities. This model is best described by Laslett (1989) as the “Third Age,” a unique period of relative good health, discretionary time, and income that could be spent for personal achievement and fulfillment. Many of our LLIs were launched and sustained by participants of this type.

The *Portfolio Life*, on the other hand, aims at balance between some form of work for pay, time for family, travel, volunteering and other valued activities (Corbett, 2007; Sadler, 2006; Handy, 1989). Just like a financial portfolio, maximizing the total value through a good balance of investment of time and energy in diverse activity is the key for this life model. The Second Career ori-

entation includes several possibilities—turning a former hobby into an income generating occupation, starting a new business utilizing skills and networks built during one’s midlife career, or it may entail an “encore career” (Freedman, 2007) in which one segues to a type of work that the individual believes offers significant benefit to society, such as teaching high school or working for a nonprofit social action group. Finally, the *Extension of Midlife Career* describes a person who wants to extend his or her midlife work activity for as long as possible, whether motivated by money, status and the preservation of identity, the satisfaction of the work at hand, or a combination of all three. Small business owners, lawyers, and members of the academic profession are among those likeliest to seek extending their working life.

### Future Directions of Lifelong Learning

The diversity in positive life models and a strong orientation toward work, which are increasingly becoming evident among people at or around normal retirement age, assume inevitable changes in various aspects of society. Lifelong learning is certainly one of the areas where a significant change is expected (Manheimer, 2008).

While lifelong learning for older adults has developed through several different paradigms and rationales and played a crucial role in people’s later life for decades (Manheimer, 1998), most institutions and programs have primarily catered to those who are entirely out of the workforce and aim for self-development, intellectual stimulation, or social connection through learning. In terms of the typology described above, the core target is those in the Neo-Golden Years who are active and intellectually enthusiastic retirees. Indeed, one of the roles of institutions intended for serious older learners such as lifelong learning institutes seems to be offering an alternative life model to the Traditional Golden Years by helping retirees fill the void after they left a workplace with learning and self-developing opportunities, instead of endless leisure time. Consequently, typical programs were geared toward pursuing cultural enrichment, socialization, new but non-vocational skills such as photography or a self-qualifying certificate such as master gardener, and yoga.

However, in the recent environment where “post-retirement” life models become increasingly diversified and more people in the age group remain in the workforce, lifelong learning institutions and other educational programs are expected to address diversified needs of the learners. The typology may serve to identify possible educational needs and learning goals of individuals embracing various life models that include a new or continuing work orientation.

Those in the category of Extension of Midlife certainly need learning and training opportunities to keep up professional abilities and marketability, particularly in situations where training for older workers offered in the workplace is limited (Stein and Rocco, 2001). Subscribers to the Second Career, which is another life model with a strong work orientation, are expected to seek acquisition of new skills for career change, or learning about how to start new businesses, pursue socially beneficial “encore careers” through turning avocation into a vocation, or effectively convert existing skills into a new career. In fact, a number of forward-looking educational institutions, including some commu-

However, in the recent environment where “post-retirement” life models become increasingly diversified and more people in the age group remain in the workforce, lifelong learning institutions and other educational programs are expected to address diversified needs of the learners.

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nity colleges, are already expanding programs to support older workers' shift to a second career (MetLife Foundation and Civic Ventures, 2008; Dembicki, 2007). Individuals who embrace the Portfolio Life, on the other hand, will also appreciate learning opportunities to update career skills in order to secure part-time employment or to master "life planning skills," offered by a burgeoning field of professionals self-described as "life coaches" aiming to help people to lead a more balanced and meaningful life.

The learning needs of individuals who are categorized in the Neo-Golden Years also seem to be changing, as more of them have an explicit or latent working-orientation. Although typical people in the Neo-Golden Years are retirees in the conventional sense, it is becoming more common to find enthusiastic older learners who still have a part-time job or are thinking of going back to some form of work which suggests their emerging needs of job-related learning. Given the serious commitment to learning, it is also possible for a person in this category to seek to develop a new profession based on skills he or she has mastered, and thus move from Neo-Golden Years model to that of Second Career.

Another noteworthy trend found in the Neo-Golden Years category is the emergence of vocation-oriented learning for social causes. Unlike the traditional "senior volunteers," who would willingly accept low-skilled routine tasks, recent older adults tend to be attracted by a type of social engagement which integrates professional skills, self-development, and often modest monetary reward. The intersection of the spirit of volunteerism, opportunities for learning about social issues, acquiring para-professional skills, and the pay of work is expected to become a field where individuals in the Neo-Golden Years can flourish. Certificate programs such as Legacy Leadership offered by University of Maryland and Blue Ridge Naturalist of the aforementioned NCCCR are good examples in this regard (Wilson and Simson, 2006; Manheimer, 2008). Incidentally, approximately 45% of the participants of Legacy Leadership program are reported to have become employed (Wilson and Simson, 2006, p.130).

The scope of actions required at educational institutions in order to address the changes in the target population certainly extends beyond the changes in program contents. Delivery methods should also be re-assessed based on the diversity in learning goals and lifestyle of the target learners. More online learning, evening courses, short and narrowly focused courses, and age-integrated programs are some of the changes in course delivery that might be considered. Financing methods could also be re-evaluated, when lifelong learning is more closely connected to work and social services. Some expense of work-related learning may be picked up by an employer, while learning for social services could be financed by a public funding or a nonprofit organization.

Educational institutions for older learners are in transition, as the oldest members of the huge baby boomer cohort have reached the traditional retirement age with expectations and conditions that are significantly different from those of their parents. While there is much uncertainty and myth associated with this cohort, "diversity" and "work-orientation" are considered to be certain and crucial factors which will influence the future directions of lifelong learning institutions. Seeking to attract and retain the new breed of retiree,

however, is both an option and a challenge for LLIs that may be called on to alter their identity, curriculum, and purpose. Is a given LLI appropriately positioned to offer courses on career change, return to the workforce, or vocational skills? Might partnerships be formed with other university departments, local community colleges, or other career-related organizations? Many of us in the lifelong learning enterprise worried about attracting members of the boomer generation, but we may not have anticipated that working in retirement would become such a powerful trend.

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**Miwako Kidahashi**, Ph.D., returned to Columbia University in 2007 as a postdoctoral research scholar of the Institute of Social and Economic Research and Policy after decades of a career in the consulting business. Her research focuses on the sociology of age/aging.

**Ronald J. Manheimer**, Ph.D., retired in July of 2009 after serving for 21 years as founding director of the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement at the University of North Carolina Asheville where he was also research associate professor of philosophy. He is also a Fellow of the University of North Carolina Institute on Aging.

# Engaging the Older Learner On Growing Old—Positively!

**Laura K. M. Donorfio and Brian G. Chapman**

## Abstract

*Through the use of documentary film, whereby course participants selected films and sub-topics, an overwhelmingly successful six-week course on aging positively emerged. The framework included contextual introductory lectures, viewing of films, and significant discussion among male and female participants ages 53-88. Qualitative research findings demystified initial questions and concerns regarding participants' willingness to view films that might initially appear to address negative aspects of aging. Participant behaviors, including voluntary research and sharing of supplemental reading, showed indications of meaningful engagement of these learners. Living longer, redefining aging, confronting an unknown future, and ageism were four primary realizations defined by this group of learners. Outcomes included an appreciation of new knowledge, the creation of positive and realistic images of aging, increased optimism, diminishment of fears, and a sense of fortitude in some participants. Pre- and post-test surveys document that the older adult learners were curious, reflective, and found the course to be overwhelmingly positive.*

The course design and development was a joint effort between the authors and older learners.

“Life, we learn too late, is in the living, in the fiber of every day and every hour.”

—Stephen Leacock (quote provided by older learner)

## Introduction

Teaching older adults about aging is a formidable task for any aging educator. How can one teach others what they have already witnessed or, in some instances, experienced themselves? The goal of this research was to learn what older adults wanted to learn about being and growing old and how they wanted to learn it, within the framework of film and discussion on current, positive adulthood and aging issues. The course design and development was a joint effort between the authors and older learners.

Let us introduce our roles and how this whole idea of creating a positive aging course based on aging documentaries started. The first author is the faculty liaison of UConn's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and was the

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instructor of the course to be discussed. The second author is the director of UConn's Osher Lifelong Learning program. With both of us being documentary buffs, it was our hope that we could develop a "how to age positively" course by using aging documentaries as the primary base. In our quest to find something similar in scope to help guide us in the design and development of our course, electronic database searches were undertaken repeatedly, with little success. We kept telling ourselves, "If only we capture the right search words, there must be a whole body of literature out there awaiting our discovery." No such discovery was ever made. Of the few articles and books we did find, even though they referred to and critiqued primarily "elderquest" type Hollywood movies or video vignettes vs. documentaries, they did offer some guidance to help get us started. (Note: "Elderquest" is a term coined by Charles Nicholas of the University of Massachusetts. It refers to a movie storyline following an older person through a quest for resolution to a conflict or the completion of a significant life task).

In his book *The Great Circle of Life: A Resource Guide to Films and Videos on Aging*, Robert Yahnke (1998) focuses on the contributions of film and literature to gerontological education. He states, "These older adult portrayals blaze the trail and show us there is more to be experienced—and accomplished—in late life. Older adults have a lot to teach the younger people around them, and they serve as mentors and guides for youth and the middle aged alike" (p. 2). Yes, we did agree with Yahnke that older adults have a lot to offer and teach the younger people around them. But a couple of questions kept resurfacing in our conversations, "What can they teach and learn from each other?" and "How can we capitalize on this?" According to Sadler (2006), "These people have been transforming aging during their fifties, sixties, and seventies. Instead of following the decrement model of aging, their lives have moved in new directions with personal growth and renewal" (p. 11). In this new journey of being and growing old, older adults need to be able to mentor each other because there are few role models to help guide them in the midst of this longevity revolution.

Interestingly, research has shown that those who teach aging courses were the early adopters of using visual media as a learning strategy to engage adult learners (Myers, Sykes, & Myers, 2008). An example of this dates back to 1992 when Fisher used commercial motion pictures to stimulate informed writing and discussion of a myriad of aging issues including caregiving, intergenerational relationships, and positive aging. Fortunately, video media with gerontological themes have become increasingly available since 1992. In fact, many film companies have specifically designed video media to enrich gerontological and geriatric education (Myers, Sykes, & Myers, 2008).

Visual media can serve as a powerful impetus for getting learners to become actively involved in their learning, especially when topics are of an uncomfortable nature. As Ello (2007) explains, "...the use of film is a means of exploring on an experiential level the specific changes, events, and situations that older adults encounter that impact on their physical, psychological, economic, and social well-being. When using film as a teaching technique, students have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives on the process

of aging and heighten their awareness of the realities of coping with myriad dilemmas” (pp.272-73). Myers, Sykes, and Myers (2008) also explain, “At times, these images are powerful enough to challenge preconceived ideas about aging.... Learners are able to encounter the challenges of physical aging, view the impact of poverty, or discover unique cultural adaptations to end of life issues” (p.235).

Ello (2007) most recently incorporated film to teach a graduate level course about social work with older adults and found substantial support regarding the effectiveness of this teaching strategy. Students were surveyed at the completion of the course for each of the four years it was offered and analysis of the data revealed that using film as a visual learning aid helped the students overcome concerns, apprehension, and anxiety about working with the elderly, and for some, this learning experience changed their negative perceptions of older adults.

In examining the available literature in this area, it was determined that using visual media could be a creative, powerful, and effective technique for teaching older adults about current adulthood and aging issues. The information that follows represents a summary of the conceptual course content, how the course was developed in conjunction with the older learners, the results of a pre- and post-test survey exploring the effectiveness of this course and the teaching pedagogy, and how film as a visual learning aid can help teach older adults about aging.

### The Course

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After much discussion and planning, we decided that the course would present current adulthood and aging issues, from a positive and thoughtful perspective, using recent award-winning documentary films. We were unsure about presenting anything that could be interpreted as negative aging. We felt the field was already inundated with the negative realities of aging and growing old in our youth-oriented society. After all, what older adult would want to take a course on the negatives of aging? We were in for quite a surprise.

The course ran for six consecutive weeks, two hours per week, and was entitled: “Aging Positively: Film and Discussion on Current Adulthood and Aging Issues.” Each session would cover a current issue related to the study of adulthood and aging. A short lecture of relevant information related to the weeks topic(s) would be presented first, followed by the documentary and then last, open class discussion related to the topic. This framework was adapted based on the work of Houston (2000) who suggested the primary instructional uses of video were to “introduce or summarize a topic, provide visual examples, and stimulate discussion” (p.353). This framework would allow factual information to be presented to dispel any myths or misconceptions, visual media to engage the learners on an experiential level, and an open class discussion to teach and learn from each other. Also, the first author brought in relevant books related to each topic each week to provide the older learners with both cutting edge and classic literature in the field of aging. Examples of books provided were: *The Fountain of Age* by Betty Friedan, *As We Are Now* by May Sarton, *At Seventy* by May Sarton, *Another Country* by Mary Pipher, *A Walk on the*

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*Beach* by Joan Anderson, *Winter Grace* by Kathleen Fischer, *Good News About Aging* by Charles Russell, and *The Art of Growing Older* by Wayne Booth.

Having successfully used them in undergraduate courses on adulthood and aging, we originally identified six films. The films dealt with the following topics: the baby boomers and the road ahead; centenarians looking forward to the new millennium; Alzheimer's disease; Parkinson's disease; aging positively in a nursing home/retirement community; and changing the face of dying with the modern world of hospice. Even though some of these topics appear to be negative in scope, all of the documentaries made a concerted effort to put a positive spin on the topic by presenting hopeful, accurate, and cutting-edge information. They provided real life, how-to strategies. Because we did not know how the older learners would interpret these topics, we decided to ask them to help choose the final list of films and, hence, topics. While this meant more work, it was important that the older learners choose topics that were the most meaningful to them.

During the first class the format of the course was explained (i.e., book of the day, short lecture introducing the topic, video, open discussion) and participants were asked to introduce themselves (i.e., professional background, where they lived, why they signed up for the course). A list of all the possible films that could be shown was handed out and the participants were asked to review and choose what films they wanted to see by ranking them from most to least desirable. They were instructed to bring this list back the following week so the results could be tallied and shared with everyone the third week. This activity added a certain excitement to the class. Everyone was interested in what everyone else wanted to see. The beginning of the third session unveiled the video "winners" and it was like being at the Oscar Awards without the red carpet. The older learners sat on the edge of their chairs, in silence, anxiously waiting to see what films were to be shown. Developing the course content together produced a feeling of mutual ownership and camaraderie. Table 1 includes a list of the films that were used.

**Table 1—List of Aging Documentaries**

Video Title	Description
Week 1 <i>The Open Road: America Looks at Aging</i> 2005 60 minutes approx.	This documentary examines the personal and social impact of the impending retirement of America's 79 million Baby Boomers. Through insightful stories of individuals confronting the obstacles and opportunities, <i>The Open Road</i> probes important social, economic, and cultural issues at stake as America undergoes an historic, demographic shift.
Week 2 <i>Centenarians</i> 60 minutes approx.	This documentary captures the spirit of men and women all over 100 years old. Now, approaching their third century of good living, 25 lively participants tell all as they look forward to the new millennium. Witty, unabashed, and sentimental, for the first time ever—25 centenarians give you their opinions, and they've got over 2,500 years of opinions!
Week 3 <i>There is a Bridge: Alzheimer's Disease</i> 2007 60 minutes approx.	Hosted by Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, this ground-breaking documentary captures eye-opening portraits of people with Alzheimer's disease. <i>There is A Bridge</i> will change your view of Alzheimer's disease—and quite possibly how you see yourself. Alzheimer's disease is not the end. Sometimes it can be a beginning.
Week 4 <i>Louie, Louie: A Portrait in Parkinson's</i> 2007 38 minutes	<i>A Portrait in Parkinson's</i> is a documentary film about a man with Parkinson's disease and the challenge his family faced caring for him. There are millions of families who have to face the challenges of caregiving.
<i>Curtain Call</i> 2006 38 minutes	<i>Curtain Call</i> is the unforgettable story of eight remarkable residents of the Actors' Fund Retirement Home. No ordinary nursing home, these residents are still full of vitality as they recall tales of Broadway's golden age, and what they have done with their lives.

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<p>Week 5 <i>Do Not Go Gently: The Power of Imagination in Aging</i> 60 minutes approx.</p>	<p>Narrated by Walter Cronkite at age 90, <i>Do Not Go Gently</i> is a documentary about the power of imagination in aging. At the center are three extraordinary artists: the godfather of modern music Leo Ornstein, 109; premiere danseur Frederic Franklin, 90; and Arlonzia Pettway, 82, one of the eldest quilters in Gee's Bend, Alabama. The science of creativity and aging is uncovered by Dr. Gene Cohen and his work at the Creativity Discovery Corps in Washington, D.C., introducing us to a deeper level of brain science.</p>
<p><i>Still Kicking</i> 2006 32 minutes</p>	<p><i>Still Kicking</i> honors the gift of age, and poignantly illustrates that growing old can be a time of creative expression and satisfaction. Amy Gorman travels throughout San Francisco Bay area, searching for female role models over 90. She finds six such women—a painter, artist, dancer, rug weaver, doll maker, and pianist.</p>
<p>Week 6 <i>Aging in America: The Years Ahead</i> 2003 57 minutes</p>	<p>This film is a journey across the topography of aging in search of what it means to have a "good old age." Told through a series of intimate vignettes of people who are living the new old age, we laugh and cry as they celebrate their freedom, apply their wisdom, and suffer the consequences of their bodies' limitations.</p>

Note: The authors selected the films for the first two weeks of the course. Participants chose the films for weeks 3–6.

**The Pre-Test and Post-Test Survey**

During the first and last day of class short pre- and post-test surveys were administered. Because it was the first time such a class was offered at UConn’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, we were interested in how such a course would be interpreted by the older learners. Specifically, we were interested in how such a course could help older adults think positively about aging, particularly their own aging. The survey questions are listed in Table 2.

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<b>Table 2—Pre- and Post-Survey Questions</b>	
<b>Pre-Test</b>	<b>Post-Test</b>
1. What prompted you to sign up for this course?	1. Did you get what you wanted out of this course? Please explain.
2. What do you hope to take away from this course?	2. Would you recommend this course to a friend. Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to “age” in today’s world?	3. Did this course change your perspective on aging in any way? Please explain.
4. How do you think “aging” has changed over the years?	4. Did this course help address any of your hopes, fears, and/or expectations related to the aging process as you stated in this survey at the beginning of the course? Please explain.
5. What are your hopes, fears, and/or expectations related to the aging process?	

**The Older Learners**

All the participants were members of the OLLI Institute on campus. The final class consisted of 20 older learners: 16 females ranging in age from 53–88 (average age = 68.18) and four males ranging in age from 58–78 (average age = 71). The majority were retired teachers and nurses. One male was a retired businessman. Of those who still worked, one was the director of a residential community facility and the other an administrator at an assisted living facility. There were two husband and wife teams. Many took care of aging parents (or had in the past). All lived in their own home or a large senior gated community.

**Overall Findings**

On the last day of the course, the participants were asked in an open forum what they would change about the class structure and organization.

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Overall, they said the course was very effective and that the only thing they would change was perhaps the length of the course (adding more weeks). They enjoyed how each session was broken up into different sections or learning activities. They particularly liked the use of cutting-edge, award-winning documentaries. They appreciated being asked what topics and films they wished to pursue. They appreciated the book of the day, and in fact, ended up bringing in their own information to share with the class, whether it was a book, magazine, or newspaper article. This was unexpected and from the third class on, after the book of the day was passed around, the entire class had the opportunity to share what they had brought in. When possible, photocopies were made for the class. Many borrowed the books of the day to read on their own and some even borrowed the videos to watch again or to share with family and friends. It ended up being a rich learning exchange for all of us.

Perhaps the biggest learning for us was that the older learners wanted to be exposed to both the positive and negative aspects of aging and growing old. As one participant put it, “I don’t want it candy coated. We are tired of this.” They wanted to be exposed to all of it. Many explained that at first they were unsure about how they would feel when discussing such topics as Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease, because many were caregivers of parents who had the diseases and they did not want to be reminded of that painful period in their life. One participant who had Parkinson’s in the class explained, “Although it was hard to initially watch the movie, I now know what to expect.” Having cutting-edge information was seen as a powerful tool to possess in their aging quest. Many explained that they wished they had known of this current information when they were caregiving for their parents. “How helpful it could have been. How far we have come in terms of what we know and how this knowledge brings a certain amount of comfort.” For example, the Alzheimer’s video included a section on how we can better communicate with those who have Alzheimer’s disease, with singing and touch being suggested and demonstrated. Watching a caregiver communicate with their care-receiver by singing was powerful for all of us.

As teachers we were able to see firsthand what videos had the biggest impact on the participants and which ones were the most meaningful. The bonus was having the learners explain why. Even though some topics were difficult to talk about because they were a reality for some and a real possibility for others, all were sensitive to one another’s feelings, concerns, and needs. This was far beyond what was expected. A class that could have been so one-dimensional, presenting static facts and what ifs, became three-dimensional, with sincere, heartfelt emotion filling the room. Even with all its possible negatives, aging was seen in its most positive light.

### Survey Findings

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#### **“What prompted you to sign up for this course?”**

Responses fell into three general categories. For some, caring for an aging parent was the impetus for signing up for the course. As one older learner shared, “Caring for an aging parent who battles dementia has forced me to look at my own life and my own aging.” For some, it was the title of the

course itself, “The title Positive Aging. There is too much written about the negative aspects of aging.” The majority of the participants were curious to learn about the aging process, current aging issues and trends, and what they could expect in their years ahead: “I want to learn how to age positively;” “I need to know the ‘how to’ to aging;” and “Since I am living the aging process, this made me a prime candidate!”

#### **“What do you hope to take away from this course?”**

The majority of participants wanted to gain a better understanding of aging and all its positive aspects. They hoped this, in turn, would help them age better and they then could help those around them age better. Two participants shared: “How to live to 105. Learn about the aging process—know thy enemy;” and “Ways of aging without growing old in mind—thinking young.” Many were interested in how they themselves were doing, “according to the experts,” and what they could implement in their lives to make life easier. Some wanted to know how they could handle their own aging in the future, what issues they would have control over and those they would not, and how to avoid some of the pitfalls of aging. As one older learner expressed, “Hopefully it will make me a more active and interesting person. I want to enjoy the wonders of this world.”

#### **“What does it mean to ‘age’ in today’s world?”**

Answers to this question centered on four realizations. The first realization was that to age in today’s world means to live longer and to work longer. As one older adult profoundly shared, “To age today is to grow old.” While this is not a guarantee for everyone, it is a real possibility for most. The second realization involved redefining what it means to grow old and what different age markers symbolically mean. Today’s 85-year-old is not what yesterday’s 85-year-old was. Chronologically you must be much older to be considered “aged.” As a participant explained, “Aging is still a time to learn and do. People seem to be productive well past 65, which to me used to seem to be old!” Today’s older adult is seen as more vibrant, confident, and able to remain a more active, contributing member of society. It is acceptable to still want to “seek adventures and new learnings.”

The third realization linked our increased life spans to an increasingly unknown future. Participants believed that we are living with more chronic illness than ever before and that we have more concerns regarding financial viability, including the future of our nation’s healthcare and Social Security systems. Life is seen as having many more “little surprises” than ever before. The last realization related to ageism. Many people still associate aging with loss — loss of physical capabilities, loss of mental capacity, loss of family/friends, loss of independence. Aging is a period of one’s life filled with limitations. As one participant shared, “Number one is the lack of respect by younger people and maybe even our ‘older’ selves.”

#### **“How do you think ‘aging’ has changed over the years?”**

Participants felt that aging has changed in several ways over the years. On

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the whole, aging has improved. It is no longer so much about the “chronology as it is about the functionality.” Older people are living longer, looking younger, and are able to be more active. “The 60s are the new 40s!” One participant even pointed out that, “Discount ski lift tickets for seniors are up to age 80 in some areas!” Technology and medicine are playing a strong role in our aging revolution.

While increased aging does have its challenges, overall, aging has become a more positive experience. Although some question this attitudinal shift, “There’s a new view, it is now seen as a positive transition but people still struggle with seeing it that way.” Society is now more accepting of older individuals and is gaining insights into providing opportunities for growth. Older adults want to continue to grow and learn throughout life.

### **“What are your hopes, fears, and/or expectations related to the aging process?”**

Participant hopes centered on staying healthy and remaining independent. As one older adult shared, “I hope that I remain healthy and can continue to seek out ‘adventures!’” Other hopes included continuing to enjoy education, to die peacefully, and finding cures for chronic diseases.

Fears strongly centered on being able to maintain one’s independence and not becoming a burden on ones family. Secondary fears involved dealing with any limitations, mental or physical, not being alone, and how they would transition to a different home if and when they had to.

### **“Did this course help address any of your hopes, fears, and/or expectations related to the aging process as you stated in this survey at the beginning of the course? Please explain.”**

Taking the course did have a positive impact on the participants’ overall views of aging. Many stated the importance of being positive and maintaining a positive attitude, “Yes, I can do it!” One participant even hoped to become a member of the centenarian group someday, not something to which she had heretofore aspired. For some, it tempered their fears of the future, especially of becoming physically or mentally disabled. Aging was put into a somewhat different, more positive perspective: “It is O.K. to age, and it is part of the journey.” “...life can still be good as one ages;” and “It brought out the value of life, the living, and the enjoyment of life.”

### **“Did this course change your perspective on aging in any way? Please explain.”**

For almost half of the participants, taking this course confirmed or reinforced what they already knew or suspected about aging. Many felt this course exposed them to many different aspects of aging, both positive and negative. Some did not realize how large the aging population was going to be, particularly the centenarian population. Some were very familiar with what diseases older people get, but knew little to nothing about them. Others felt more optimistic about getting older. As one poignantly shared, “Accepting old age in a positive way and accepting the challenges of old age has made a memorable impact on me.

It has deepened my understanding of what I'm observing in myself, my husband, and my friends."

**"Did you get what you wanted out of this course? Please explain."**

All participants gave a resounding "Yes! [they] did get what [they] wanted out of the course." and that "It was a very positive experience." Half of the participants specifically stated that they did not know what to expect when they signed up for the course. As they wrote:

"Yes. I wasn't sure what to expect. The films showed a good perspective on life as we age. It was great to see that the new "old age" is now the 90s and 100s. When we retire from our career jobs, there are many years to learn, travel, and pursue new interests."

"Yes, when I signed up for this course, I wasn't sure what to expect. I hoped it would not be depressing—and it wasn't. I'm an active person who believes keeping busy is a positive attribute. These films certainly showed this to be true."

"Yes, I did. When I signed up for this course, I did not have any expectations. However, I was quite surprised by my internal thoughts. The films challenged me to think positively about aging and to be less fearful. It was thought provoking, since I'm in the throws of determining what my 'retirement' is going to be and how I want to 'age.'"

For many, seeing the films positively changed their attitudes toward the aging process. One participant never wanted to live long enough to be a centenarian, but after viewing the film on centenarians, didn't think it would be such a bad thing. Another felt a "newfound comfort with herself," knowing she can still learn about her future, what to expect, and what not to give up. Another felt similarly, believing now that "aging is a part of the journey of life and goals can still be reached to make it a more positive experience." The films gave them positive role models with which they could identify and also opened up new possibilities of what aging can bring to one's life.

For some the course reinforced what they thought they already knew about the aging process. One participant expressed a "real fear" toward Alzheimer's disease, but the information from that segment of the course told her she was doing all the right things. Statistics on various aspects of aging were seen as "interesting and mind opening." Topics seen as especially interesting were: the growing number of people over 100, the number of housing options available to older adults today, and what future government programs must consider to accommodate the growing population of older adults.

**"Would you recommend this course to a friend—Why or why not?"**

All of the participants indicated that they would recommend this course to a friend. The two most powerful quotes were:

"Yes, because some individuals I know are afraid of the aging process. I say it can help them realize that it can be the most rewarding part of their lives."

"Yes, I would highly recommend this course. Facing the facts about aging is difficult. But facing the facts and learning a positive approach are quite valuable."

One participant even hoped to become a member of the centenarian group someday, not something to which she had heretofore aspired.

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Other reasons included:

- Being exposed to positive aging role models
- Offering specifics about the positives and negatives of aging
- Increasing awareness and empathy surrounding aging issues
- Facing the challenges of aging
- Introducing the possibilities of new experiences as we age
- Putting “old age” into a new perspective
- Opening up your mind to different paths of aging
- Uplifting, rewarding, and inspirational!

## Conclusion

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The positive aspects of offering a course such as this are far reaching. Feedback from those who took the course reinforced the notion that visual media, specifically video documentaries, can be successfully utilized as a teaching strategy to help older adults learn about aging (Ello, 2007; Myers, Sykes, and Myers, 2008). The documentary films helped the participants to become actively involved in their learning by exposing them to both the positives and negatives, which in turn, broadened their perspectives on the different aspects of aging.

The main concern we had about whether we should present the negative aspects of aging was overpowered by the older learners’ desire to understand all aspects of the aging process, positive and negative. As noted earlier, one participant strongly reinforced this idea—“We don’t want it candy coated.” The secondary concern we had about what this course could offer and teach older adults about growing old was also overpowered by the older learner’s wonderment, appreciation of knowledge, and recognition of the value and quality of what others in the class had to offer.

Having the participants help decide the content of the course proved successful and created a sense of overall course ownership. Also, the general course framework adapted from Houston (2002) that consisted of presenting a short lecture, showing of the film, and then class discussion proved quite successful. This framework allowed factual information to dispel misperceptions, visual media to engage the learner on an experiential level, and an opportunity for discussion that we all looked forward to. The course became an educational conversation among those taking the class, while the role of the instructor became that of a facilitator. It was learning at its best, both inside and outside of the classroom.

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## Cognition and Leisure Time Activities of Older Adults

**Patricia M. Simone and Amie L. Haas**

### Abstract

*Older adults have much more leisure time today than they have had in the past. Evidence points to the connection between engagement in physical exercise, a leisure time activity, and the overall health of older adults. Because health is an important issue, especially as we age, it is helpful to know that we have some control over it as we age. Cognition, i.e., our ability to remember, to pay attention, and to think, is also a concern in aging. Is it possible that the choices we make about leisure time activities may influence our cognitive abilities in old age? This critical review of the literature examines the effect of three leisure time activities—socializing, physical exercise, and mental exercise—on cognition in older adults.*

Until the past few decades, it was thought that we had little control over how we age and that leisure time activities had little impact on our health and well-being, including our cognitive abilities. However, we now know that our health is influenced by many factors, including leisure time activities such as physical exercise and lifestyle choices such as nutrition. Could it be possible to influence our cognition as we age through leisure time activity choices as well? There certainly appears to be a belief that leisure time activities can influence cognition as reflected in the rise in the interest in cognitively engaging activities such as Sudoku, reading groups, adult education, and lifelong learning opportunities among today's seniors. This paper discusses aging and cognition, reviews research findings regarding leisure activities and cognition, and provides advice on maximizing the benefit of leisure activities on cognition.

Does our cognitive ability change with age? The simple answer to this question is “yes.” In the absence of disease, normative age-related changes in cognition do not profoundly affect real-world function; however, a majority of aged adults report that their memory is not as good as it used to be and in laboratory tests a decline in cognition is universal (Hedden & Gabrieli, 2004). Though cognitive decline may be inevitable, there exists the hope that we have some control over our own cognitive change. First, there is tremendous individual variability in the rate and extent of cognitive decline in older adults such

that some adults show no symptoms at all while others experience significant loss. Might this variability be the result of lifestyle choices as well as education, genetics and other factors? Second, there is evidence that therapeutic interventions, also known as cognitive training, can improve cognitive performance (see below). It is likely that this variability and trainability of cognition leads many adults to believe that these normal age-related changes might be reversible and possibly mitigated through lifestyle choices and/or therapeutic interventions. Many scientists agree (Hedden and Gabrieli, 2004).

### Therapeutic Interventions

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Unlike lifestyle choices we make about our leisure activities, therapeutic intervention, or cognitive training, involves repeated sessions of professional training on a particular dimension of cognition. Cognition is not a single ability but rather a word that describes many different types of thinking-related processes like processing speed, attention, memory, spatial skills, language, and “executive” or self-regulatory capabilities. Some of these abilities, called “fluid,” decline as we age because our physical brain shows changes (i.e., processing speed), whereas others, called “crystallized,” are acquired via life and learning experiences and increase with age (Cattell, 1971). It may be useful to consider a computer metaphor, with the hard drive representing our fluid abilities and computer software programs representing our crystallized abilities. In aging, fluid abilities decline starting in our 20s to 30s, a decline that is related to loss of neurons in the brain. Crystallized abilities, which rely on learning and experience, tend to increase over the lifespan (Schaie, 2005). While it is possible to compensate for the loss of fluid abilities to enable the increase in crystallized abilities, this ability to compensate for damage to our hardware becomes more difficult as we get older, ultimately affecting the function of our software, too. In other words, learning becomes more difficult.

Dimensions of cognition typically trained in adults are ones that affect crystallized domains, like episodic memory (paired associates: recalling information presented in some linked format), perceptual reasoning (spatial relations: identifying relationships between visually presented objects), perceptual or processing speed (Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale or WAIS, Digit Symbol subtest), word knowledge (WAIS Vocabulary subtest), and inductive reasoning (i.e., the ability to use logic to make decisions, as assessed in the WAIS Similarities subtest). Such domains require individuals to process new information and access information they have previously learned in a quick and appropriate manner, thereby compensating for underlying changes in fluid abilities.

Cognitive training studies involve repeated sessions of training over several weeks or months on one or more specific aspect(s) of cognition (Schaie, 2005; Ball *et al.*, 2002, Willis *et al.*, 2006). Pre-training performance is compared to post-training performance in both experimental (those receiving training) and control groups (those not receiving training). Performance on these cognitive tasks improves following training sessions, an effect that can last for years. However, a shortcoming of the training is that the benefit is ability-specific. For example, if a person is trained on how to perform spatial rotation tasks, spatial rotation performance will improve, but this benefit does not transfer

Though cognitive decline may be inevitable, there exists the hope that we have some control over our own cognitive change.

## Cognition and Leisure Time Activities of Older Adults

to other cognitive tasks, such as paired associates (Schaie, 2005). Interestingly, Willis *et al.* (2006) found that cognitive training on inductive reasoning skills resulted in less decline in self-reported daily living abilities such as managing money or shopping. This finding offers some hope that improvement in the laboratory can transfer to issues we face in our everyday activities.

In summary, performance on cognitive tasks can improve following specific training sessions on that cognitive function. This benefit may last for years, but it does not tend to transfer to other cognitive abilities even though it may improve some aspects of functions involved in daily living. However, the usefulness of cognitive training on our daily functions may be limited.

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### Leisure Activities

There are three categories of leisure activities identified by researchers as important components of “successful aging”: social engagement, physical exercise, and mental stimulation (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Is there evidence that these leisure time activities might benefit cognition too?

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### Social Engagement and Cognition

Social networks and social engagement have been found to be related to a reduced risk of death and a decrease in a variety of adverse health outcomes in older adults (Berkman *et al.*, 1979; Berkman, 1995). Do these benefits extend over to our thinking and cognition as well? Many recent studies have found that social network size (how many people we see at least once a month) is inversely related to the risk of cognitive impairment (Bennett *et al.*, 2006; Gow *et al.*, 2007, Barnes *et al.*, 2004). In other words, the number of children, family, and friends we have and how often we interact with them may cushion us from cognitive decline. People with large social networks are more likely to engage in cognitive, physical, and social activities, which also mediate cognitive decline and may be involved in the protection provided by social networks.

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### Physical Exercise and Cognition

While scientists rarely, if ever, say that something is proven, most would agree that there is little doubt that aerobic exercise such as walking, running, swimming, or biking is good for the body. New evidence shows that this benefit extends to the brain and cognition, thereby influencing our fluid and crystallized abilities. In studies published over the past several decades, it has been shown that physically fit adults are more capable on cognitive performance measures than non-fit adults (Churchill *et al.*, 2002; Colcombe *et al.*, 2004). A lifetime of aerobic fitness leads to the most positive outcomes for cognition in aging and cardiovascular fitness training has also been found to improve cognitive performance in otherwise sedentary older adults especially when the aerobic exercise sessions exceeded 30 minutes (Colcombe & Kramer, 2003).

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### Mental Stimulation and Cognition

Do intellectually demanding activities improve or help maintain cognitive functioning in older adults? Here the evidence appears to be mixed. Schooler and

Mulatu (2001) examined cognitive functioning in people who challenge themselves with complex activities. Complex leisure activities were identified as reading (books and high level magazines, e.g., *Scientific American*), visits to fine art institutions (e.g., museums, concerts, plays), and number of hours spent on special interests, hobbies, and activities. Those who frequently engaged in these complex activities had higher cognitive function than those who did not. Conversely, Salthouse (2006) concluded that while it may be beneficial to believe that mental exercise improves mental function, there is no evidence to support this view. He argues that those with high cognitive ability are likely to seek complex leisure activities. In other words, the type of leisure activity does not affect cognition. Rather, cognitive ability determines what type of leisure activity will be selected.

While scientists debate whether there is any evidence for the “use it or lose it” theory of cognitive function, many people choose to engage in cognitively challenging activities. Unfortunately it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide evidence that mental stimulation improves cognitive performance in later life for both practical and scientific reasons. Establishing such a relationship can be demonstrated only under carefully controlled experimental procedures which may not be feasible or ecologically valid. For example, to determine whether attending Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) classes improves cognition, the ideal study would require participants to be randomly assigned to either the experimental group (those taking OLLI classes) or the control group (those not taking OLLI classes). Random placement in the control or experimental group is critical because adults who self-select to take classes may be different from those who do not take classes in a variety of ways, including initial cognitive ability. All participants would receive a baseline assessment of cognitive function prior to the study. After a year (or some specified period of time) of participating or not participating in OLLI classes, individuals would be brought back to the lab to determine whether cognitive performance had improved in one group more than the other. Unfortunately, because other mental exercise activities may confound the results, during the year of the study all participants would have to refrain from mental exercise activities such as reading, exercising, socializing, or doing any other activity that may somehow stimulate their cognitive skills. Due to the amount of control that would be needed in such a study, it would be very difficult to do and results would most likely not be generalizable to all older adults.

Although causation may be difficult to demonstrate, there are other ways to examine the relationship between mental stimulation and cognitive performance. A common means to determine whether or not leisure activities influence cognition is to distribute a survey asking adults questions about their engagement in mentally stimulating activities. The next step would be to examine the relationship between reported mental activity engagement and performance on cognitive measures. What conclusion would be drawn if it were found that those who participate in many mental exercises are more cognitively fit than those who do not engage in mental exercises? Do mental exercises improve cognitive function or does high cognitive function inspire someone to engage in mental activities? Each of these conclusions is equally plausible, and therefore, we cannot know the causal relationship. Unlike an experiment with random

Do mental exercises improve cognitive function or does high cognitive function inspire someone to engage in mental activities?

## Cognition and Leisure Time Activities of Older Adults

assignment and control groups, this is a correlational study and causation cannot be inferred. However, even though we cannot assume causation from these types of studies, it is interesting to note that several researchers have found a positive relationship between mental exercise engagement and cognitive function (Salthouse, 2006).

Another issue that muddles the discussion of whether mental activities improve cognition is that mental exercises differ in the degree to which they challenge us, depending upon the task and our own unique cognitive strengths and weaknesses. In particular, some activities require minimal cognitive effort to complete while others place a high demand on cognition. Salthouse and colleagues (2002) asked participants to rate the cognitive demand of 22 mental exercise activities in which they engaged. Teaching/attending a class was rated as placing the highest cognitive demand and watching TV was rated the lowest. Games, reading, writing, musical performances, volunteering, and socializing with friends were moderately challenging. These are average ratings, however. Not surprisingly, the level of cognitive demand of each mental exercise depended on the cognitive ability of the rater. In other words, what is challenging for one may not be challenging for another. Two people are not getting the same benefit from completing a crossword puzzle if it took one person five minutes and the other two hours.

In summary, definitive evidence regarding the positive impact of social engagement, aerobic exercise, and mental stimulation may not be forthcoming due to the challenges faced by researchers in designing and conducting the studies to provide unequivocal evidence. However, several studies do suggest that lifestyle choices such as social engagement, aerobic exercise, and mental stimulation may mediate cognitive change in aging. And like cognitive training exercises discussed above, these lifestyle activities may increase crystallized intelligence in adults.

### Computer Games and Cognition

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Today, business in computer games claiming to enhance cognition in aged adults is flourishing. *The New York Times* reported that in 2005 Americans spent \$2 million on computer products to boost brain function and in 2007 that number was expected to exceed \$80 million (Aamodt & Wang, 2007). The Japanese video game maker Nintendo was one of the first companies to target the older population with video games claiming to “boost the ageing brain.” This game, called *Brain Age* in the United States, was created with Ryuta Kawashima, a Japanese scientist noted for his development of mental exercises to improve cognitive function in elderly adults (Fuyuno, 2007). The computer game provides mental workouts by having gamers complete tasks such as reading aloud, completing multiplication problems, or memorizing words. They can also be done as a solitary or team activity and can combine social benefits in the latter case.

Computer games could be considered more like a cognitive training intervention rather than leisure activity mental exercises because the tasks in computer games involve training specific aspects of cognition. These may, at least for a period of time, improve performance on a particular task. Like most mental exercises, engaging in these computer games probably does not hurt and may even

improve cognition if the user finds the game challenging and interesting enough to continue playing. Whether any benefit from playing the computer games transfers to everyday living situations has not been demonstrated.

There are at least three disadvantages to the use of computer games to enhance cognition. First, computer gaming involves little to no social interaction when done alone. Second, gaming is sedentary, requiring no aerobic activity. Finally, computer games aimed at improving cognitive speed or computation ability do not promote learning through interaction with one's environment in the sense that other lifestyle activities do. However, computer gaming, if challenging and fun, is more likely to impact our cognition positively, rather than spending that time doing something relatively passive (e.g., watching TV) or doing nothing at all.

However one distills it, remaining cognitively sharp requires us to use what we currently have as well as be open to the process of learning new things. Learning is something we do our entire lives, as is evidenced in the increase in crystallized intelligence over the lifespan. It can happen in the classroom, at cultural events, during travel, when reading, writing, or engaging in conversations with others. Learning can happen when playing games, on the job, or in volunteer positions, and in tackling new projects. While human experience can induce and facilitate learning throughout life many people find that learning on the whole becomes harder as we age.

## Advice

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Most adults do experience some decline in cognitive function although there is considerable variability regarding when this loss begins and how extensive the loss is. To maximize our cognitive ability in later life the evidence seems to suggest that we (1) maintain a social network that keeps us socially engaged with our world, (2) stay aerobically fit, and (3) expose ourselves to experiences that challenge us and promote learning.

So the next time you sign up for an OLLI class that you find interesting, you should find a parking space as far from your destination as possible. Walk briskly to meet friends to discuss the book you read the day before, current events in the paper that morning, the topic of the next class, etc. Then walk together to the OLLI class and challenge yourself to learn something new.

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## Fall Meditation

**Eric Jensen**

Rake scratching through the grass  
I clear my yard of deaccessioned leaves  
And thinking back  
Past Alexandria  
And fire-blackened scrolls  
There was another tree,  
Another fall,  
An icy wind that drove us out of Eden  
And yellowed leaves of knowledge  
Lost their perfect binding  
Fell  
And scattered  
And left the garden ignorant,  
Chaotic as today,  
And I collect the leaves.

Born in Portland, after attending M.I.T. and moving to New Hampshire for work, **Eric Jensen** retired back to Cape Elizabeth, Maine. At M.I.T. he discovered computers and spent his career as a scientific programmer. He worked on a system that could read English to blind people. He also spent time working with Dean Kaman, the inventor of the Segway scooter. Now Eric spends his time playing with robots and writing.

## Appetizers

**Clarence H. Campbell III**

Drinking in one another  
Peeking over sexy wineglasses  
Watching her rounded curves  
Circling around the beams of sunlight  
She smells almost grape-like  
Swirling her inside my mouth  
Savoring the taste of her lips

I pose the question . . . Red or White?  
Her answer smells like French perfume  
“Sauvignon Blanc, S’il vous plait.”  
Pouring two glasses; sipping slowly  
She laughs, spraying wine bubbles in the air.

She nestles like a leaf against my neck.  
Strolling through the vineyard  
We are two appetizers  
Dreaming about dessert!

**Clarence H. Campbell III** is a graduate of Georgetown University (class of '61) and the University of San Diego School of Law '64. He has been writing poetry since law school and throughout his 30-year career as a special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. His poem “Appetizers” was inspired by “Bordeaux Simple,” a poem by John Vanek published in the 2008 edition of *The LLI Review*. Campbell is currently writing a family memoir and is a student in the creative writing course at OLLI, California State University, San Marcos.

## Intergenerational Teaching Partners

**Christine D. Popok**

### Abstract

*Fifteen years ago, the author's husband worked as the controller for a chain of intergenerational day care centers much like the one featured in Ruelas' article (2001). Thinking about the benefits of these creative arrangements inspired her to develop more purposeful writing assignments for first-year college students by engaging them with Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) members. Linking so-called Millennials (Strauss, 1991) with individuals a generation or two older can provide both groups new, meaningful perspectives that enhance critical thinking. This article will discuss the assignments, relate the challenges, and note future directions for an emerging intergenerational literacy partnership between the OLLI members and California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) students.*

### Getting Started

I grew up in Santa Paula, California, a small agricultural town. My childhood home was also my mother's childhood home, and it was within walking distance of both sets of my grandparents. Spending countless hours talking with them (or eavesdropping when the conversation was deemed too grown up) about family, history, politics, health, economics, race, religion, culture, scandal, ethics, and death enhanced my cognitive development and self-concept in immeasurable, yet invaluable ways. However, locational and emotional proximity to one's elders is a privilege that has diminished over the last three to four decades due to demographic shifts (Sweeney, 1996). If biological connections between the generations are narrowing and fragmenting, I became curious as to how to re-create emotional and social ties among generations that would be mutually beneficial. Intergenerational literacy projects work in various libraries, secondary and primary schools in Ventura County, so connecting college students with OLLI members appeared a logical leap, especially at a time when more college students experience serious struggles.

Current estimates report that over 30% of American college students abuse alcohol. Additionally, over the past five years, more than 80% of counsel-

...locational and emotional proximity to one's elders is a privilege that has diminished over the last three to four decades due to demographic shifts.

## Intergenerational Teaching Partners

ing center directors note an increase in the number of students treated for serious psychological problems (Eisen *et al.*, 2009). As an educator who advocates a whole-person approach to teaching, I surmise a link between increasing rates of depression and substance abuse and diminished generational bonds. As cited in Dixon and Kurpius' 2008 study, a National College Health Assessment reported 22% of students were unable to function in 2000 as a result of feeling depressed. Intuitively and experientially, I know writing performance and enthusiasm for learning improve when students' psychological needs are valued rather than ignored. One way of improving student affect might be to enrich connections on campus that will hopefully continue beyond the writing course.

Dan Dentzner, associate professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota, recommends locating a surrogate older adult to spend time with regularly. This contact can help younger people value a senior citizen as a key supportive contact (Sweeney, 1996). While I recognize that I cannot force relationships to develop, I can at least create a space and an objective for them to start learning more about each other. Sharing histories and bouncing concepts back and forth allows individuals of different generations to learn about the contexts from which each person emerges. And, it's not just the younger party who benefits. I recall casually talking with an OLI member long before this project started who related to me her disappointment that there weren't more efforts being made on the part of university faculty and university centers to involve senior citizens with the younger students. She sardonically rattled off the title of our Multicultural and Women's & Gender Student Center and wondered why this inclusive group appeared to exclude seniors. I thought she made an intriguing point.

When I approached Dr. Marty Kaplan, OLI Director, with the idea of having first-year undergraduate students work with OLI members on writing assignments, he was immediately enthusiastic and helpful. He put me in contact with various OLI instructors and together, we brainstormed the first assignment.

### Life Story Interviews

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Both OLI members and first-year composition students relate to the excitement and anxiety of adjusting to 21st-century university learning environments. During the spring 2008 semester, an OLI class focused on memoirs as literature. The instructor explained to me that OLI members were reading some exemplary memoirs and privately writing limited memoirs of their own. I gave my students the option of interviewing OLI members to both help the members recall significant events for their own memoirs and to provide information and insights for drafting a life story interview essay for the first-year composition portfolio they would turn in at the end of the semester. Students were allowed to use the life story interview essay in lieu of another assignment in my writing course. Although coordinating schedules to allow for interviews to take place proved difficult, approximately 15 students took advantage of this opportunity and met with OLI members outside of class time.

Scholars note the value of mutual storytelling in breaking down stereotypes and in forming bonds between diverse individuals (Kazemek, 2002).

Andriecce Dennis-Lucas, a 19-year-old African-American CSUCI student, engaged in discussion with an OLLI member. After the interview Andriecce asked me if she could alter the assignment by writing the essay as a creative piece, taking on the interviewee's perspective. Thrilled to oblige her interest in the assignment, I encouraged her to take this approach rather than simply reporting on the interview and reflecting about her connections to it. As a result of this altered assignment Andriecce's peer, Sophia Nichols, added another twist in her own essay.

Ms. Nichols interviewed OLLI member Jean Sheaks and structured her essay such that she, similarly to Ms. Dennis-Lucas, took on the *persona* of the interviewee, but she then offered her own personal reflections throughout the piece in italics. Several excerpts follow:

My name is Jean Sheaks and I am not your typical California State University student because of my age, which I will never say. I have had a very interesting life, and I have traveled all over Europe, Canada, and the United States. If I could say one thing about my life I would say that you can't change people, and problems don't necessarily go away since we can never forget memories. *When I heard this I thought back to my own life and experiences. I realized that what she said was true. No one can change me, but if I choose to change I can change myself.*

Around my time it was common to get married young, so you can only imagine that I got married during college. I started a family, but it was considered normal then, when now it is not the norm to take time away from school to raise children. Times were different. For example, we didn't know that people could live to be 100 or older, so I started a family. *It feels weird to think that people didn't live as long as they do now. It makes sense that she would start a family due to the life expectancy, but I could never imagine having children in my early twenties. It is just a few years away, so it is hard to imagine.*

Even though I got married at a young age, I never gave up my education, since it is one of the most important things to me. From the time I entered college to my graduation in 1974 from ASU, 20 years passed. During that time, we moved often, and I had to enroll at various academic institutions. Graduation day was such an accomplishment; my husband, parents and children were all present. *I could never get married at my age. It would be so awkward. I do believe that it is amazing though that she never gave up her education. Education is the key to success in life.*

I have learned to be passionate about life, even though you can't always control it. *Being nineteen and hearing her words of wisdom, I was overwhelmed by her optimism and passion for life. I was amazed that someone could be so wise and love life so much.* (Nichols, 2008).

Scholars note the value of mutual storytelling in breaking down stereotypes and in forming bonds between diverse individuals.

Intergenerational  
Teaching PartnersSerendipitous Room Locations and Shared Humor

The following semester, fall 2008, I found myself initially reluctant to require my students to interview OLLI members if scheduling the interview added to the stress of adjusting to college. That was until I talked it over with Director Kaplan. I then learned not only were there OLLI classes willing to work with us, but also the OLLI classes started and ended at just about the same time as our classes. It would now be more convenient for students to interview members immediately before or following class. Additionally, our classrooms were now just two doors away from each other in the newly opened Broome Library. Now that's a logistical gift.

Concurrent with my concerns for students' well-being, I decided to make the course theme "Humor and Our Humanity." The assignment relating to OLLI members was entitled "Interview a Wit." To help my students get started, I provided the following list of questions they could consider, and they were encouraged to come up with additional inquiries as the interview progressed. I suggested asking: What is lost/gained as far as what's deemed funny from one generation to the next? Inquire about how humor has impacted their lives and their outlooks. How has humor helped them deal with life's stresses? Do they look back on something now and laugh that it took them years to see in a humorous light? Ask them to comment on how your upbringing was different from theirs. Reflect on their responses, focusing on what surprised you the most. Is there an event in your life you hope to be able to laugh about someday? Were you parented with humor? Were they? Does your interview subject have complex reasons for expressing him or herself with humor?

Next, I visited OLLI classes and solicited members to sign up to be interviewed. Once students and members were matched the fun, poignant learning began. Students and members met for lunch on campus or settled into the cozy, inviting furniture in the library lounges to talk.

As a rule, I avoid using profanity. I was raised in a conservative home in which even saying "pissed off" would result in getting the knuckles wrapped with the heavy end of a butter knife. So why, toward the end of the semester, did I find myself hovering outside the OLLI classroom clutching an envelope with the words, "Fucking Awesome!" in my handwriting, scrawled in large letters on an envelope containing a hand-written letter of thanks to an unforgettable OLLI member, one my student described as "having the mouth of a drunken sailor" (McCrary, 2008)? Read on, and ponder if you would do the same.

Two CSUCI students, Maegan McCrary and Bree Land, write of an unforgettable experience interviewing OLLI member Eunice Udelf.

Exemplifying stereotypes youth can hold about seniors, Maegan writes, "I went into this interview expecting to be sitting through a dawdling hour of some elderly woman talking about her boring life and the lack of humor in it. What took place was quite the contrary" (McCrary, 2008). Eunice asked the one male student to wait on the couch as she led the three female students to the restroom. A different, befuddled student noted, "The question that led us girls into her *office* was if humor can cure" (Land, 2008). In the bathroom, these young adults learned that Eunice required a hysterectomy seven years ago due to cancer. Doctors told her later that she also had breast cancer and that they needed to

remove one breast. Bree recounts, “To Eunice this [recommended treatment] was ridiculous and she felt like they were mutilating her body” (Land, 2008). The interviewee went on to explain that she requested both breasts be removed to avoid the absurdity of “one saggy boob hangin’ out” (McCrary, 2008). The reality check about breast cancer and about the importance of humor she was providing my students reached its climax when Eunice related what doctors told her: “If she ever wanted to have nipples again, they would have to take the skin from her vaginal region” (McCrary, 2008). Eunice’s bold gift of defiant humor comes next: “She actually started to lift up her dress!” (Land, 2008). She showed my students not her newly constructed and reorganized erogenous zones, but rather, butterfly tattoos where her nipples would have been. Bree reflected, “Strangely enough I was not embarrassed by this at all. I was truly amazed and interested in this woman right after she was able to share such an experience with us... she showed how humor can cure or at least help through tragic times.” In addition to providing the insights noted above, the interview resulted in these attractive 18-year-old girls reconsidering some notions they had about aging.

Bree observed, “She still has the spirit of an 18-year-old ... [and] laughs a lot more now because she has a lot to look back on and sees no reason in stressing over getting old.” This student’s essay concludes with a message I was hoping they would receive from the assignment. She notes about the interviewee:

“Looking back at our generation she feels that a lot is being rushed and she hopes for all of us to never take anything too serious. She inspired me in a way I never thought. Proving that no matter what life throws at you, humor can really get you through it or at least make it easier on you” (Land, 2008).

Maegan notes prior to the interview, “It never occurred to me that some old people are actually vivacious and comical. My main experiences with the elderly were either yearly holiday cards or witnessing them die.” This assignment aided the student in blurring black and white into gray as evidenced by her observation, “When you grow up thinking one thing, you usually believe it’s true.” As the interview progressed, Maegan found connections between her mother and Eunice’s. She explains, “Eunice’s mother was rarely able to make her daughter laugh.” Then, the student goes on to explain that in her adolescence, Eunice was discouraged about sharing her witty and raunchy observations for fear of others’ reactions. The student connects her own frustration with self-censorship. Maegan recounts her mother’s melancholy during her grandfather’s progression into Alzheimer’s. As the disease was taking hold, her grandmother passed away. When Maegan’s grandfather got up to speak at the funeral, “He had forgotten that he was at his wife’s funeral and thought he was actually at his twin brother’s who had passed the year before.” Years later, in her essay she asks herself: “Am I the only one who sees the humor in this?” With resignation, she explains that no one in the family discussed it. They just pretended the mistake did not occur. It frustrated Maegan that even after an appropriate amount of time, she did not feel free to share her view that his confusion could be comical. In her first year of college Maegan received from Eunice

...the interview resulted in these attractive 18-year-old girls reconsidering some notions they had about aging.

## Intergenerational Teaching Partners

an example that gave her permission to express her desire to laugh about it, even if doing so may seem inappropriate to others. She learns, “By keeping my mouth shut, I stopped myself from entering a healthy healing process and instead discovered what repression was ... I never really felt comfortable sharing my feelings from that day until I interviewed a wit” (McCrary, 2008). In my estimation, this project produced some writing that’s more purposeful than assignments I gave earlier in my career. I can never predict how these situations will turn out for those participating, but I do know that good writing involves risk. So does good teaching for that matter.

Now, back to that letter I wrote to Eunice. I felt nervous as I handed it to her, but the moment I placed it in her hand and she read the outside of the envelope, she experienced that most precious of emotions: the burst of laughter warmed by sincere tears that communicated to me that she understood her risking exposure to my students was admired and worth her vulnerability. Earlier I noted my distaste for foul language, but when the context calls for it, even the F word can be the most appropriate choice. Academics have long recognized the linguistic critique of socially constructed determinations of what is deemed a bad word. Hats off to George Carlin and his “Seven words you can’t say on television” routine. We weren’t on television. I needed to write it. Eunice needed to read it. What she did for those students, and for me (I was in the bathroom that afternoon too) can’t be taught in a classroom. We women learned to speak our minds, to respect our bodies, to be proactive with our healthcare, to continue to see our beauty as we wrinkle and droop, and most important, to be open to finding the humor in even the most devastating of circumstances.

### Next steps

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I would like to see this project evolve into an academic intergenerational book or short story club, of sorts, that aids participants of any age to build upon their literacy proficiency, social interactions, and community connections (Larson, 2004). Mediation implies that collective interfacing serves as a support for literacy enhancement. Boyd relies on Vygotsky’s explanation that semiotic systems such as reading, talking, and writing help the learner move from perception to problem solving (Boyd, 2000). Ideally, these affiliations will aid in wearing away stereotypes that seniors may have about young adults and misconceptions Millennials may have about aging. That goal seems worth pursuing despite the challenges inherent in launching new practices.

For fall 2009, Director Kaplan and I are in discussions with OLLI instructors to develop the partnership between our courses to include shared readings and possibly shared writing assignments. To improve psychological and cognitive functioning, in the 1970s Vygotsky underscored communication among parent, grandparent, and child (Boyd, 2000). Due to demographic trends toward fragmentation in the 21st century, educators emphasize exploring other intergenerational encounters such as the collaboration we have begun and will continue to improve upon each semester as we learn from the successes and challenges of the previous one. Others who have

worked with intergenerational literacy programs caution that in order for the program to grow in significance for all involved, both OLLI members and CSUCI students need to be in control of the project's direction (Kazemek, 2002). Dr. Kaplan, OLLI instructors, and I have laid the groundwork and will seek ongoing feedback from participants to enrich the assignments for all involved.

Teaching is a challenging, but rewarding, profession. I am grateful to the OLLI members, their instructors, and the director for sharing their experiences, perspectives, pains, humor, and triumphs. Their efforts help first-year college students understand that suffering in life is normal and expected, but so, too, is joy, accomplishment, love, and hilarity. With mentors offering their real-life examples, Millennials will learn to grow through their obstacles and hopefully commit to a lifetime of academic and personal development.

*Author's note:* To protect the privacy of CSUCI students and OLLI members, pseudonyms were used in this article when requested.

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Chasing her passion for reading and writing, **Christine D. Popok**, a CPA who began her career at Deloitte & Touche in 1992, earned an M.A. in rhetoric and composition and teaches English courses full-time at California

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State University Channel Islands. Presently, she is focusing on further development of service learning and civic engagement pedagogy in both English and accounting courses. Serving as the faculty advisor for CSUCIs Rotaract Club, while teaching full-time, running a small CPA practice, raising two children, keeping her marriage fresh, maintaining a sense of humor, and training for marathons gives her perspective on one of the topics she provides to the community as a volunteer for the Faculty Speakers Bureau: work-life balance.

## Why I Don't Speak French

**R.G. Koel**

*This story, and the one that follows written by Margaret Liddell, are from "The Writers Circle" at the OLLI at San Francisco State University. Participants in the circle write memoirs, short stories, historical fiction, and other genres, read their manuscripts to their classmates, and receive feedback.*

It was the time of Shirley Temple, the child movie star, the beloved one. "Reenee Adoree," called out old man Eisenberg, "When are you going to Hollywood?" He laughed and rocked in the chair on the front porch. "Come on up here and sing me a song." And I would go up and sit on his lap and sing *The Lady in Red*:

*The Lady in Red  
The Fellas are crazy for the lady in red;  
She is so bawdy  
Oh Lordy  
What a personality.*

When I finished singing, old man Eisenberg would laugh and laugh, then reach in his pocket and give me a Hershey chocolate drop. I didn't understand the words of the song, but I had plenty of chocolate; and I didn't look like Shirley Temple either, but on my street, I was known to sing and wiggle my four-year-old body and always got some chocolate. All the songs on the *Hit Parade* were part of my routine, and my curly auburn hair bounced when I belted out the number one song on the radio *Hit Parade* for the week.

Renée Adorée was a French silent film star, my mother's favorite, for whom I was named. My mother loved the movies. Both she and my grandmother went every Thursday evening when they gave away a dinner plate with the movie ticket. My mother eventually collected a full set. My grandmother was, also, influenced by the movies, especially in regard to what she expected my mother to do: find a good man, somewhat older, secure money-wise, who

Renée Adorée was a French silent film star, my mother's favorite, for whom I was named.

## Why I Don't Speak French

would worship her because she was young and beautiful. My mother, however, married my father: young, handsome, and penniless. Life may have been hard during the Depression, but the movies were rich in fantasy, including the roles of Renée Adorée. She was called a “Spit Fire.” And I liked that phrase because I did spit at people when I was mad. My mother would seat me on a chair in the corner facing the wall to cool down. Every so often she would ask me if I was ready to come out, but I was too sassy. “No, I won't. I'm saving up more spit.” She called me a “handful,” but I got over being angry because it was boring in the corner.

In our neighborhood Renée Adorée became Reenee Adoree. So I was called Reenee until I began school when I was then called Renée and that's when the split personality began: Renée at school and Reenee at home. School was wonderful because you knew what to expect: “Sit up straight; don't speak without raising your hand; you may be excused.” These were the rules Renée, the good girl, learned and was rewarded for with gold stars on her chart.

In my house the rules seemed to constantly change. If you “sassed” you got smacked, and you didn't even know what being sassy really meant. My mother was unpredictable in her judgments of me, especially if the rent was due and my father was late coming home from work with his pay. On those days, I stayed away from my mother and played outside in the courtyard of our apartment house where she could see me out the kitchen window.

Her best mood was when the ironing board was taken out with clothes to be ironed and the radio turned on for the afternoon soaps. *Our Gal Sunday* was her favorite and *Helen Trent* was next. When I had the measles or chicken pox, I loved staying home listening to all the stories and playing in bed with my paper dolls. My mother was always kind when I got sick; I guess because I was quiet.

I also had a police record at the age of five. I didn't like being scolded or smacked so I took off, usually just before dinner to aggravate my mother. Walking away into strange neighborhoods and pretending I was lost was fun. When I didn't come home for dinner, and my mother couldn't find me, she called the police. After many calls they were used to her. The police would tell her to wait until it began to get dark and then phone again. But I would usually saunter innocently into the apartment and pretend I didn't know it was so late. First, my mother cried because I was safe, then she smacked, and I ducked. But she always gave me dinner.

Rules always changed depending on my mother's mood. If I disobeyed by forgetting to close the door when I went out to play, she usually yelled bloody murder, but if she was in a good mood, she simply shut the door after me. If I took something from the icebox she was saving for dinner, like an open can of peaches, she slapped my hands hard and sent me to my room. That was her bad mood. But if there was one last cookie — which I didn't even expect to get, but got — that was a good mood. So I grew up in a kind of normal, schizophrenic world:

*A—can't-figure-out-the-rules-at-home, and able-to-follow-the-rules-at-school; a Reenee at home, a Renée at school. I loved Renée because she was the good girl and followed rules that seemed to make sense.*

When I started junior high, my homeroom teacher, Miss Corcoran, was also the French teacher and, boy, did she love me because I was a Renée and not a Reenee. On her windowsill were 20 geranium plants, mostly in bloom with red flowers. As a reward for my French name, I was given the privilege of watering her plants and feeding them once a month with Quick Grow, a houseplant fertilizer. This task was special. Attendance taking and many other new duties were given to me and I began to adore Miss Corcoran. Next year in the eighth grade I would begin French and I looked forward to speaking with her in this exotic language to go with my exotic name. Miss Corcoran had dyed red hair, and she wore the same scarf around her neck every day. She took our class on tours through the halls of our middle school pointing to hung copies on the wall of French paintings with exotic names of battles, landscapes, and my favorite, the good girls of Mary Cassat. There were little brass-covered shades over the lights above the paintings and on dark winter days they were lit up and the halls without students looked austere and serene. I loved those days taking attendance sheets down to the office, walking through the empty halls like Queen Renée, the almost-French student next year.

After Easter vacation, we concentrated on imaginative writing. Now I would be in my element and would shine for Miss Corcoran. I wrote this great story about a French Queen who was kind and generous and gave away her riches to the poor, especially her beautiful gowns for all the poor girls to wear at endless parties with plenty of cake, ice cream, and giant platters of chocolate. The story was given to Miss Corcoran to be read the following Monday. I could hardly wait. My story would cinch my grade, and the whole class would admire me, and, more important, Miss Corcoran. On Monday she smiled at me as usual as I finished watering the plants. When attendance was taken, the class settled down to hear the stories written. Almost everyone's story in the class was read except mine, and I was disappointed. I waited and waited, but she read mine last. I thought it was because she was saving the best for last. Now I wasn't the greatest speller. I was a fast reader, and I didn't have time to memorize all the letters in the words, but I knew what they meant. I was always in a hurry to get the words down on paper. Miss Corcoran began to read my story, stopping every few seconds to call out my misspellings, such as *there*, *their*, and *they're* and a whole bunch of other words that I can't remember now. But Miss Corcoran droned on and on, correcting every word and laughed and laughed at my mistakes. I couldn't believe what was happening. How could the teacher I loved make fun of me? She didn't even comment on the story. Besides, no one before had ever told me the differences between the same sounding words. How was I to know where to place them? I felt betrayed, shamed, and embarrassed and I hated Miss Corcoran and wished I could just take off which I could've, if I was home.

The whole day at school I simmered, felt sorry for myself, and dreamed of killing Miss Corcoran. I was teased in the hall before the math class, but I got my revenge on most of the snotty girls who couldn't add or subtract which I could do very fast and I teased back, telling them they were stupid in math so they shut up. That night before I went to bed, I thought long and hard about Miss Corcoran. She, too, was unpredictable, just like my mother.

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## Why I Don't Speak French

The next morning I arrived early to class, and began my duty of watering the plants. I added a tablespoon of Quick Grow to each plant and continued the day as usual, but festered inside. My thought of revenge was growing and blooming like the geraniums. For two weeks I fed each plant, each day with Quick Grow and by the beginning of the third week when I arrived very early on Monday, the plants were all dead, all 20 of them from the overdose. Miss Corcoran walked into class, looked at her plants and started screaming at me, telling me what a horrible child I was and marched me down to the principal's office. Boy, was I scared, but also happy.

That afternoon I was transferred to Mrs. Elliot's homeroom. She was the Spanish teacher. When I entered the eighth grade the following year, we read *Don Quixote* in Spanish; I liked the story and the language. And that's why I don't speak French—even though I am a Renée.

**Renée Golanty-Koel** says this about herself: "I am a retired academic who is just beginning to attempt to write fiction. Unlike writing research papers, I find writing fiction requires a new set of skills. Our writing workshops at OLLI have been invaluable."

## The Mead Paper Mill

**Margaret Liddell**

**B**urnt cabbage stench from the mill is vivid, omnipresent. The acrid smell drifts through the air, floats into our house, clings to our clothes, and penetrates the pores in our skin. The Mead Paper Mill spews noxious fumes that rise in a white cloud from its red-ringed smoke stack. The plant is less than a mile from our house on West Seventh Street and if you look hard enough, you can see the odor float by.

Back in the days of the mid-20th century, we didn't know that the fumes, smoke, and waste pouring from the paper mill could be toxic and polluted and could possibly cause us harm. The yellowish green water that comes from inside the Mead spills out like a small waterfall into a creek that washes right over the field where we sometimes pick greens that we eat for supper.

The mill looms like a giant ogre in the south and east ends of town belching, regurgitating, contaminating, dominating our lives. The Mead provides some of the best jobs for colored men in our community. Anyone who has a job at the Mead does well. In the 1950s, most Negro men who work there are janitors with no chance for advancement. The collective karma of Negroes in Chillicothe, Ohio, is fixed and immutable.

A swimming pool owned by the Mead sits enclosed by a chain link fence. It's only a few blocks from our house but we're not allowed to swim there. Brown skin boys who want to swim go to the Scioto River or Paint Creek and jump in with no supervision and no instruction. They struggle to learn the best way they can. And brown skin girls, they don't swim at all.

### The Incident

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The Scioto River rises overnight and by Friday afternoon it's five and half feet higher than usual. For me, Friday, June 18, 1954, is just another hot summer day in the life of an eleven-year-old girl. For nine boys who live in the west end, the stifling humid day sends them to the river. They grab towels and inner tubes and go to the water to escape a scorching heat wave that comes early this year. Laughter fills the air. While six of the group stretch out on the bank, the

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## The Mead Paper Mill

other three want to feel the coolness the water offers. As they have done so many times before, the boys want to swim, play around, feel the splash of river water. Like me, they're all happy that school is out for the summer.

I swing open the screen door and race from the front porch to answer the phone. "Oh, hi, Mary Ann, how are you?"

"Margaret Ann," sobbing seeps through the phone. "Is Alice home?" Her words submerged in tears cause concern. Mary Ann is pregnant and I wonder if something's happened to her unborn baby.

"What's wrong? You want me to call mom at work?"

"No honey," her voice cracks, "that's all right, I'll call later, just let her know that I called."

As soon as I see mom coming down the alley from work, I run to tell her.

"Mom! Mom! Mary Ann called. She was crying real hard. You'd better call her back right away."

Mom tries again and again but all she hears is the steady hum of a busy signal. Finally the line is clear and her phone rings. "Hi, this is Alice. Can I speak to Mary Ann?"

Their brief conversation ends; mom puts the receiver back in place. Wide eyes stare at me in disbelief. Her shoulders slump, her head sways from side to side, "Lord, Lord, Lord, woe is me." She sighs and reaches in her apron pocket for a handkerchief to wipe tears that spill down cheekbones.

I quietly lean against the chair where she sits. I look at her sadness and wait. I wait for her to tell me what's going on.

"Mary Ann and her family were all in the backyard this afternoon. She just saw them this morning. Now they're gone."

"Mom, who's gone? Who?"

"Mary Ann's younger brother Vernon, her nephew, Aaron, and Reverend Wingo's son, Michael."

News travels quickly in a small town. Phone lines bulge with talk, neighbors weep, hearts miss a beat, even stop, no, it can't be true.

Three boys drowned in the Scioto River. Sweet Jesus, why?

The heat tempts Vernon, Aaron, and Michael to wade in with their inner tubes, not realizing that today the Scioto is vicious. They slide down the embankment to the edge of the water, but in an instant, the swirling water clutches, pulls, snatches, causing them to lose their balance; they slip off their inner tubes. The water overwhelms.

Panic rips through the six boys on the bank. Arms flail, voices yell, young legs fly to Reverend Wingo's for help. Richard, Vernon's brother, frantic with fear that's beyond his control, fights to go in after them but his pants get caught on a snag. The swirling Scioto sucks the three boys into its muddy waters and they vanish. The current is too strong for twelve-year-old boys who, friends say, could swim "no more than a little bit."

Hundreds stand on Bridge Street to watch while sheriff's deputies, police, and firemen search the river. Red Cross volunteers set up tables loaded with sandwiches and coffee for the searchers. The sheriff and his men stretch barbed wire across the river to catch bodies whose lungs are filled with water.

About 45 minutes later, several high schools boys spot three empty inner

tubes. Michael's lifeless body floats just behind the inner tubes that couldn't hold him and his friends. Near Popular Street, about 65 feet downstream, a young stranger wades in, grabs Michael's arm and drags him ashore. By Saturday night, four men in a boat find Aaron Smith near the N & W Bridge. Seven boat crews continue the search for Vernon, Mary Ann's brother.

Seventy-two hours after the drownings, on Monday, town folk sit in pews at Mr. Zion Baptist Church to mourn death. Grown men who never cry dab at tears gathering in the corners of their eyes. The church overflows, people crowd in, standing room only. Women wail, wave their arms, and faint from the weight of the heat and the presence of the Holy Ghost. Heads nod when the Reverend says that God always has a plan, He called the boys home to heaven. Rivulets of sweat drip from the congregation as it lets out a collective Amen. Weeping, gnashing of teeth, screams of sorrow from the funeral goers can be heard all over the West End.

And still the river doesn't give Vernon back to his family. Thursday morning, Chief Deputy Sheriff Fred Heinzelman welcomes the services of a Mr. Lee Pulver and his divining rod. Desperation. Try anything. Go to the river and pray, please God, let them find Vernon's body.

Mom talks to Mary Ann every day. She tells Mom that her eyes are swollen from a flood of tears, she feels numb and hollow, she paces the floor with no destination; she just needs to keep moving. Death shatters her life and sleep offers no respite from the pain.

Finally, word comes.

The Chillicothe Gazette reports: *Boydston Boy's Body is Found. After eight days of intensive searching, at 1:30 p.m., Saturday, Vernon Lee Boydston, one of three Negro youths who drowned on Friday June 18th was found lodged in a willow tree on a gravel bar located a mile and a half east of Chillicothe. Graveside service held at Greenlawn Cemetery.*

The event shakes the entire town. How could this be? Did they drown because they couldn't swim in the pool built by the Mead for white families and their children? Three innocent boys who wanted to swim and have fun are dead. Intense, deep and profound mourning consumes relatives and friends and complete strangers. Grief hangs in the air casting a net of sorrow over all of us.

By the time I'm 12 years old, the power brokers in Chillicothe open the gate that surrounds the forbidden pool. They offer us swimming lessons with the Red Cross and entry into one small aspect of their world. A dime admits us to the place where a lifeguard sits watching, waiting, available to save a life. It's heaven, a new experience, and a moment in time when something positive comes from an inconceivable tragedy.

**Margaret Liddell** says this about herself: "My father died when I was eight years old. So my mother, two brothers, and I moved to Chillicothe, Ohio, where I grew up. After I completed graduate school my younger brother and I drove from Ohio to San Francisco, California, to make a living in the city of sand and fog. I married, had a daughter, lived in Kenya, East Africa, taught elementary school, bought a house, traveled, retired, joined OLLI, and began writing my memoir."

## Life Stories, Autobiography, and Personal Narratives

**Robert Atkinson**

Remembering who we are may be the most important practice we can carry out for ourselves. For many, remembering where we came from, who we are, and where we are going is a very fruitful spiritual practice. It helps us stay connected to our deeper purpose and to our soul.

In this year, 2009, there are many reasons to remember who we are, not the least of which is the history-making event we witnessed in January. Our first African-American president, in his inaugural address, captured the importance of both personal memory and collective memory when he said, "Let us mark this day in remembrance of who we are and how far we have traveled." What a powerful metaphor for both our own individual lives and our collective lives. What we remember personally connects us with what everyone else remembers. We all have shared memories and shared experiences that, when remembered, bring us even closer together.

This year, our two fascinating and compelling life stories, though quite different in many ways, do share some common themes that will help connect all OLLI members even more.

I enjoyed tremendously listening to Duke University OLLI director Catherine Frank tell her life story. Born in Pennsylvania, her story was one of learning where she fit within the new social and cultural setting of North Carolina where she grew up. Guided toward literature and the arts at a young age, this is the milieu within which Catherine thrived. Learning also to follow her instincts, she experienced many serendipitous opportunities, including being a mentor and teacher to many future National Basketball Association players at the University of North Carolina, and being the editor of the classic *Quotations for All Occasions* published by Columbia University Press. What she also expresses so clearly and convincingly is the power of the self-motivated lifelong learning experience she sees up close at the Duke OLLI.

Listening to Ed Stolman's life story was another wonderful experience for me. He tells a vivid and moving story of his father's immigrant experience, coming from Poland to Ellis Island, making a new life for himself in New York and then Chicago. Ed, too, followed what was most strongly leading him,

through a dozen successful business careers and to a post-retirement career of enhancing the lifelong learning experiences of others. Ed is also very clear on how invigorating and energizing it is to be a lifelong learner, because everyone is learning for the sake of learning. At the age of 82 his dream is to build lifelong living centers on campuses around the country. He hopes he'll have enough time left to accomplish this dream.

**Robert Atkinson** is a professor of human development at the University of Southern Maine and associate editor of *The LLI Review*. He is also founder and director of the Life Story Center, formerly known as The Center for the Study of Lives.

## Ten Years Ahead of Myself

**Ed Stolman**

I was born in 1926 in Chicago, Illinois. I had an older sister, three years older than me. My father was an immigrant. I think he came to this country in about 1903. He came from a town in either Poland or Russia, depending on which day of the week it was, and which army was prevailing at the time. It was sort of on the border between Russia and Poland. The little town was called Suvalk, and the people were known as Suvalkis.

He was 13 years old and his parents decided they wanted to get him out because the Russians were there then. He would have had to go in the Russian army, so they sent him with a friend to the United States. I have researched and found on the Ellis Island websites the ship that he came in on.

But what happened is this man who brought him—I saw his signature right below him on the documentation—decided that when he got to Ellis Island he didn't want the responsibility of bringing this young man to the country. So he ditched him at Ellis Island.

The authorities found him there and my father could only speak Russian, Polish, and Yiddish. They didn't know what to do with him. They were going to send him back, but they kept him overnight and finally decided they would let him in because it would be too hard to send him back.

He went through, they told him that he was going to be in New York City, but he needs to have an American name. The name was "stolarski," s-t-o-l-a-r-s-k-i.

They said, "We're going to change your name to Stolman, because now you're a man." And that's how we got our name.

My father came into this country and he slept above the vents to the subway system for about a week. He didn't know where he was, had very little, a few pennies left in his pocket, and didn't know what he was doing.

Finally, he was walking around the Lower East Side and he saw some writing in Hebrew. He was not a religious person. His uncles were religious, but most of his family were not very religious, the way he wished he could have been, and he went into the synagogue and the keeper of the property took my father in.

He introduced my father to the congregants and one of them gave him a pushcart. He went out and sold what they called “shirt waste” in those days. It was ladies blouses, and he would walk down the streets and sell these. He did quite a few things.

He met Eddie Cantor at the time and Eddie Cantor’s grandmother was living there. She didn’t want to light any lights on Friday night, the Sabbath, so my father went up there, and he would turn the lights on and make a couple pennies on Friday nights.

Eddie Cantor started singing in some of these nickel bars and they took my father along to pass the hat. That lasted for a long time, and in the meantime, he wrote back home. It probably took four to six months for a letter to come back again.

His parents said, “Go to Chicago, you have family there, they’ll take you in,” figuring the streets are paved with gold. It took him another six months to get the money for the fare and to get everything together.

Some of the things he did I thought were so interesting. He’d get up in the morning early and ride the subway down to 34th Street, pick up all the newspapers that were there, fold them up carefully, come back up, and sell them.

That was his first job in the day. Then he would have the pushcart during the day and other things like that. He eked out an existence and when he got enough money he got on a train and went to Chicago.

He found the family and they took him in immediately, which was the sort of habit in those days. Everybody helped everybody else out. They had a clothing store on Division Street in Chicago, and they brought him in and he worked there. In about two years, they made him a partner. It was called Miramont at first, and then it became Miramont and Stolman.

After a few years at that location, they moved across the street to become friendly competitors. One would be Miramont and one would be Stolman’s, so that on either side of the street there would be the same merchandise but different customers.

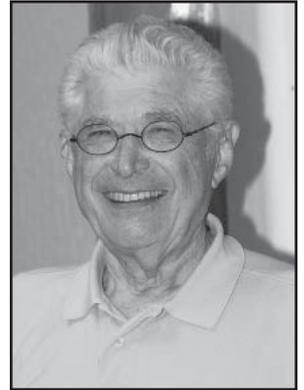
Then the Depression came along. I was born in 1926 and the Depression came in 1929. They just weren’t doing any business, they were going to have to do something, so my father picked up and rented a store on Howard Street in Chicago, which is the last street in the city going north, right next to Evanston, where Northwestern University is.

At that time, there were all these wealthy people from Evanston. They were hurt, too, in the Depression, and my father had the knack of making a lot of friends easily. He would go downtown on the El to the market and buy a damaged dress here, or a sample dress there.

They used to know him around the market as “Two-dollars-on-the-nose.” He used to pay two dollars for any dress that he could get, and he had a seamstress that he hired, and they’d patch up the little holes, redesign it a little bit, and it was an original.

So here are these wealthy people from Evanston who could now come down to Stolman’s Dress Shop on Howard Street and buy a dress for a lot less money than they could have before, and it was sort of an original.

He had a gift of gab. The biggest thing that he did that I thought was



*Ed Stolman*

## Ten Years Ahead of Myself

interesting was he built a walk-in safe. Every night his gems would go into the safe and when the customers would come very little was out in the front. He would let the customer come back with him to the safe and he would pull out this gem that he would lock up just for them. He was a great salesman, the kind of guy everybody loves. He was known as A.D., Abraham David.

My mother worked in the store. We had hired help for years and years, so I grew up in that environment, with a man who was very sensitive, who spoke with an accent, didn't speak English very well, and never was acutely religious but who loved to be religious if he could, because this country sort of saved him. He let us grow up as we wanted to grow up. He didn't try to influence his religion on us, although he probably wished that I had had a little more sense of religion.

I think the interesting part of that early life was the pictures that would come out of the children. He'd bring out a picture of my sister, a picture of me. He was very much a family man.

My mother was born in Chicago. He met her and they got married in 1920, I think. My sister was born in '23, and I was born in '26. We never knew we were poor. No, we weren't poor. Everything we ever wanted he was able to provide for us.

It was just an amazing existence. I never heard a swear word in the house. I never heard an argument much. If there were ever any arguments, it was behind closed doors. In fact, I always wondered about that, because I have a hard time getting angry myself. We were brought up in a fairy tale existence really, my sister and I, very close.

They sent me to Northwestern after high school. I knew I was going to be drafted. I went to college when I was 16. I graduated very early. I was still a kid when I went to college and I really needed to grow up.

I finished two years and then I became 18 and got drafted. I served about six or seven months in Virginia. I was pudgy, grew three or four inches, lost 40 pounds, got my manhood, moved to Washington, D.C., and was on my own for the first time. Although I had been to summer camp, I had never had the experience of living away.

That experience sort of made me grow up. When I got out of the Army, the GI Bill was available, and I went back to Northwestern. I was going to go to Dartmouth; I applied and I got in. And I was going to go to Wharton; I applied there, too, and got in, but I decided I really wanted to finish school at Northwestern and get out in the world and make my mark.

So I went back to school, and I met a young lady through my brother-in-law who was stationed in Nashville. I went down to visit them when I got out of the Army. I had about a month before school started and I met a young girl down there who was still in high school at the time and we started dating.

When I got back to school, I went to visit her at the University of North Carolina and I couldn't wait to get married. In those days you got out of college, you got married, and you went to work. So we did. I graduated in December of 1946 and we got married in January of 1947. We moved down to Nashville.

I really wanted to be in international trading. Northwestern didn't have a course in international trade but they designed one in my last year so I could

have a professor who mentored me. We worked out a course in international trade my senior year in college. I got into the business world and I started a foreign trade company.

I met somebody who said they wanted some streetlights in Buenos Aires, so I sent in an application. I had beautiful stationery made up, and I got the order because I was willing to sell it for \$500 profit, and they went for it. That was my first sale in foreign trade.

When I got married and went down there and told my new father-in-law I was going to take his daughter to South America, that didn't sit well. He was also in the retail business. He had a chain of about 14 children's, men's, and women's clothing stores all through the South and it was quite successful. He had two other daughters who were married to guys in the Navy and when they got out he put them in his business. So when I got down there he says, "Give me a year. You come to our business for a year. I don't want our daughter going down to South America. Try it for a year and if you don't like it we'll talk about it later."

Well, I was hooked. I went down to Nashville. I never liked the retail business, but I was in it for 20 some odd years. Then, like every other family, there were problems. One of the other things that happened is my father died and my mother, who lived in Chicago, went down to Florida for the winter. My father-in-law's wife died and he went down to Florida with a friend of his. Naturally they went to visit my mother and about four or five months later they got married. So my father-in-law married my mother.

That didn't work well with the rest of the family because now they thought that I'm going to be the influential son-in-law. Meanwhile, the other two sons-in-law were having family problems and one of them went out to California. The other one was there and his wife was very jealous of us because of the relationship we had with the new stepmother. So that didn't work.

But my father-in-law passed away, and then I said the only thing to do is sell the business. We spent about six months trying to figure out how to do that and we finally did it. I was out of business but I was 40 and I really couldn't afford to stay out. I could a little bit, but it really wasn't my career.

I've always been a little bit of an entrepreneur, so in looking for something to do, I finally got into an arrangement with a friend who wanted to get out of his business where I could try his business for a year. If I liked it I could buy in and have a partnership. Well, that pleased me, because I needed to have work.

In the meantime, my first wife became mentally ill and had a problem. She went away to Menninger's Clinic, and left me there with the two boys. One of them was away in school and the other was still in high school and he lived with me for a couple years.

Finally, I got a letter from her one day which was really devastating. She had met somebody at Menninger's, a patient, and they decided they wanted to get married. So she wanted a divorce, after 22 years of marriage. That was really a tough moment for me. But you had to go on, and so I did.

Then, before I left the clothing business, again, my entrepreneurship came along and I had the opportunity to get into the bowling business. My brother-in-law in Chicago had invested in a bowling alley, and I to a little extent. We had this business; I said why don't we have one in Nashville? He had a good

My brother-in-law in Chicago had invested in a bowling alley, and I to a little extent. We had this business; I said why don't we have one in Nashville? He had a good manager, someone who knew the business. That was right when bowling was really big time, 1957, hardwood floors and everything.

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manager, someone who knew the business. That was right when bowling was really big time, 1957, hardwood floors and everything.

So I put together a deal with a doctor friend and his doctor partner, and we opened up this bowling alley. My brother-in-law always became my partner in everything we did. We built the bowling alley and that was a very successful experience. In fact we sold it about 20 years later for a shopping center. It turned out to be a very good situation.

We were very much ahead of our time when we bought the land that we bought, and some more land after that and built a swim club and developed it. It was fun.

So these two doctors, after I was in the bowling business with them, they knew me from that, and all of a sudden, when I was still working at the shop that I had the option to buy into, they approached me, and said that they were starting a hospital company and asked if I wanted to join in. They thought that I could help them out. So I became a founder with them and we started a hospital company, which I knew nothing about. It was called Hospital Affiliates at that time.

There was a company called Hospital Corporation of America that started in Nashville. It was a great company, and one of these doctors had been an investor in Hospital Corporation. The man who started that business was very successful and they said, "Well, if Jack Massey can do this, we can do it, too."

So they started this company and I became the first employee and a founder. I was there, but I didn't know how to run a big company. I hadn't had that experience. But I loved it and now that I was a single man I could travel. I could work 80 hours a week, or 100. My youngest son was now in college, so I really had the time and effort to work full-time in this hospital business.

I was in the business for about 18 years. We became a very big successful company. We were smart enough to know that we had to finally bring in talent. I helped hire the man we brought in to become president. I became executive vice president. I didn't necessarily need the title, but he knew how to run public companies and what to do and he became my mentor, actually.

I was always the outside person and he was the brains on the inside. We still to this day have a fantastic relationship between the two of us. I always used to call him my Jack Anderson because there was a Jack Anderson who was a newscaster. This is my Jack Anderson. He's different, but a very, very interesting man.

So we ran this business, but we were never able to raise money like Hospital Corporations would. In 1978, I met the people at INA, which was Insurance Company of North America, and they wanted to get into the hospital business. I contacted them, and we sold our company to them. Then they changed their name to CIGNA, a contraction of Connecticut General and INA.

I stayed with them for four years and became vice-chairman. Jack became chairman, and the original founders got out. Then CIGNA sold us to Hospital Corporation of America. That was my opportunity. I had one of those wonderful contracts that said that if they sold the company they'd pay me for 10 years, but I had a non-compete clause. I couldn't be in the healthcare business.

By that time I had become financially okay and quite successful. I always

had this entrepreneurial desire to do something a little different. Unfortunately, I was always 10 years ahead of myself. The ideas I had were great, but 10 years later they were even better.

I did many things. I started dealing in the restoration of old buildings in a little town called Franklin, Tennessee. I got into re-building historical landmarks and sort of changed that whole town. Then the mayor of Nashville got hold of me and wanted me to help develop the downtown district. So I bought a building and turned it into a very fancy restaurant. That was a mistake. It was an interesting experience, but I certainly didn't make money with it. Right now that property is probably the dearest property in Nashville. I don't own it anymore. The symphony hall is a block away, and the whole area is redeveloped.

So I had that experience. I got to meet a lot of people. I've always been interested in the art world. I've been on the outside of that, collecting African art and things of that nature.

Then I remarried. My first wife, by the way, died of cancer. She was not married to me then, but she died of cancer in Topeka, Kansas. I was married to my second wife six years and she died of cancer.

So I had eight years between wives and eight more years after my second wife died and I did a lot of traveling. I was still working in the hospital business, so before we sold it, I was able to see the world. We had a hospital in England, a hospital in France, a hospital in Singapore, and we had eight hospitals in Australia, which I set up because I loved to travel.

In the meantime, I started an ambulance company and I helped two friends of mine get in the men's clothing business. I always took a little partnership in the businesses, with ex-employees of our company who were smart and young and aggressive.

I never wanted to get old so I would be with younger people all the time. Even now, my friends are maybe 10, 15, 20 years my junior. I've never really gotten to my age group.

I'm 82. My good friend Barney Osher just hit 80, so I am two years older. But I do work out. I had a triple bypass 30 years ago now. I was one of the early ones. So that was my Aha! moment. That's when I started to physically get myself in shape. For 20 years I was a runner. That was my energy level, doing all those healthy things to try to do it.

Then, I finally met a woman in San Francisco. As luck would have it, I was living in Nashville and she was in San Francisco. I came out to San Francisco and a year later we were married. We were together for 18 years, and she passed away from cancer about five years ago. We built a home up in Sonoma. While I was courting her I would come to San Francisco. The arrangement in our marriage for the first two years was she would never move to Nashville.

I owned a beautiful home in Nashville. Everybody knew me in the community, and I knew everybody there. I never thought I would leave Nashville, and then all of a sudden one day some friends of ours were going to build a house up in Sonoma and they were looking for some property, so my wife and I went with them.

They had a real estate agent and so we looked at some property in Sonoma. At the end of the day, I said, "Why am I living in Nashville, with the

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## Ten Years Ahead of Myself

hot weather and all this stuff?" I said, "This is beautiful in northern California." So I sold my home and I moved up. We bought some property and built a home up in Sonoma.

While I was courting her, spending two or three weeks at a time in San Francisco, I would go to the Fromm Institute, which is a lifelong learning institute that Barney knows very well. The Fromm family in San Francisco started it. I loved that school.

A friend of mine, who I had met in San Francisco, said, "You ought to come to some of these lectures at Fromm, they're wonderful." So I went, and I got hooked. The classes were absolutely outstanding. They were wonderful, and I was learning so much. I didn't care what they were teaching.

I was learning all this stuff that I never knew anything about. It just became part of my life. So when I got up to Sonoma, I missed it. That's how this whole thing started. Our students feel the same way, when they come to class.

They just care about being there for the sake of learning something and using their mind. You never graduate. You never get a degree. You just go and go and go, like the Energizer bunny; it just keeps going and going and going.

When we moved up to Sonoma, I couldn't drive in every day to go to school. My wife heard that there was going to be a symphony hall built in Sonoma. No one knew. So we called Sonoma State, and they told us about it and we met the development director.

We said, "We know a lot of people in Sonoma, maybe we could do a fundraiser for you at our home." So the president, I'd never met him until that day, came over to the house and talked about the symphony hall. We raised quite a bit of money for them.

So I got involved with the school. The day I met the president I said, "You know what, I had this class in San Francisco. We really need to have a lifelong learning school in Sonoma."

So he says, "Oh, why don't you do it?"

So I said, "Well, I'll get some information."

I went to the Fromm Institute. Mr. Fromm had died, but Mrs. Fromm, Hannah, was still living at that time. She's gone now but she was wonderful. She says, "Well, I'm too old, I'm 84 years old and I don't want to do another school, but you can talk to my deputy director and he'll give you all the information. We'll try to help you any way we can."

So I met with him and learned the process of what they were doing, how they set up their financials, and how they did everything. I went back to the president of Sonoma State University, and I said, "Reuben, you know, I met with the Fromm Institute."

And he said, "I don't care about them. I want you to set up the school."

So I started thinking about it, and I put together a few friends of mine and we formed a board. I figured that we'd raise \$100,000 through my friends. I thought we could do that. Then another \$100,000 would come from tuition we were hoping to get if we had enough students.

I didn't know where in the heck I was going to get the other \$100,000. I was going to worry about that later. Their budget was \$600,000 at the time. I said, "Well, if they're giving 16 courses, I'll do 8 courses and I need to raise

\$300,000. It was done on the back of an envelope. It wasn't scientific.

The nice part of it is was that Reuben left me alone. He put me in the School of Extended Education with Dean Adler. Les just retired, but we got a board together and started this program.

It was successful from day one. Today we have over 1,500 students. Then my friend, who's on Barney Osher's board, said, "You know, you ought to talk to Barney about this, because I know that he's given some money to Maine, and he's from Maine."

I knew that and I called him up and I said let's have lunch. We went to have lunch. It couldn't have been 20 minutes into the conversation and he said, "Ed, you're doing exactly what I want to do. I'm going to give you a \$100,000 a year for three years. If you're very successful, I'll give you a million dollar endowment."

I looked at him and I said, "Barney, are you nuts?"

He said, "No, this is what I want to do."

So we started the school. Barney gave me the last \$100,000 I needed. He's a brilliant, brilliant man. I knew about Harry Sky, and I knew about Barney's attachment to Maine. But this was the first attachment he had in the West, Sonoma State.

About a year and a half later, Barney says, "We've decided we want to expand the program. I'm going to issue an RFP to the California state universities and offer them the same deal I offered you. I want to put on a seminar at Sonoma State, and I'd like for you to do it. I'd like to put a little grant together for you to do it. Will you do it?"

Absolutely. So, we had the first annual meeting of the Osher schools at Sonoma State University and Barney was very pleased. It was very successful.

The next thing you know, a couple years later, Barney calls and says let's have lunch. "I've decided I want to expand the program across the country. I want to have more schools. This is something that needs to be done. I believe in it, and I want to do it."

Of course, he got Cal to open up the Research Center for Education there, and it's just been like a fairytale ride all the way through this. It's so interesting to me because I have so much respect for him as a human being. He's just an amazing person. He's just as soft as can be, and he's so generous with his money.

It's been a real wonderful thing, between that and all these entrepreneurial things I always wanted to do. Well, about three years ago, I said, "I think we need lifelong living."

I started checking it out and doing some research on it. There was a piece of property about five minutes from Sonoma State University. A developer had bought 200 acres and he was going to develop it. It was an old building owned by Hewlett Packard, which became Agilent. Then they abandoned it.

The developers who bought this land wanted to build a new urban village. I've been trying for three years to get a deal with them and finally about a month or so ago we got a handshake deal. I'm going to get four acres of land there and we're going to build this new lifelong living village.

It's got all the requirements that I want. Number one it's intergenerational.

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## Ten Years Ahead of Myself

It's going to be a green village, have office buildings, a town village center, and a movie theater which I'm going to get during the day for classes because we don't have enough room at Sonoma State.

We've got this beautiful symphony hall which will become a cultural center of northern California when it's finished in a year. The Sonoma State campus is a beautiful campus. Now we have over 1,500 people and I think the next step of this is to go to lifelong living, on or near campuses.

My fiancé moved from Denver to Huntington Beach and she's had a very interesting career. Her husband was an astronaut, so she's smart and in the world of space. She's really great. We went to Denver and we found a place at Denver University. They were very receptive to it and we started working with a developer there, but the housing market went down, and that sort of phased out.

I was going to have one in Denver and the one at Sonoma State was in limbo at that time. Now in the past three months it's all come back. I have a meeting with the architect in Denver and with the Chancellor of the University because we'll be right on the university property, and it meets the requirements that we feel are important.

I've teamed up with some of the best people in the world who have done assisted living and retirement centers. They're fabulous and they know everybody in the industry. I have a team, a wonderful set of lawyers that do this kind of work.

It all started with Barney, in a way, because he started the Osher Integrative Medicine program in San Francisco, connected to UCSF. So Nancy and I (that's my fiancé) went to the first meeting, trying to get them to do a wellness program. The idea is that you tie in integrative medicine to what we're going to be doing. We'll be teaching Tai Chi and other wellness activities and we want it to be intergenerational.

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Some people want golfing communities, some people want swimming beaches, a lot of people want academic relationships, and I think that university campuses need this, because that's endowment money to them if they do it right.

It's an opportunity for the university to use their facilities as long as they have the land and the parking and the classrooms. Those are the three hardest parts to get, but if they can do all that, it's wonderful.

The University of Illinois is ready to talk now, too. If I could get two going, that's plenty. If I could get three going, it's a winner. What we're trying to accomplish is to make it to where we keep people well and have a community. Our concierges, for example, will all be social workers, so that when they see that a patient may be not combing their hair they can connect them to assistance.

There's all this technology that's out there now that can make it com-

fortable for not only the person who's going to live there, but also for their children. People don't necessarily want to go to Florida or Phoenix for their retirement. They want to stay in their community, but they all want to downsize.

I think it's the wave of the future, I don't think we'll have any trouble finding 18-20 universities around the country that would love to have a school like this on their campus. That's my dream.

It's about how we build an environmentally friendly community. We'll have a farmers market, movie theaters, and restaurants. These are not people that are ready yet to go into an assisted living type of place—they're active adults.

Right now, we have a trip going to Turkey and Dean Adler is leading the trip. We're filled with 35 people. We've had three trips to Cuba because the president of the university is Cuban. He taught a course on Cuba. We've had trips to Mexico, so we're doing a lot of trips, a lot of educational things. Film is a big part of people's lives at this age, too.

Our 1,500 students support the program tremendously. We have a program where you can donate a chair; a chair is \$5,000. We have about eight people who have given chairs. That's \$40,000. We pay our professors \$3,200 for an eight-week session, \$400 a session. We get about \$140,000 a year from students, and we've got about eight endowments from people who are giving money to the program when they get through.

We've got a great development person who's doing all this, and everybody just loves it. The school leaves us alone, and now with the opening of the symphony hall, it's going to be such an attraction for our people to have one of the finest symphony halls in the world, one of the top five, because it's modeled after the Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood. So it will be a whole new environment in Sonoma.

That's my story up to date. I've had 14 careers, and now I grow olive trees. I make one of the world's finest olive oils, in Sonoma, California. So this is what I've been doing. The only trouble is, I'm 82 and I've got plans for the next 20 years. I think that's part of it, to have the zest to want to do it. I just hope I can make it for another 20 years to get all this over with.

I've made many, many friends, and I enjoy every day. I'm with a wonderful woman right now. We're not planning to get married; she always tells me that when she gets pregnant we'll get married.

## Keep Your Options Open

**Catherine Frank**

**M**y parents are from Pennsylvania. My mother grew up in a small town southwest of Pittsburgh. My father was from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. My mother had a sort of typical childhood, I believe. She went to Catholic school for 16 years, including a Catholic women's college, and became a dietician in a hospital.

My father had a slightly less idyllic childhood. He had an older brother, nine years older than he, and their father was an alcoholic and so my father, I think, bore the brunt of some of that. It shaped very much his desire to want to be a very good parent because he hadn't had that, and had seen his mother suffer in many ways under that.

His brother was the dean at a small college. He had been a Navy pilot. I remember some of the stories about how he was only 5'4" and had to stretch himself to get into the Navy. But he became a Navy pilot. He was a hero, I guess, to a brother who was nine years younger.

When my dad finished high school he apparently had lots of difficulties throughout his career. They kept keeping him back and then they found out he just needed glasses. And he was fine. When he finished high school he went to work in the steel mills in Johnstown.

And then he went into the Navy, post-Korean War, but he apparently tested out and did some technical kinds of things. There were pictures of him in Greece. He came back and went to college and studied English. Then he met my mother. He was living with my aunt and uncle while he was in college, and they had children, maybe 8 and 10, who thought, here's a grownup who gets to live like a kid, essentially. I think my aunt wanted to marry him off and get him out of house, so she introduced him to my mother.

They got married and I was born while he was still in college. My mother had finished college, although he is five years older than she. He got a job as a technical writer in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. They moved here when I was probably 6 or 8 months old.

I think in some ways that's a life-shaping experience because they were different from people in North Carolina. At that time there was less movement, I guess. So when they came here, my brother was born in 1960, and my favorite

story that they tell is when my mother was in the hospital and the priest came to visit her. Apparently, North Carolina was mission territory for Catholic churches and the woman in the room with her, when she was getting ready to leave, said, "Well, you know, for a Yankee and a Catholic you don't seem like a bad person." Being an outsider has been important in the way I've seen the world.

My dad read to us. I remember him reading Edgar Allen Poe to us when we were eight or nine years old. Because of his frustrations, that love of language was something he wanted to pass along to us, and it stuck with me very well. So, I got a copy of *Jane Eyre* when I was in 6th grade and fell in love with reading. Reading became a real part of my identity.

He also wanted me to take music lessons. He was sort of prescribing these things to me as I was growing up because it was something he had never been able to do. I think my mother had taken piano lessons with nuns who rapped her knuckles, so she didn't want to inflict that on anyone else.

But I began to take lessons. In Winston-Salem there was the North Carolina School of the Arts. It's a state-supported institution, part of the 16-campus system. I went into 7th grade as a classical guitarist. Again, it's kind of not being like everyone else who was there. Most of my classmates at that young age were dancers. I was the only classical guitarist in high school. However, there were some orchestral musicians.

That was a wonderful place for me in many ways because it pushed me to see things that I would never have been able to experience had it just been up to my parents or if they had had to pay an enormous amount of money. We paid very little for me to attend high school there. And because our classes were small, and because I loved learning, I got great private attention from instructors. It probably was just the perfect place for me to be. I got to play for Andres Segovia when I was a senior in high school, which was a great thing to be able to do.

I guess if you are thinking about themes in my life, as literary scholar you always look for quests and journeys, I feel like I have done lots of journeying but very little questing. There's not this great goal that I see at the end. But the ability to enjoy the journey has been sort of a theme, as I look at it in my life.

The School of the Arts was a great place because I got to see gay people before I knew what gay people were. They were just part of my life and my experience. I judged them just because they were who they were, before I really understood what this meant at all. That was a great advantage to me. I looked upon race and gender differently than I might have had I not gone to Philo Junior High School in Winston-Salem.

At the same time, there were people who had difficulty being in this very creative atmosphere all the time. I would often spend all my free time reading books. I would be in the library reading and listening to music for theory classes and things like that. It was in many ways like a private life of the mind. I guess that has always been part of who I am and what I've done.

I chose this small college, Davidson College. It is a great school. They had just graduated their first class of women and there were still lots of jokes about women coming there because there was a 3:1 men-to-women ratio. That was not what I was used to. And it was very small, very isolated, at that time. My dad had primed this pump that college is this great intellectual experience.



*Catherine Frank*

## Keep Your Options Open

Most of these kids had a goal in mind—they wanted to be a lawyer or a doctor, or at least that's what they said going in. I'm sure not all of them ended up there. I had a very different idea of what this would be like. So I was unhappy.

I went back home for a year and took college-level classes at the School of the Arts and political science courses at Wake Forest at the same time I was doing my arts training. Then I went to the University of North Carolina in my junior year. That was a great place for me to be, too. It was enormous, but when I went in as an English major, it was small. I was in the honors program so I could take these really small seminar kinds of classes. When it came time to finish I didn't have a career path in mind but I was encouraged to go to graduate school.

Graduate school kind of became gradual school for me! I took a very, very long time to finish. Actually, after I finished my master's degree I went back home and worked at a newspaper in Winston-Salem for a year.

Then I came back to school and I met my current husband. He was a graduate student in physics. My roommate was dating his roommate. That's the way we met. That's been the formative experience for me, just finding myself where I needed to be or wanted to be. Looking back, if I had set better goals I might have had a more conventional academic career, but that's not where I ended up. In some ways, I feel like being part of a lifelong learning atmosphere is just right where I needed to be. It just took me awhile to find it!

We've been married for 25 years and we have a six-year-old. We did all kinds of things to try to make that happen. That's been a great gift, too. I think had I been 25 when I had this child, it would have been very different. It really does feel like a gift. I appreciate what that means, and am also less judgmental now than when I was working so hard to get pregnant. I would watch news stories about people who had beaten their children, or something like that, and think, "They don't deserve to be parents ... I do!" But very soon after she was born I saw a similar story on the news and I thought I can understand why that person who has five children under the age of five ends up feeling like this. I wouldn't do it, but I understand it.

That kind of learning to understand has been a real important part. Empathy is so important in the study of literature, learning to see things through other people's eyes. I think that has informed my approach to life, too.

My undergraduate thesis was about Herman Melville. I use the line over and over when I am talking about lifelong learning. Melville said that he felt so lucky that he had not read Shakespeare until he had been on a whaling ship. He said he couldn't have understood it until he had done these things. He said the whaling ship had been his Princeton and his Yale. That idea of how experience forms our intellectual development has been something that's very important to me.

Being able to be irreverent in looking at literature, not taking any of it so seriously that you're overwhelmed by it, but being able to bring it into context, is what is so important about the OLI program we have. It's almost seductive to be a part of some of these lifelong learning classes. I know that's probably not the word that comes to mind when someone walks into an OLI class, but that atmosphere of inquiry for the sake of it is the key. That strikes me as what

I may have been looking for when I went to Davidson when I was 18 years old.

I found that when I got to OLLI, which was kind of a serendipitous connection in itself. My neighbor was a member and she knew I was not. I didn't have a full-time job and had finished my dissertation. She said, "Would you like to teach a course at OLLI?"

I said, "Sure." And it was seductive, almost. I was always waiting, when I was teaching undergraduates, for the kid who was going to push you so far and you weren't going to be able to answer his questions, and it never happens. It's not that it happens here, but the students will challenge you and push you and they really care about it. That's the kind of thing I think I was looking for, and yearning for.

The other strange, serendipitous experience I've had that is very much unlike anything else is being a tutor for student athletes at the University of North Carolina for a very long time, and I continue to do that. It was an experience that gave me an insight into a way of life that is very different from my own. I've worked with the men's basketball program, and they are very well known, certainly in our neck of the woods and I guess nationally.

I had never been to a men's basketball game. One of the players was in my undergraduate writing class. When they had a tutor who quit, he suggested I might be someone who would be good to work with. I started that way. It's been this really long, interesting, experience. We have an 86% graduation rate, so I can look at that and say that's good.

Being able to listen to some of these kids who maybe haven't been encouraged to do learning at all, as I was as a child, but still have such a unique perspective and something to offer to the University, and can be prepared and can bring discipline to their academic studies, as well as their athletics—it's been fun.

I began doing that right around the time Michael Jordan left, so I've met him. He comes back. The joke in North Carolina is that if you look at the statistics on who makes the most money from UNC, it's the geography majors. They make more money than any of our other graduates, but it's because Michael Jordan skewed the curve pretty heavily!

I have worked with Vince Carter, Rasheed Wallace, Jerry Stackhouse, and all those guys who people in North Carolina are very interested in. It was a real education for me, about the way the awareness of race plays into it all. I think people see these kids as privileged and yet, I'll never forget, they were at a big event and there were lots of boosters glad-handing them and patting them on the back and introducing them to their children. One of the players turned to me and said, "If I didn't play basketball at UNC, he wouldn't have let me touch his daughter." The booster was white and this kid was African-American. It's been this way of knowing about those things and being able to talk about it honestly that has been a great gift to me, a way of understanding the world in a way I would have never have known had I not done this.

Almost from the first day I was in the classroom as a writing instructor at UNC I realized I wanted to be a teacher. I was really nervous. This is fairly typical, but they need lots of writing instructors. As a doctoral student, they give you maybe a couple hours training and they throw you in the classroom.

That kind of learning to understand has been a real important part. Empathy is so important in the study of literature, learning to see things through other people's eyes. I think that has informed my approach to life, too.

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Having grown up as someone listening and observing, I feel that I have become more and more comfortable in front of a classroom.

I did teach writing for quite a long while, and some literature courses, and learning how to deal with difficult students and that sort of thing has been fun. But being a writing teacher is a unique kind of teaching because there is a kind of intimacy that comes from really listening to someone's story, watching it grow, and finding ways to be critical of their writing in order to help it improve.

Finding ways to help people believe that you don't have to be born a writer, or that there are things you can do to make the writing process easier, was a great way to start teaching. Then, as you earned your stripes as a teacher, you got to teach literature, which everybody wanted to do.

That was a different kind of teaching because when you are doing that you are kind of teaching to a goal, much more than you are in an OLLI class where the journey is the more important thing. That was something that I enjoyed and was good at, something I think I've brought to everything that I've done since then.

But then I ended up in a preservation society because we purchased an old house right in downtown Chapel Hill. I got involved in zoning issues and went on the historic commission to articulate those kinds of things. When the job at the Preservation Society where I had volunteered came open, being a writer and being a communicator was something I think helped me in that position.

I learned things that make me a better OLLI director now. Working with boards, dealing with different personalities, trying to educate, because we were an older organization and it had kind of become social, trying to pull people back to a mission, these were part of a teacher's job so I feel like I brought those to the table there.

I've had nothing but zigs and zags in my life. But everything is connected. When I started thinking about talking to you that's what I thought. My six-year-old has a series of tapes, it's a Christmas story and this little British dog says at one point, "I never know what to ask for but when I see what I got I always say that's just what I wanted!"

I kind of felt like when I heard that, "Oh, that's the story of my life!" So there you go— English cartoons are another source of wisdom.

I was very happy when the possibility came up to be part of this OLLI program in a new way, since I had been teaching there. I didn't realize this until I took the job, but I had actually taught 13 courses at OLLI before I took the position as director.

There is this kind of strange connection, but in my very first class at OLLI I was teaching Thomas Hardy's poetry and novels. There was one woman in my class and we would have these great discussions about women in Thomas Hardy. We would talk about it but I thought she was seeing it in a very narrow kind of way, imposing 20th-century standards on this book, but also not seeing the very interesting things he was doing with gender.

I was reading a national preservation magazine one day and they had an interview with the woman who is head of the Tenement Museum in New York. She talked about her mentor, Gerda Lerner. This was the woman's name in my

OLLI class. I thought, “There can’t be that many Gerda Lerner’s in the world!”

Indeed, she was one of the founders of the study of women’s history. It was a great moment for me because I realized, you know, people at our organization come from all kinds of backgrounds. I probably never would have argued with Gerda Lerner if I had known who Gerda Lerner was. But I didn’t, so I had the courage to treat her as an equal. And she treated me as an equal, too. She never pulled the Gerda Lerner card and said, “Don’t you know who I am?”

So it was great. That’s part of what OLLI is, too, this kind of democratic place where everybody brings experiences but nobody dwells on, “I used to be this.” We are who we are in the moment. That is another theme in my life. Sometimes you think, “Oh, I wish I’d sought that status, or looked for that credential,” but I didn’t. So enjoy the journey.

This woman had actually has taken a couple of my classes and we just kept having discussions about gender and Charles Dickens, gender and Charlotte Brontë. But she was very supportive. She kept coming in and saying, “When are you going to publish that dissertation?”

She never told me she was Gerda Lerner, and I never talked to her about being Gerda Lerner, although we did talk. She taught a course at OLLI and we talked some about what she would do.

I still have people from that first class. We had one guy who was a salesman in New York, but he was absolutely captivated by Thomas Hardy, and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. He knew that I did the basketball tutoring and he used to tell me, “*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is the only book I took to read during the games at the Dean Dome,” which is the arena where the UNC team plays. So that was equally gratifying. You know, here is somebody who had never known this before and took so much from the course. I used to read these quotations about teachers and, you know, as a parent you can follow the effect of what you do in the world. But as a teacher you are never quite sure what you have had as an effect.

We are a pretty big OLLI, and as we grow we worry about community and that kind of thing. But the great thing about our classes is that they are all relatively small, our average class size is about 20. So people actually do build these friendships.

One of our members has Parkinson’s disease and she had been teaching a memoir writing class. She would say at the beginning of every term, “I can’t do this anymore.” Then she would want very much to do it, so we found her a new place to do it, at the retirement community where she lived and her students followed her there. I would say to her, “Whatever you want to do, we want you as long as you want to do this.”

But apparently she began suffering real pain and felt she was losing papers. She called me and said, “Would you just come and listen in on the class?”

I drove out there and she said, “Catherine is going to take the class for us.”

I thought, “Oh, can I do this or not?” And I said, “Yeah.” It was only three or four more weeks but it’s been wonderful because this is a great group of people who (at least a core of them) have been together for several semesters.

They’ve been working on their memoirs and part of it is the experiences they bring. I mean, one person was a model and designer who’s French. When

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she was 22, she worked for Christian Dior and came to this country as the Christian Dior spokesperson. She's had this very rich life. She was in France during the Nazi occupation. That's part of her life, too.

Another woman travelled extensively in China as a teacher. Another woman worked for CARE. They are all telling their life stories. There are other people in the class, one guy is a lawyer who was in the Army and he's writing about his experiences during that time.

I think they've really liked having a new person come in and read their work with a different kind of eye and a different sort of attitude toward what they were doing. One woman was writing about growing up in Chapel Hill, which of course I knew a lot about. I knew through my preservation work some of the people she was talking about. One thing she was writing about was her experiences with what she called "colored people."

At first I thought, "Oh gosh, does she not know that this probably isn't a politically correct term?" And then I really read what she had written and she was very conscious of using that word. At the last class they each bring in a piece of their writing and put it in the middle of the table. They all read and the format has been that the instructor would talk about each individual piece and let the other students comment, too.

We got to hers and she told a story about her brother having given a toy to the child of the woman who was their maid, and her mother took the toy back from the maid's child. And the woman writing the story never knew why. It upset her and embarrassed her because she said her mother probably would have said, "Oh, I'm a liberal. I wouldn't do that. I believe all people are equal." But something in her took that toy back and acted as if it were taken, or stolen, or inappropriate somehow.

So I said, "At first, I wasn't sure about your use of this word."

And she said, "You know, the other instructor always told me to say African American. I didn't want to do that because that isn't what I was writing about. This is the word that means something to me here now."

I thought that was an interesting exchange because I think they've all felt a little bit invigorated by having someone new come in. I've also felt invigorated because I haven't had the chance to do a lot of writing instruction. It's been fun and I never really worked with people who do this kind of writing. It's urgent for them. They want these stories down. Some of them have ambitions to publish and some of them just want to give them to their children to let them know what their lives were.

All of those different agendas and reasons have been interesting. Some of them have really grown even since I have been in there, in terms of finding a way to balance their reflections on their story with just remembering all the details. It's another one of those things where if I were the kind of person who was really good at managing her time I probably wouldn't have undertaken, but it's been great fun.

I've been married for 25 years and haven't really talked about my husband. More of our social life was with his department because it was smaller. He's a nuclear physicist. They have a lab facility where they would do 24-hour shifts to do experiments. So when you are with someone at 2:00 in the morning you

just get to know them better, and they become part of your social life.

I've never taken a course in physics. I opted out of that. When I was an undergraduate at UNC I took lots of French so I wouldn't have to take a math class. And here I am married to a physicist. That kind of academic discipline is so different from writing a dissertation in English. This has been something else that's pushed me in a different direction than I might have gone had I just hung out with English majors all the time.

It helps me bring something new to OLLI. It has informed the way I see the world, by listening to people talk about things that are important to them. I learned to listen to people talk about doing scientific experiments. As somebody who took classical guitar and read books all the time, it wasn't part of what my journey was.

I guess I am scientifically literate, just by osmosis. Not being in the same field has been an important part of the reason things work out all right with us. And then, my daughter is this great gift to both of us. We never thought it would happen at some level, but you always hoped it would. She is this exuberant 6-year-old, and we are kind of too old to keep up with her, but you know it gives us a different perspective. We are probably as old as most of the grandparents in her room. That's all right. Again, it's like we're a little bit out of place, but for that reason I am feeling that I am enjoying things maybe more than I might.

Some days are not that much fun because you get bogged down in lots of details. Where's the coffee? Or, somebody asks why did you spend money to take volunteers to lunch? Those kinds of things everybody deals with. But the thing is that somebody comes in and says, "Thanks." Being part of that is a learning experience, too.

I continue to teach as well. There was an OLLI member who was teaching a course in opera. He had been a director of an opera and a wonderful teacher. He had been an administrator at the college level and in my very first weeks there he came in and said, "You've got to keep teaching. It will make you tired some days, but it will give you energy." He actually passed away last summer. That happens more frequently than you want it to. But it was a great piece of wisdom. So that keeps you going.

The book I put together was another thing that fell into my lap. My dissertation director is a wonderfully generous person in terms of giving his students these opportunities. He had been at Columbia University Press and he had given me an enormous amount of work to do. We worked on the *Granger's Annotated Encyclopedia of Poetry*. We would do annotations for the top thousand poems. He kind of randomly assigned these poems to us. I ended up writing annotations for something like 25 Shakespeare sonnets.

He talked to his editor about his other project, *Quotations for All Occasions*, and asked me if I wanted to do it. I said, "Well, okay, I'll try." It was great because I would just follow instincts. They had the idea, some outlines, like marriage and first job, once-in-a-lifetime things, annual things. That's what I worked with. I used everything and anything that I had ever learned because I wasn't sitting around with a cache of quotations for all these things.

I had to be creative about finding them. I would go over to the library

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and give myself eight hours and think, “Oh, there might be something in Bronson Alcott’s diary about seasons.” I would go look and almost always find something, even if it wasn’t what I was looking for. I learned about different religious traditions. I had to find quotations for Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, or Ramadan. That’s not part of my experience so I learned about those things. Some of the funny things that you stumble across as you were looking for something else were great ways to stretch your intellect. That was a great thing for me, I enjoyed it immensely.

The other thing that I was thinking about is what are the stories, what are the themes in my life? My dad always used to tell me when we were growing up, “keep your options open. Don’t ever shut down on anything.”

At some level, that’s been my undoing because I just kept all my options open and never set that goal and strived for it. You watch dancers and they have to set that goal and have to be in the company by the time they are 16. Or, working with student athletes: we have to win this game and we have to go onto the next game and we’ve got to lift weights. They have a trajectory. I’ve just never done that. I mean I probably could have, or should have, but I didn’t, so I’m just enjoying every twist and turn of the path.

That’s the thing about the OLLI approach. I have often heard it said that continuing education is the stepchild of the university, as if somehow it’s not their main mission, it’s not what they’re supposed to do. But it strikes me that at OLLI we’re the purest form of education that goes on. Everybody else at Duke, which is this great top ten elite school, is doing it for an ulterior motive, for the most part. There is learning that goes on along the way that is not for that, but you want to finish at Duke because you will have a Duke degree, or because you’re going to earn more money.

But our people come, and it’s always amazing to me, they’ll sit in on a class on Wittgenstein not because they have to take a credit in philosophy but because they want to learn more. Some have no particular aptitude for it. There is something kind of dogged about the way they do it. But they still love it. Even if it seems like they aren’t getting it, they keep coming back because there is something that is stretching them, making their minds work.

I think that’s the story we have to tell. That’s the thing that we bring to the community, and to the world. That’s really exciting to be part of. Whenever I hear from people that we are just the stepchild, I always tell them that Cinderella was the stepchild, too.

## Twenty-first Century Communications for OLLI

**Thom Clement**

### Abstract

*A substantial challenge facing any growing organization is how to maintain and improve communication to, from, and among its members. The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University has combined creative talents of members with an expectation for involvement by volunteers. In addition to its state-of-the-art electronic newsletter, this energetic group maintains a robust Web site, a growing number of videos, online registration and member directory, and several print publications.*

One of the biggest challenges facing any growing organization is how to maintain and improve communication to, from, and among its members. This has certainly been the case for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University (OLLI/Mason) in northern Virginia. Out of necessity, OLLI/Mason members have marshaled their creative talents and energies to handle the high expectations of a 21st-century learning organization.

### Volunteerism Comes from a Spirit of Belonging

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How does OLLI/Mason manage to do so much? Gordon Canyock, chair of the Communications Committee, shared his thoughts: “The volunteer work ethic was well-rooted in our membership from the start. The founding members all felt the need to pitch in, whether it was teaching, stuffing envelopes, answering the telephone, or driving to the nearest metro stop to pick up a guest speaker. They inspired their successors to do the same. We have a significant turnover every year, but once members have been on board for over two years, they start to feel as if they are part of a team, a social group of similar interests... Camaraderie encourages volunteering, which leads to deeper friendships.”

Part of the culture at OLLI/Mason is illustrated by the axiom, “The more you put into OLLI, the more you get out of OLLI.” When people join, they receive a New Member Welcome Packet that includes the Member Handbook. In this document, the many volunteer opportunities are described in detail.

Although we benefit greatly from our affiliation with George Mason University, we are free to make our own decisions about content and distribution of various communications, and this encourages the volunteer spirit.

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During the first week of each term, we have a New Member Coffee during which our committee chairs make a “pitch” for involvement. Canyock’s enthusiasm for communications generally produces several new volunteers each term. One-on-one conversations tend to carry the most influence in generating and maintaining member involvement.

Currently, there are 28 members involved on the Communications Committee, about half of whom are editors and proofreaders. At any given time, about a third of the committee members are involved as writers, photographers, and Webmasters. The time commitments vary greatly. The primary editors put in over 10 hours a week, but others may only average a few hours a month.

Former OLLI president Charles Duggan noted that “the nature of our status as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit association has kept us relatively free to determine our own editorial and publication policies.” Although we benefit greatly from our affiliation with George Mason University, we are free to make our own decisions about content and distribution of various communications, and this encourages the volunteer spirit.

### Communications in the Age of the Internet

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The growth of the use of personal computers paralleled the growth in our institute. The single most dramatic development affecting our communications was the Internet, and the accompanying use of e-mail. To put it conservatively, the Internet changed everything about the way we interacted with each other to accomplish the work of our institute. According to our most recent survey, 94% of OLLI/Mason members regularly use e-mail and are able to access information via the Web.

Perhaps the most unique and prominent example of our improved communications is the *OLLI E-News*, which is e-mailed every Friday throughout the year to approximately 1,000 individuals. The *E-News* keeps our members and community contacts fully informed about OLLI and items relating to its courses and events and serves as a public forum for communications between the membership and the leadership. Gordon Canyock commented, “The changeover from the traditional LRI News to OLLI E-News resulted in a dramatic increase in the timeliness of information sent to the membership. Instead of a 10-day lead time for submission of an article, we reduced it to 24-36 hours. As a direct result, special one-topic “blasts” sent by staff to all hands decreased from several per week to less than one per month. Editor Rod Zumbro notes that, “Newsletters have always been our primary means of communication.”

The *E-News* also contains news about upcoming events or activities at Mason or other organizations with which OLLI is affiliated that may be of interest to the membership, as well as occasional news about local events not widely publicized that may also be of interest to the membership. Printed copies are available at each OLLI location only when classes are in session.

Video is another important area of communications which is emerging for our OLLI. We produced *The Story of OLLI* and made it available on our Web site, along with numerous short one-click videos that welcome visitors and share entertaining and enhanced information about life at OLLI. Some of the videos feature member testimonials and chronicle events such as the annual Teacher

Appreciation Reception, the Holiday Luncheon, and historical interviews with our founder, Kathryn Brooks. According to Rod Zumbro, “Video is a huge part of modern communications as witnessed by YouTube and similar video-hosting sites and the numerous videos on such sites as CNN, MSNBC, and CNET. At OLLI, we have embraced video to help tell our story.”

Our OLLI Web site serves as a convenient, easily accessible repository of current and historical information about OLLI and is frequently updated. In 2008, the addition of a “DocStore” link began to serve as a convenient “one-stop shopping” site for articles and links related to specific courses, guest speakers, and documents ranging from administrative forms to catalogs going all the way back to 1991. Gordon Canyock notes, “The creation of the Web site provided quick, comprehensive, one-stop shopping for information to our present and potential members, donors, prospective employees, and the community at large.”

The quarterly catalog, also available online via the Web site, provides a current schedule and description for each term of the courses, special and social events, and ongoing activities available to OLLI members and potential members in sufficient detail to allow members to make choices among available offerings. It not only offers sufficient information to facilitate registration and enrollment, but also is a vehicle for recruitment of instructors and of members, describing the OLLI program and an overview of the function of the organization. Although we still mail a copy of the catalog to each member and to numerous others upon request, we are now able to post the entire catalog on our Web site weeks before it is available in hard copy. This allows members much more time to review course selections and plan their calendars.

The Member Portal is our online site for registration and access to information for registered members. It is password-protected and linked to our member database and to the catalog, and also serves as the access point for the Membership Directory, rosters of course participants, and statistics about class enrollment. Dr. Richard Chobot, the first executive director for OLLI/Mason, suggested the transition from strictly paper registration to an online system. He contacted Ken McLean, author of LRI Solutions, who developed the software based on our specifications. Through contractual agreement we are able to continually make improvements and enhancements to the system. We are now able to send “broadcast” e-mail messages, including the weekly *OLLI E-News*, directly from the Member Portal to OLLI members, thus eliminating the need to maintain separate e-mail distribution lists.

*The Membership Directory* previously was prepared, proofed, and printed semi-annually by the administrative staff for all members, but a continuously current edition is now available for members via the Member Portal. Because it is linked to the registration system, members have instant access to the most accurate contact information for each member. E-mail addresses are listed as live links so that members need only click on the address to send a message to someone. Of course, members have the option of declining to have their information listed in the directory.

*The OLLI Communicator* is a one-page document produced by the staff to provide a consistent vehicle for announcements and reminders when classes are in session. The executive director e-mails the edition for the upcoming week to

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the persons who have been selected as class “liaisons” for that term.

The *Member Handbook* is a joint project of the Membership and Communications Committees, revised as needed, and provides the membership with an overview of the organization and explains the many volunteer opportunities. It is available online via the Web site.

*Fairfax Ink* is typically produced annually to feature short stories, poems, and other writings from OLLI members. The editor is normally the coordinator of the Fiction Writers’ Club, which serves as the editorial board.

*Poets of Tallwood* is commonly published every two years to feature original poetry written by OLLI members. The editor is normally the moderator of the Poetry Workshop; the group serves as the editorial board.

### A Better Kind of Mail

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In addition to bringing about a revolution in publications, the Internet has made communication via e-mail almost instantaneous. We have greatly reduced our dependence on envelope-stuffing and postage-stamp licking. The staff, board members, and most committee chairs now rely on e-mail distribution groups to quickly communicate with groups of volunteers, to organize meetings, and exchange ideas and feedback. According to Canyock, “The various committees and the Board in the past had to convene in order to discuss and vote upon issues facing the Institute, delaying action. With the advent of e-mail and the use of the Internet to create special chat rooms, decisions could be reached without face-to-face meetings and obtaining a quorum was no longer a problem.”

These changes in the quality and speed of communications have also brought about a need for a code of courtesy and a reality check in expectations. We all have experienced the urge to pound out an emotional response and click “send” before we have thoroughly thought about the repercussions. We sometimes provide a 500-word treatise when only a brief “sounds good to me” would suffice. There will always be a need for personal communication via phone or face-to-face. After all, human beings cannot adequately interpret the full meaning of communication without seeing facial expressions or hearing inflection and tone of voice. We’re still learning about this at OLLI-Mason.

To take advantage of Internet and computer applications between rooms and campuses we’ve installed wired Ethernet and secure wireless access points and repeaters. We have installed a dedicated server to host Web sites for the investment forum, the PC user group, the document storage site, and special projects (such as the silent auction Web site).

### Catalysts for Change

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Key individuals served as change agents to keep up with the demands and expectations of our growing organization: Charles Duggan (president, 2004-2006), Gordon Canyock (Communications chair, 2005-present), Michael Coyne and John West (Webmasters), and Rod Zumbro (*OLLI E-News* creator and editor, 2005-present).

When the organization first opened its doors in 1991 as the Learning in Retirement Institute (LRI), there were fewer than 100 members. According to Lilyan Spero, one of the founders, most of them had been friends and acquaintances.

tances for years and there was little need for formal communication vehicles. More often than not, people picked up the phone (a land-line with a cord attached) and made arrangements for meetings and course offerings in one-on-one conversations. Usually, someone would take handwritten notes as decisions were made and then type them up on a typewriter.

As the organization grew through the 1990s, it became difficult for every member to make it to every meeting. New faces began to appear in classes and there was a need for more formal communications. Members volunteered to put together a newsletter and they continued to publish the *LRI News* for the next several years. It became much easier to collect and edit articles for two to four pages each quarter using a personal computer. The newsletters were copied on a Xerox machine, stapled by hand, folded, and distributed in classes.

In the early days, there was one part-time staff member, so most communication was done by member volunteers, and this helped to create the “membership-driven” philosophy that continues today. Additional part-time staff members were hired to assist the members who were trying to communicate as the number of committees and curriculum “resource groups” grew. By the late 90s, member Marjorie White, a retired editor at Kiplinger and a very talented writer, put together a short newsletter each week when OLLI was in session.

An additional area of communication need arose as the number of concurrent classes expanded and the Institute began offering classes at multiple locations: a way to make timely announcements and reminders to members. There was also a desire to have a place to share personal writing. The first *Poets of Tallwood* was published with original poetry in 1996.

By the time our LRI received its initial grant from the Osher Foundation, our membership had grown to almost 600 members. We became the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University in 2004. We were now part of a national network of similar organizations and poised to make a leap in improving our communications.

Charles Duggan, former president of OLLI, has been credited with the inspiration to move toward the electronic newsletter. Duggan recalls that, “When I became president in June 2004, believing that we were not communicating enough with the membership, I started a practice of sending out a president’s e-mail message each week to all the members with e-mail (85% at the time). I consciously kept it short (about 200 words) and sometimes focused on important matters, sometimes promoted an event, and sometimes just talked about subjects people might find interesting.

“During the 2004/2005 year, Gordon and Rod (with the help of Webmaster Michael Coyne) figured out a way to send out the newsletter electronically and started to make it a year-round weekly publication (rather than only when class was in session). I recall that they prepared it both ways: e-mail format and print format. This became a tedious task and they quickly adopted the one format we have today. As the e-mail became the medium to report news in a timely manner, I adjusted the subject matter of my weekly president’s message.”

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## A Never-Ending Journey

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Twenty-first Century  
Communications  
for OLLI

marily for the joy of the journey rather than the outdated idea that we can ever arrive at a complete mastery of any field. This is certainly true in the area of communications. To help our institute move forward in this area, we have formed the “Tom Swift Squad,” formally known as the Audio-Visual Support Committee, to investigate every aspect of technology as it can be used to improve our communications, enhance the learning environment, and better serve our members.

With each new communication enhancement, obstacles such as cost and the need for training must be met head-on. For example, we needed to find the best way to distribute our weekly *E-News* to almost 1,000 individual e-mail addresses. Our initial distributions were rejected as spam by our Internet Service Provider (ISP). Even when we divided up the mailings into several smaller distributions lists, some of our members’ ISPs rejected our mass mailings. We also had the ongoing problem of maintaining up-to-date e-mail addresses for our current, former, and prospective members. Just recently, the software developer who designed our Member Portal and registration system has enabled us to send the *OLLI E-News* and other “blasts” using the e-mail addresses that are in the member database, a major step forward that streamlines the whole process.

“In the future,” Canyock states, “as travel time to and between campuses increases due to population expansion in northern Virginia, some members may request live televised classes, beamed over the Internet to their home computers. Others may desire to have access to an OLLI Community Bulletin Board where they can exchange information, ask questions, and seek advice on a wide variety of subjects unrelated to our program.”

It is exciting to realize that the tools that I am using to write this article will be improved in ways that I can’t even imagine. The Boomers who will increasingly join our OLLI will bring even higher expectations for the quality and effectiveness of communication. And of course, we can learn even more from our grandchildren who are as comfortable with new forms of communication as they are breathing air!

Of course, some things will always be the same. It is not easy convincing seniors to change something that has been working relatively well for them. Lilyan Spero reminisces about the days when everything was communicated one-on-one. According to our current surveys, that is still the predominant way that our new members say they heard about us, in a personal conversation with a friend or neighbor. And in our ongoing discussions about the need for volunteers, what I hear time and time again is that the most successful way to “hook” a new prospect is to start a dialogue and begin a personal relationship.

But hang on; one-on-one conversations are no longer sufficient for OLLI communications in the 21st century. The journey to improve communication will continue to be both challenging and fun.

**Thom Clement** has been the executive director for OLLI/Mason since January 2008. His previous career as an elementary school principal and teacher enabled him to foster lifelong learning skills and attitudes in individuals at the other end of the continuum of education. Thom and his wife Carol live in northern Virginia and have four sons.

## Fiddling Around with Seniors

**Eleanor Lehmann**

### Abstract

*Although perhaps not among life's greatest challenges, learning to play an instrument in later life is a challenge nonetheless. One cannot understand the enormous undertaking involved until one commits to getting started. Then it falls upon the instructor to take this enthusiasm for learning and turn it into success.*

Imagine, if you will, two neighbors chatting over their garden fence when the sounds of a violin waft through the air. One neighbor says to the other: "My son seems to be making remarkable progress with his violin lessons." The neighbor responds, "Oh, that isn't Alex. His grandmother started taking violin lessons at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute last year." This scenario really didn't take place, but then again it might have.

In the spring of 2007 I volunteered to teach "Beginning Violin" for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine in Portland. Imagine my surprise and delight to learn that eight people had signed up to take my course. As they told me during the first class, they had always wanted to play a violin but the years had passed with no opportunity to do so. Now, that opportunity had arrived.

As a professional violinist-violist, I had years of teaching experience in the public schools and in a private studio with children as well as adults. As I went about preparing material for this class, I felt fully confident in what I was about to undertake. I chose certain studies from various method books to fit a progressive learning plan tailored to meet the needs of the senior adult student. I also decided to print an extensive amount of material, since I didn't know the pace at which my students could learn. Having prepared the musical material and relying on my years of experience, I felt perfectly secure in teaching this subject matter. However, the teacher quickly became the student.

First hurdle: Nothing was wrong with my lesson plans, but I didn't take into consideration the fact that arms and fingers over a certain age were not as pliable as they once had been, making the playing of this particular instru-

As they told me during the first class, they had always wanted to play a violin but the years had passed with no opportunity to do so. Now, that opportunity had arrived.

## Fiddling Around with Seniors

ment uncomfortable for many. I had to learn to be careful with the demands I made of my older students. For example, I always have my students stand during lessons in order to develop proper posture for playing a violin. Good position enables us to have additional flexibility when playing this instrument. However, in this particular situation, although my students were game to try, I quickly found that sitting was more comfortable for them. I did end up letting them make the choice. Many chose to stand until they got tired, and then they sat down.

Classes at OLLI are two hours long. This is a long time for anyone to stand or sit with a violin tucked under their chin. So I alternated actual performance time with brief periods of written music theory and exercises. It provided a relaxed learning period and a break from holding the instrument.

Second hurdle: I had to adapt the holding of the violin bow. There are good reasons why violinists hold the violin and bow the way we do. In performance, much of the music you hear, with its variety of sound effects, depends on how we use the bow. This begins with the bow hold. However, the senior student's arms and fingers are not as supple as they once were. Another factor to consider was that they wanted to learn violin for the pure joy of playing a simple song or two, which does not require technique for fancy bow work. One of my students, due to arthritis, had difficulty folding his fingers around the slender bow stick. I came up with the idea of placing a small piece of insulation tubing around the stick to make it thicker, thus allowing him a more comfortable grip as well as control of the bow. And so we did the best we could under these circumstances.

Third hurdle: Vision was another "eye-opener" (please excuse the pun). While instructing small children to read music, I use large print. This enables them to see and process the notes without suffering the frustrations of making errors due to optical illusions, of which there are many in reading music. Teens and young adults seem to resolve these problems more easily, because of vision and brain development. But now we come to the senior. Reading the small notes became a real obstacle to many in the group. This problem was resolved by using the larger printed music. As my students became accustomed to reading the music and learning musical patterns, I was able to gradually introduce the smaller print.

Fourth hurdle: In the classroom, young students rarely ask questions pertaining to the subject being taught, but adults and seniors love to ask questions. Many questions raise important issues, and for the process of learning deserve comprehensive answers. To the beginning violinist some of these answers could lead to confusion, inviting more questions in a desperate attempt to clarify the original question. I found it necessary to choose which questions would be helpful when answered and which to "put on hold" for future opportunity, using diplomatic flair to avoid hurting feelings.

The philosophy by which I guide my classes for seniors is: "Join the group and learn to play violin using a stress-free and fun method. This course will teach the rudiments of music while at the same time, the art of violin playing. Learn with others to perform simple but delightful music."

The process of learning to play a musical instrument is beneficial to

mental health at any age. The concentration and muscle coordination involved stimulate mental and physical development. The actual success achieved in attaining a goal of this nature, that of producing music for the first time, gives one a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.

At the end of the eighth session all of the artistic classes at OLLI, e.g., chorus, theater arts and violin, were invited to perform in a joint recital. The beginning violin class controlled their stage fright and outdid themselves in performance, receiving a standing ovation from the packed auditorium. The program was even recorded for the Maine Public Broadcasting Network. Needless to say my students and I were on a high for days afterwards.

Learning any instrument, especially the violin, is not an easy challenge to take on, especially in later age. So “Bravo!” to those who try.

**Eleanor Lehmann** began her musical studies on violin at an early age in San Francisco. After receiving a degree in music from the California State University in San Francisco, she began her career as a music teacher in the public schools. Shortly thereafter, she made a move to Mexico where she played violin and viola in a number of professional orchestras. She also performed as soloist and chamber musician. In 1986 she returned to the United States and entered the teaching profession in California. After 15 years of service in public schools she moved to Maine. She now has a studio for young violinists and violists and, as a member of the Portland Rossini and Marston-Kotzchmar Clubs of Portland, performs frequently with various ensembles. In 2007 Eleanor began teaching at OLLI at the University of Southern Maine.

## Losing the Forest

**Ruth Webber Evans**

It's like losing the forest one tree at a time.

it doesn't have to be a close friend to miss them,  
the husband of our attorney, not someone I knew,  
but someone people I know admired, suddenly  
he is gone—a hole—a missing place.

The town is full of them, these missing places  
and the mail box brings news of death  
instead of long, chatty letters with little red hearts  
dancing along the address.

Telephones ring unanswered  
until the service is cut off –

a friend reunites to tell me his brother, the one  
who sat eating grapes by the pool, has died  
sometimes it seems more than I can bear

this open, naked landscape  
no shade anywhere.

**Ruth Webber Evans** has recently (at age 77) earned her M.F.A. in poetry from Vermont College of Fine Arts. This was an outgrowth of a poetry group led by the poet Henry Brawn, which started as a Gold Leaf course at the University of Maine, Farmington. Ruth's poems have been published online at: [www.dailybulldog.com](http://www.dailybulldog.com), the *Aurorean*, *The Wolf Moon Journal*, *Puckerbush Press*, and the *Beloit Poetry Journal*.

## The Old Woman and Time

**Sophie Freud**

Was it only yesterday  
or ten years ago  
I stood on one foot  
straight as a tree  
in my yoga class  
arms over head  
saluting the sun?  
This is so easy, I thought,  
I could stand here all day.  
Today, time's typhoon  
threatens to blow me down  
as I stumble along  
on both feet.

**Sophie Freud** came to the United States at the age of 18 as a refugee from Austria and France. She graduated from Harvard University with a B.A. in psychology, from Simmons College School of Social Work with an M.S.W., and 25 years later from Brandeis University with a Ph.D. in social welfare. Before becoming a study group leader at the OLLI at Brandeis, Sophie was a professor for 30 years at the Simmons College School of Social Work.

## Going with the Flow: Tai Chi Chuan and Aging Gracefully

**Fred Brancato**

### Abstract

*In an OLLI course designed and facilitated by the author, ancient Eastern philosophies are combined with physical movement in such a manner that older men and women move in slow, dance-like ways. In this article core principles of the Tao Te Ching and Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan) are explained with an eye toward helping people to age thoughtfully and gracefully.*

“If you realize that all things change, there is nothing you will try to hold onto”

—Lao Tzu, 6th Century B.C.

In parks throughout China and in studios across America today, it is not uncommon to see groups of men and women of all ages moving in slow, dance-like ways. They're practicing the physical and mental exercise of Tai Chi Chuan (“Grand Ultimate Fist”). Tai Chi Chuan (also spelled Taijiquan) is an ancient Chinese art known by its practitioners to enhance health of mind and body. Its health benefits are also increasingly affirmed by modern medical research. Taijiquan, with its soft, flowing movements and underlying wisdom about living in harmony with the way of nature, is an effective vehicle for aging gracefully.

During the past five years, I have had the good fortune of sharing what I learned about Eastern philosophy and Taijiquan with students of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Southern Maine. I'm 71 years old and have been studying the world's diverse spiritual traditions for 50 years, while practicing Taijiquan for the last 21. In 2003, with encouragement from the chair of our senior college's curriculum committee, we began offering a course that mixed the movements of Taijiquan with discussion of Eastern philosophy. OLLI's students enthusiastically responded to a class routine that began with 40 minutes of “soft” Chinese exercise, called Qigong (“the practice of energy development”) followed by 40 minutes of philosophical discussion. This allowed time for rest before ending class with another

40 minutes of Taijiquan practice. Participating students, whose ages ranged from 50 to 90, often noted how the effortless movements and gentle breath of Qigong and Taijiquan calmed their minds, improved their balance, eased joint stiffness, and stimulated feelings of vitality. One person with diabetes reported lower blood sugar levels.

### Origins of Taijiquan

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Taijiquan was born of a marriage between Qigong and Shaolin Kung Fu. Qigong is an ancient exercise developed by Taoist monks to increase internal energy; Shaolin Kung Fu is a martial art developed by Taoist and Chan Buddhist monks for spiritual practice and self-defense during a violent era in China's history. A 14th-century monk by the name of Zhang Sanfeng is generally credited with blending Qigong's principles of body alignment, soft flowing motion, and harmonious breath with the martial art movements of Kung Fu. During the centuries that followed, three principal styles of Taijiquan evolved: the Chen, Yang, and Wu styles, named after the families who preserved and further developed them. It was not until the 20th century that Taijiquan became more widely practiced in China and spread to other parts of the world.

Taijiquan has unique value on three levels: First, as a vehicle for calming and centering the mind (it has often been described as stillness in motion); second, as a way of stimulating physical health and well-being; and third, as the highest form of martial art. It is said of Taijiquan as a martial art that "four ounces deflects a thousand pounds." However, this can only be experienced after decades of concentrated intention and practice. For us, and the vast majority of people who take up this profound and complex, yet simple art, the two related reasons for practicing Taijiquan are health of body and serenity of mind.

### Principles of Taijiquan Movement

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"The hard and stiff will be broken. The soft and supple will prevail."

—*Tao Te Ching*

There are several principles of movement that guide the practice of Taijiquan. Developing the ability to simultaneously implement these principles of movement—while at the same time learning Taijiquan's specific postures and form—challenges and feeds what neurologists call the brain's plasticity. This is especially good for us as we age because recent brain research shows that development of new motor and spatial skills enhances all functions of the brain.

The fundamental principles of Taijiquan's movement are as follows: 1) vertical alignment of skeletal structure and elongation of the spine; 2) soft, relaxed muscle; 3) natural, unforced breath; 4) movement directed by the lower spine and abdomen; 5) continuous and coordinated movement of all parts of the body; 6) circular and gentle, spiral-like motions of the spine and limbs; and 7) rhythmical shifting of body weight from one leg to the other. Instead of the "no pain, no gain" approach to exercise witnessed in many gyms, the mantra I would ascribe to Taijiquan is "no pain, no way ... move like water and follow

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Going with the Flow: Tai Chi Chuan and Aging Gracefully

the path of least resistance.” Such low impact and gentle movements that stay within the comfort zone of an aging body are good not only for the brain, but for better balance, flexibility, strength, and agility. It is important to note that the practice of Qigong and Taijiquan can be adjusted to a sitting position.

### Internal flow

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Taijiquan’s posture, easy breath, and soft, flowing movements stimulate what Chinese medicine calls the “meridians,” the “gates,” the acupuncture points through which the body’s vivifying energy flows. It is the essential view of Chinese medicine that health and well-being exist when this internal, vital energy (“chi”) flows unimpeded through the body. When this energy is blocked and does not flow freely, disease and poor health result. The primary effect and goal of Taijiquan practice (even as a martial art) is to increase, cultivate, and consciously guide the flow of this vital energy. In Taoist philosophy, this vital force that animates the human body also powers the sun and greening grass.

### Internal Disposition

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“Be still as a mountain, move like a river”

—Wu Yu-Hsiang

Taijiquan’s internal state of mind and emotion is as important as its bodily movement. As we know, mind and body are inseparably linked and powerfully influence one another. This connection is deeper than the physiological bond between the brain and the rest of the body. There is the tendency in Western culture to think that mind and body, physical and spiritual, sacred and secular are actually separate entities. This is not so in Taoist and Buddhist traditions, especially the Chan and Zen Buddhist traditions of China and Japan which were influenced by Taoism. For them, and other traditions as well, enlightenment moves beyond the world of arbitrary mental distinctions to the realization that spirit and matter are one.

It is well-known that high anxiety and mental stress are detrimental to bodily health, and conversely pain and poor health tend to dim a person’s disposition. It naturally follows that a body without tension fosters a mind that is calm. Even physical posture has an effect on attitude, and attitude in turn affects posture. So, too, the movements and breath of Taijiquan significantly influence a person’s state of mind and the state of one’s mind greatly affects the movements and breath of Taijiquan. When trying to follow the age old instruction that Taijiquan movements be “light and agile,” I think, “so, too, my mind.”

The Taijiquan state of mind is calm and still, open and receptive, connected and interactive. Integral to this mental and emotional state is the absence of pre-conceived notions and judgments. Expectations and gaining ideas are dropped. Overall, there is an internal disposition of “letting go,” deep listening and readiness to respond. For this to occur, the mind must be completely still and present. It so happens that all of these interrelated qualities of mind and emotion are the ideal not only for the practice of Taijiquan, but of the mysti-

cal traditions found in Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the indigenous peoples of North America. Needless to say, this state of mind is significant for the quality of one's interior life and has side benefits extending not only to the body, but to those we love.

### Taijiquan and Taoist Philosophy

The internal disposition of Taijiquan is rooted in four core views of Taoist philosophy. The first view, from which the others derive, is that of Wu Chi (the "Grand Void"). Wu Chi is the infinite, un-manifest source of all that is or can possibly be, and no created entity can comprehend it. Although it is referenced as the "Void," it is really not void as we understand the word. Rather it contains all things in its oneness, and, in a way beyond all human thought, is all things. It is, as Taoists would say, "Beyond being and non-being." Nothing can be predicated of it. This is similar to references made in other traditions to the "Godhead."

Second, Wu Chi manifests itself as Tai Chi ("Grand Ultimate"). Tai Chi is what the Taoists call the world of "10,000 things." It is the infinitely vast universe of all creation. It is the world of "this and that," distinctions and polarities, unity and separateness, harmony and discord, hot and cold, birth and death, balance and imbalance. Taoist terminology for this range of Tai Chi manifestation is "yang" (the Creative) and "yin" (the Receptive), two words that have become fairly familiar worldwide. Tai Chi is in the process of continual movement and change and all change is a fluctuating blend of yang and yin, the inseparable powers of creativity and receptivity. In this dynamic interaction between yang and yin, each is contained within the other.

Similarly, within the continuously changing world of Tai Chi is Wu Chi, oneness and stillness itself. This aspect of the Taoist world view is reflected in the practice of Taijiquan, for within the movements of Taijiquan there is an inner stillness and unity from which motion arises. And like the ebb and flow of yang and yin, every entity that emanates from Wu Chi into Tai Chi returns to Wu Chi. This is symbolically represented in Taijiquan's customary practice of beginning and ending with what is called the Wu Chi stance.

The third core element in Taoist philosophy is focused on how to live in harmony with the way of Wu Chi and Tai Chi. It's called "wu wei," variously translated "doing without doing," "not doing," or "letting it be." Wu wei involves doing or acting in harmony with the way of nature and our human identity. "Doing without doing" involves listening deeply with an inner ear to the hidden way of the universe and letting oneself be moved by it. This "way" of the universe is called the "Tao," another term that has become fairly familiar to westerners.

An analogy that I think captures the meaning of "doing without doing" comes from a personal experience and lesson I received 20 years ago while whitewater rafting on reputedly the swiftest river east of the Mississippi. While floating downstream toward the roar of the rapids in a small raft that held only three people (a guide, another person, and me), the young guide led us through some paddling practice drills for maneuvering the raft. He said that when we entered the rapids his job was to "read" the river to locate the current.

Such low impact and gentle movements that stay within the comfort zone of an aging body are good not only for the brain, but for better balance, flexibility, strength, and agility.

## Going with the Flow: Tai Chi Chuan and Aging Gracefully

Our job was to follow his instructions about when to paddle and when to stop. The lesson came when he informed us that paddling was only done to enter the current. Once in the current we were to stop paddling and let its flow take us around the rocks and whirlpools without mishap. While in the current we were to do nothing but let ourselves be carried by it. If flipped out of the raft for any reason, we were not to stand-up in the river and resist its flow because we would be sucked under (which has its own metaphor for what can happen when resisting change). With this young man's guidance, we had the wonderful experience of being carried effortlessly by the river's powerful current around and past all the danger spots. This is "doing without doing."

When "doing without doing," the mover and guide of the action is the Tao, the "Way," of the universe. When attuned to its current, nothing is forced and the action is effortless. One characterization of "wu wei" is "the action does itself." Athletes, artists, and musicians who have experienced this phenomenon call it "the zone." It's where thought and pre-meditation dissolve, and something else takes over. The music plays itself, the painting paints itself, and the athlete's body makes a seemingly miraculous move that cannot be consciously replicated.

This kind of action, or non-action, is the pinnacle of Taijiquan. It is the centuries-old counsel of Taijiquan masters that if internally still and receptive enough, a time will come when the movement of Taijiquan arises by itself. At such times there is nothing to do but follow its flow. These same masters have frequently used images of water and its qualities to depict the movement and internal disposition of Taijiquan. Water exemplifies "doing without doing" and serves as a model for Taijiquan practitioners.

The fourth core view of Taoist philosophy is the all pervading presence of "chi," the vital energy which gives life and form to all beings. The Hindu tradition calls this same life force "prana." Similar to the experience of yogis who evolved the techniques of Hinduism's Hatha Yoga, Taoists found that this vital energy can be cultivated through certain types of exercise and ultimately directed by the mind. As referenced earlier, the cultivation of "chi" and conscious guidance of its flow within the body are among Taijiquan's features related to health and well-being.

### Taijiquan and Aging Gracefully

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I am increasingly struck by the deeply intimate connection between the state of my body and the state of my mind. The more Taijiquan increases my body awareness, the more I realize the extent to which my anxieties and fearful thoughts, for example, are registered in my body and held there. There's the slight slump in my posture, the tension in my muscles and the constriction of my breath. In these moments, it is clear that the presence of anxiety and fear in my body contributes, in turn, to being mentally and emotional stuck in them. However, when I elongate my spine, soften my muscle, and ease my breathing, I experience an immediate mental and emotional release of the anxious and fearful thoughts plaguing me. I'm momentarily liberated from the paralyzing constriction of mind and body. This phenomenon is pivotal to why the practice of Taijiquan is related to gracefulness.

Gracefulness has an ease and naturalness, expressive of harmony. Nothing is forced. Nothing is contrived. It has a centered, calm quality that silently speaks of comfort with change and what is presented in the moment. Gracefulness is fluid and responsive, with no trace of rigidity, intolerance, or inner conflict. There is, too, a simplicity about it that reflects wholeness and integrity, qualities that make something beautiful. In this sense, grace and beauty are one and evoke similar feelings of awe in their presence. The dictionary defines grace as “beauty of form, manner, motion, or act.” Among the indigenous peoples of North America, the Navajo have an expression, “walking in beauty.” It means living in harmony with all relations and the way of the universe. “Walking in beauty” and Taoism’s “doing without doing” are good synonyms for living gracefully.

“Aging” is a contextual and relative term, with many connotations. At one end of the spectrum it evokes thoughts of loss: loss of looks, value, stature, capabilities, autonomy and being part of the mainstream. At the other end of the spectrum, aging signifies unfolding, evolving, perfecting, and ripening, as in wine. Like the flow between yang and yin, aging involves both loss and unfolding. Both are the realities of change. Learning to move, and live, in harmony with change and its yang-yin dynamic is a dimension in Taijiquan deeper than its health aspects.

While the irreversible, unstoppable current of change is a fact of life, it can be influenced by what we do mentally and physically. Minus the pre-conceived notions and judgments engendered by our culture about growing old, aging is simply change. Mindful of the profound connection between mind and body, it is reasonable to suggest that as we think and act, so do we age. Aging gracefully is about unfolding in the midst of loss. It’s not about resisting change in our bodies, or minds. It’s not about removing the lines aging naturally brings to our faces, but shaping them with a life lived in a graceful manner.

The health and fitness benefits of Taijiquan are integral to aging gracefully. Greater health, energy, balance, flexibility, and agility positively affect the beauty of our form, manner, motions and actions.

The following quotation from the “Book of the Way” (*Tao Te Ching*, 6th century B.C.) captures the essence of Taoism’s “doing without doing,” which is at the heart of Taijiquan and aging gracefully. In this translation by James Legge, the word “simplicity” is used to depict the Chinese character for “Tao.”

Simplicity without a name  
Is free from all external aim.  
With no desire, at rest and still,  
All things go right of their will.

**Fred Brancato** earned a Ph.D. from New York University’s Department of Culture and Communication and has been studying the world’s diverse religious traditions for 50 years. In his retirement, he teaches Tai Chi and courses about Eastern philosophy and Native American world views. He is the author of a new book entitled *Ancient Wisdom and the Measure of Our Days: The Spiritual Dimensions of Retirement, Aging and Loss*.

## The Fisher-Folk

**M.E. Hansburg**

*The story "Fisher-Folk" is one of a collection. More stories may be found at [www.classjump.com/threecreeksOhio](http://www.classjump.com/threecreeksOhio).*

**T**he Lake Erie walleye are biting, and the weather was pretty darn good this weekend. It was a good weekend for the obsessive anglers from Three Creeks. They had spent the night before, in Marblehead, trying to figure if there would be any way to s-t-r-e-t-c-h the legal limit of a half-dozen fish into, well, perhaps, a dozen? The Sheriff, being a law man, knew they wouldn't do it, but the thought of two dozen walleye, twelve in the freezer sure sounded good.

Lamar laughed out loud. "I can see the headline in the Three Creeks paper, 'Sheriff caught hiding six frozen fish, a cold crime on a hot July day!'"

"Very funny, Lamar!" replied the Sheriff. "The only problem with your plan is there won't be any extra fish! When the walleye see your red shirt they will jump right off the fish hook and back in the lake." Lamar had worn his favorite fishing shirt: cheery, cherry red. It was a tad faded but still beckoned amused looks from bystanders. This shirt had the sense of a drippy cherry popsicle, the kind that left you with sticky fingers and a red smear across your cheeks. Lamar was positively superstitious about his red fishing shirt. He knew this shirt was a fish-magnet and increased his catch numbers, no matter what the Sheriff thought.

These fisher-folk were up early. The walleye were moving in the deeper waters. There was a large number spotted between Huron and Vermillion about eight miles offshore.

Lamar could not wait to sink his line in the water. Feisty walleye waited to feed off spinner rigs and night crawlers. Because the walleye were most active early and late in the day, fisher-folk must work while the light levels were low. That worked out just fine for Lamar and the Sheriff. They could fish from 5 to 10 a.m. Come back to the cabin, clean the morning catch, put them on ice, and head over for a beer and a game of pool at Bud's Fishing Camp Store. By

the time you had a late lunch, and returned to straighten up the cabin, it was time to launch the boat for the late afternoon expedition.

While at Bud's Store, Lamar had picked up some postcards. He never said much about his feelings, but Lamar knew that his niece and nephew would want a postcard, his folks would want a postcard, and Lamar wanted to send a postcard to Maddie Gowank at the Blessed Sacrament Retirement Center. Maddie loved getting mail. She would sit on the porch of the Retirement Center and read all her mail to Ben. Ben was Maddie's husband and he did not see so well anymore. Maddie would tell you this. Truth is, Ben had passed. But Maddie chatted with him all day long. Maddie knew that Ben was dead, but she kept up a regular line of conversation. Either she knew and did not believe it, or she knew and simply talked to his ghost.

In the lulling moments in the boat, while reeling in and reeling out, the Sheriff and Lamar had short two- and three-word conversations. These short conversations held the same sanctity as the confessions in church. Fisher-folk talk stayed between fisher-folk. No outsiders needed to know. So it was in the lapping moments between fish bites that Lamar told the Sheriff what he had discovered about his life from the last time he'd visited at his parents' place.

Lamar's folks lived in town now, but it hadn't always been that way. As a kid, Lamar's family had lived on the very edge of town. Lamar and his sister had taken the bus to school because they were just over the two-mile limit, and so rode the bus with all the kids from Jefferson County. Lamar had never guessed that his life had begun so strangely. He never thought that his take on the family was any different from his older sister Cathleen. Now Lamar knew different.

The last time Lamar had been to his folks' place for dinner, his Mom had asked him to go up into the attic of the new house and bring down her sewing kit. Last winter when they moved in, the box with the sewing kit had been moved into the attic by the movers. Lamar was happy to oblige. As he climbed the stairs of this new, smaller house, he made a mental note of how much smaller this house was than the one where he'd grown up. In his childhood home, the rooms were large and numerous, big farmhouse rooms, plenty of space for living. Maybe because the rooms were so large, the family planned on having lots of children.

Once in the attic, Lamar opened up box after box looking for the sewing kit. He found it eventually, but not until after he'd found something else, something that maybe explained much. While moving in the attic, Lamar bumped into an old desk stuck in a corner, and a leatherbound notebook fell off the desk and onto the floor. The notebook opened and papers flew everywhere. Lamar was disgusted by his own clumsiness and leaned over to pick up the notebook and the loose paperwork. That was when he saw his name on one of the pieces of paper: Lamar Jorgenson. What? That wasn't his last name. Lamar looked carefully through the stack of old and yellowed papers. Court papers. Adoption papers. Lamar stood dazed by what he read.

Lamar was adopted. There was the paperwork: Jefferson County Courthouse. His throat tightened. Lamar swallowed hard. Now? Now he put together why there were no baby pictures from the hospital. Unlike Cathleen,

Truth is, Ben had passed. But Maddie chatted with him all day long. Maddie knew that Ben was dead, but she kept up a regular line of conversation. Either she knew and did not believe it, or she knew and simply talked to his ghost.

## The Fisher Folk

her baby pictures showed her in the hospital and the coming home ceremony and the baptism. Lamar's pictures started only with the baptism. Now he knew why. Lamar was not sure what he felt. Curiosity? Anger? Regret? Why hadn't the family told him? Why the secret? Lamar was not sure if he wanted to keep his discovery to himself or confront his parents and ask why?

He heard his Mom call up the stairs. He heard his own voice respond as though nothing unusual had occurred. Lamar returned downstairs with the sewing kit, having returned the notebook to the desk. They had dinner and Lamar's Mom had made his favorite dessert, cherries jubilee. He said nothing all through dinner and seemed very subdued. Lamar parried his parents' queries by relating how he'd pulled a double shift at the firehouse and was just tired. A bit later, Lamar hugged his folks, got in his red VW and returned to his apartment across town. He told no one about what he'd discovered.

On the lake that July afternoon as the sun smiled steady and low in the sky, Lamar asked the Sheriff a question.

"Do you think people keep secrets because they are ashamed of something?"

"That's a possibility, Lamar. But my experience tells me it is the quality of the folks that's more important than the secret itself. Some folks keep secrets because they don't want to hurt another's feelings. Others keep secrets because they have reason to regret something. I make the judgment that if the quality of the folks is good, the secret was meant to spare another pain or sadness. Nothing more," so replied the Sheriff while baiting his hook for another turn at catching walleye.

"Okay, that seems to make sense," replied Lamar. He seemed to relax and settle into the boat. Fishing was the best prescription for a life well-lived. No truth like a fish truth.

Three days later, when the Sheriff and Lamar returned to Three Creeks, they came as "Greeks bearing gifts," with 6, 3- and 4-pound walleye packed in ice. Fisher-folk had once again redefined themselves by the measure of wind, water, fish, and friendship. It was a real good trip.

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## Retirement: A Time of Significant Personal Growth and Contribution

**Jack Hansen and Jerry Haas**

### Abstract

*This article reports selected findings from research on personal dimensions of the transition from full-time career pursuit to retirement and the implications of these results for lifelong learning programs. These findings are drawn from in-depth interviews of 45 retired professionals from around the country in which the impact of this transition on relationships, feelings of self-worth and purpose, and spiritual and intellectual growth were explored.*

### Introduction

Advice to those approaching and in retirement is dominated by such topics as finances, health and fitness, and desirable places to live. The underlying supposition of our time seems to be that retirement consists of endless recreation made possible by a big nest egg, good health, and desirable surroundings. A few authors, however, have begun to recognize and focus on the more personal dimensions of this life transition, the excellent article by Sherburne in last year's *LLI Review* (2008) on the role of spirituality in this phase of life being one example.

Our own research of the past two years complements such work. We have conducted in-depth interviews of 45 retired professionals from around the country, focusing in particular on how the transition from full-time work to a part-time role or retirement has affected relationships, feelings of self-worth and purpose, and spiritual and intellectual growth. These more personal factors are in fact central to our sense of well-being and fulfillment in retirement, just as they are in every other phase of adult life. We know this from our own experience, and it is also borne out by studies of other stages of adulthood. For example, Sheehy (1995) identifies changes in purpose, relationships, and spirituality as key issues to be worked through as we go through "middle life," which in her work spans the age range of mid-40s through early 60s.

Our findings on the personal dimensions of this transition are reported fully in a forthcoming book on the subject (Hansen and Haas, 2010). In the

We have conducted in-depth interviews of 45 retired professionals from around the country, focusing in particular on how the transition from full-time work to a part-time role or retirement has affected relationships.

## Retirement: A Time of Significant Personal Growth and Contribution

present context we summarize the methods employed in the study and the essential results, and then explore the implications of some of the results for lifelong learning programs.

### Methodology

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An interview questionnaire was developed and refined in collaboration with current retirees and individuals who have studied other life transitions. The interviewer posed the same questions about the following topics to all participants: (1) nature of work before retirement and how the transition from full-time employment was made; (2) how time and energy are being invested after retirement; (3) impact of retirement on significant relationships, both inside and outside the family; (4) effects of retirement on feelings of self-worth; (5) changes in spiritual interests and concerns experienced in moving into retirement. Additionally, advice was solicited from each participant for organizations seeking to serve growing retiree populations and for individuals contemplating retirement. Every conversation was nevertheless unique in that it also included follow-up and clarification questions and interactions. This form of interview, sometimes referred to as an “intensive interview” (Charmaz, 2006) is characterized by a focus on each individual’s interpretation of his or her experience at a deeper level than typical conversation between peers. Every participant was given a guarantee of confidentiality to allow them to speak freely and honestly.

The perspectives we have drawn from the interviews have been refined through interactions with over 100 additional retirees, as well as with a smaller number of individuals (pastors, physicians, financial planners, etc.) who serve retirees. These have been both one-on-one interactions and also small-group discussions. These additional interactions give independent validation of and fidelity to the conclusions drawn from the interviews.

### The People Interviewed

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The 25 men and 20 women who have been interviewed represent a broad range of executive and professional work experiences. Nine were employed in the private sector, and another nine were pastors or priests. Seven had professor or administrator positions in institutions of higher learning. Six were affiliated with not-for-profit or religious organizations, and six more were health care professionals (doctors, nurses, administrative positions). Three were state or local officials, three were authors, and two worked in primary/secondary education. They also represented various ages at retirement, length of time retired, family circumstances, and health. The average age of the participants when they retired was 62, which corresponds to the most recently reported average retirement age in the U.S. The youngest at retirement was 50 and the oldest 70. They have now been retired an average of six years, with the range being from six months to fourteen years. Some had lived abroad during a part of their careers. About one-half had been married once and their spouse is still living. A smaller percentage were divorced or widowed, and some of these had remarried. A still smaller percentage had never married. Well over half described themselves in good health, but others had experienced significant

health problems either before or since retirement.

Some characteristics were common to the participants. Most consider the spiritual dimension of life important. Most had a college education or equivalent. They seemed highly motivated and generally described themselves as self-starters. And while the individuals on average are probably somewhat more financially secure than the retiree population as a whole, these individuals represented a wide range of financial circumstances. Several authors including Gentzler (2004) have noted that retirees of the baby-boomer generation will be better educated and more well off than any previous generation. Thus, the current study of retired professionals may offer a useful window into the future of retirement as well as into the experience of a significant subset of the current retiree population.

### Common Themes

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Several common themes emerge from these discussions of the personal dimensions of the transition from full-time career to partial or full retirement. For example, several noted their awareness of moving to a “smaller world” of influence, authority, and recognition. By virtue of their own illness or that of someone they know well, others observed their recognition that they are or will experience declining physical capabilities. Quite a significant percentage of those interviewed have been called upon to be a caregiver to a parent, spouse, sibling, or adult child in this phase of life. Most have experienced adjustments in key relationships within their families and challenges in maintaining existing relationships and/or building new friendships. Most were active in volunteer or professional pursuits, or as one person put it, had “retired to something as well as from something.” And finally, many have found this period of life one of significant spiritual development and intellectual growth or contribution.

In this article we shall elaborate on three of these themes (intellectual growth and contribution, spiritual development, and volunteerism) and their possible curriculum implications for lifelong learning programs. Then, we shall discuss how the incidence of care giving and limited mobility may suggest the desirability of remote, on-demand access to some lifelong learning courses.

### Intellectual Growth and Contribution

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Among the retirees interviewed were men and women pursuing intellectual growth through taking courses, private study, and participation in educationally oriented travel. One retired denominational leader gave an example of individual learning. He is improving his foreign language skills through an online course, and he has also completed a science course offered in a similar manner. This form of intellectual enrichment is particularly convenient for him because he does not live close to a city or town with a university. Some of those interviewed do live near universities offering lifelong learning programs, and they take advantage of coursework offered by these institutions. In fact, one of the authors is involved in the OLLI program at Furman University. Still others take advantage of educationally oriented travel opportunities. A retired executive of a religious organization described a trip to eastern Europe that she had recently taken. She selected this particular tour, not only because of her desire

Most were active in volunteer or professional pursuits, or as one person put it, had “retired to something as well as from something.”

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to visit the region, but also because an acknowledged authority on the region led the tour. He gave a set of intellectually stimulating lectures in combination with visits to sites of historical and cultural significance.

Additionally, several people described significant teaching responsibilities that they have undertaken since leaving full-time career pursuits. In fact over 10% of the people we interviewed have taught or are teaching part-time at the college level. Some were faculty members prior to retirement while others have developed areas of expertise that students seek. One retired business executive, for example, began teaching a course on investing at a local university while working full-time; and has continued to do so in retirement. In addition, since retirement he has developed a course on electronic commerce, which he is now offering at the same university. Another interviewee, a retired faculty member, described a full-time, but limited, teaching role he had abroad.

Perhaps most significant, a number of individuals with whom we have interacted are continuing to engage in creative activities. Some are involved in writing projects. One retired pastor, for example, has completed a book on retirement and he is now working on a book of poetry. Another has developed a fundamentally new stock trading methodology about which he is currently writing a book. One woman began writing books in her early 60s and has now had several published. Several others are writing family histories for the benefit of their children and grandchildren. And one of the women we interviewed has again begun painting. She put aside this creative avocation some years ago because of career and family demand, but since retiring has returned to it. Taken together, these activities and contributions suggest that retirement can be an intellectually active and productive time in which one not only grows in knowledge but also imparts this to others and undertakes a range of creative activities. From the enthusiasm with which these activities are described by those engaged in them, it is clear that they are a source of enjoyment and fulfillment in this phase of life.

## Spiritual Development

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Several authors have suggested that later adulthood may be a time of significant spiritual development. A number of the contributors to a volume on religious influences on the health and well-being of older adults (Schaie, *et al.*, 2004) noted the possibility of increasing frequency of prayer with age and also the importance of religion in facing some of the challenges associated with aging. Others, such as Autry (2002) and Koenig (2002), have written about the importance of spirituality in retirement in the broader terms of personal purpose, relationships, and the inner life.

The individuals we interviewed cited additional discretionary time and schedule flexibility associated with retirement or part-time work as the most important reason for significant spiritual growth in this phase of life. One retired nurse summarized a sentiment expressed by many when she talked about the positive impact on her spirituality of "not having to rush out the door to the job each morning." A second important, but less often stated, reason for growing spirituality was declining health and increased awareness of mortality. The spiritual dimensions of these realities caused these individuals to be more spiritually attuned.

Several distinct forms of spiritual growth were articulated. One was increased study of the Bible (or other sacred literature of one's faith). One retired business executive described how spiritually enriching it has been for him to participate in a serious Bible study, involving both daily personal study and then weekly study with a group. A retired pastor noted how enriching he has found reading significant books on spiritual formation, something he had not done with any regularity since completing his formal theological education. This dimension of spiritual growth is closely tied to the intellectual development described by some people interviewed and caused us to think of the two areas as closely connected for some in this stage of life.

Other dimensions of spirituality that blossomed after retirement were the regular practice of such disciplines as meditation and prayer, as well as the assuming of service and leadership roles in one's church or other religious organization. One woman we interviewed, who has written extensively on spiritual topics as a part of her profession, described how the time and freedom to practice spiritual disciplines regularly and in an unhurried manner has allowed her to "get to know God in a much fuller way." Two retired business executives gave examples of service and leadership. One has assumed responsibility for the overseas missionary program of his church, and another has taken a part-time position at his church, overseeing the pastoral care of the congregation.

### Volunteer Responsibilities in Retirement

In seeking to contribute in significant ways to the well-being of others, several of the individuals we interviewed are involved in substantial volunteer responsibilities. For these individuals such responsibilities are an important part of living out their desire to retire, as we mentioned earlier, "to something as well as from something." Of course, for others this desire is fulfilled in part by assuming part-time paid positions that build upon their professional expertise and experience. One example is a retired business executive who has become a child advocate in his state's court system. Another individual, with a legal background, has assumed a part-time role as a court-appointed mediator. Two other individuals we interviewed, one a former business executive and the other a retired nurse, are working in programs that provide instruction in English as a second language (ESL). The striking similarity among these examples is that all require training offered by a state, professional organization, or other institution.

### Possible Curriculum Implications for Lifelong Learning Programs

These findings concerning an orientation toward continued intellectual growth are certainly consistent with the growing popularity of lifelong learning programs such as those offered in the institutes affiliated with the Osher Foundation as well as with such programs as Elderhostel. What we were more surprised to find was the prominence of significant creative activities such as writing books and poetry, painting, etc. This raises the interesting question for lifelong learning programs of how they might enhance their students' creative activities? Certainly courses related to artistic forms, creative writing, and the like fall in this category. But other possibilities might be attractive as

This dimension of spiritual growth is closely tied to the intellectual development described by some people interviewed and caused us to think of the two areas as closely connected for some in this stage of life.

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well. For example, a seminar series, in which one student describes his or her work each week could serve as an invigorating forum for soliciting input and keeping abreast of other students' activities. If a sufficient number of students are involved in painting, photography, and related areas, showings of this work for the benefit of other students and for the broader community might be considered. Regardless of the specifics, the underlying question that is posed by the level of creative activity is how it might be encouraged, appreciated and recognized.

The significant orientation of those interviewed toward spiritual development also suggests that curriculum offerings in the area of spirituality would be well received. This suggestion is certainly consistent with the experience at Furman, where course offerings on Old and New Testament have been well received. These might be supplemented by offerings in such areas as Jewish spirituality, e.g., the Kabbala; Christian spirituality in different eras and locales, e.g., early desert period, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Middle Ages, modern era; and the history and spirituality of other major world religions, e.g., Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

A third possibility suggested by our interviews is to offer courses of study that prepare participants for significant volunteer opportunities in their locale. This suggestion grows out of the number of volunteer responsibilities described to us that require some training. So such courses could be both a service to LLI participants and also expand the host academic institution's service to the broader community. Interactions with both LLI students and local volunteer organizations would highlight the types of training needed to meet both practical needs and, if relevant as in the child advocate example, statutory requirements. It is quite possible that an organization that utilizes volunteers requiring specialized training might be interested in providing an instructor for the LLI as a way of introducing potential participants to the opportunity as well as preparing them for it.

## Online or Other Means of Offering Lifelong Learning Courses on Demand

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A final question for consideration is suggested by the experiences of the individuals who have difficulty attending courses in the classroom. This can be due to location (not near an institution with a lifelong learning program), mobility constraints, or scheduling difficulties associated with caregiving responsibilities. Might it be desirable to offer selected courses online in lifelong learning programs? While such course offerings are becoming quite common for more traditional student populations, we are unaware of any concerted effort to explore this option in the context of older adult education. In the case of the OLLI at Furman, we are examining the potential technical and practical issues of such an initiative and found no real "show stoppers." As a result we are exploring the option of offering one or a small number of courses online on an experimental basis and evaluating the student experiences to determine if such an initiative has promise for the longer term.

## Conclusions

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This study suggests several interesting possibilities for lifelong learning programs. The first is that such programs could provide encouragement to individuals involved in creative activities such as writing and painting. Second, course offerings might be provided that support the orientation toward spiritual development expressed in these interviews as well as in previously published works. Third, some of the volunteer responsibilities assumed by those we interviewed require training. Offering such training through a lifelong learning program could be a service to local volunteer organizations as well as to the students. And finally, such considerations as living far from a lifelong learning program, mobility limitations, and caregiving responsibilities may commend offering some lifelong learning courses through online or other remote means.

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**Jerry Haas** is the director of the Academy for Spiritual Formation, part of the Upper Room in Nashville, Tennessee. Prior to assuming this role he served as pastor for several United Methodist churches with large retiree populations in Arizona.

## Travel the World without Leaving Home: Cultural Bus Tours are a Hit at OLLI at Aquinas

**Sue Stauffacher**

### Abstract

*Cultural bus tours offer an opportunity to see the communities in which we live through a different lens. Lifelong learners in Grand Rapids, Michigan have been able to immerse themselves in Indian, Mexican, Mediterranean, and Asian cultures by spending an afternoon with hosts who emigrated from those parts of the world. Each tour includes destinations to religious, culinary, and cultural points of interest while hosts share stories of what it means to blend their native cultures with the American way of life.*

Many of our students have traveled the world, and while some still do, they also appreciate opportunities for travel and enrichment much closer to home. I have always felt that exploring the diverse cultures within our region—Grand Rapids is the second largest city in Michigan—would be a wonderful way to travel without leaving town. Our cultural bus tours have become our most popular offering, with 57 seat buses filling up just a few days after the catalogs are distributed.

The idea for a cultural bus tour arose from our mission to attract a wider array of students and to grow our program a little younger to include ‘leading edge’ boomers. To do so, we needed to continue to challenge ourselves about our traditional notions of learning. I could envision this “mobile learning lab,” but it wasn’t easy to convey to others. To do our first tour, I recruited my husband, Roger Gilles, an “Indiophile” who loves the culture, food, and spiritual aspects of India. He offered to be the volunteer manager of the trip, creating an itinerary for the tour and making contact with the various organizations and businesses we would visit. Next we asked four of our friends, Medha and Parag Kosalge, and Yatin and Pradnya Bhagwat to talk to our students as we traveled from one destination to the next. I explained that this would be a new concept in learning, blending historical, cultural, and geographic facts with personal experiences of living in two very different cultures. Though no one could quite see how this would look, and we were

all a bit nervous, we relied on the mutual bond of friendship to try it out together.

### Grand Rapids, India

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Though it didn't happen right away, by the end of our registration period the bus for our inaugural trip was full. Our first destination was the local Dollar Store — this one happened to contain Indian spices, food, clothing and cooking implements — and the students listened to the owners, Manikyam and Sukanya, explain Ayurvedic philosophy. Manikyam was well-versed in many natural treatments and I have since had students marvel about the fact that a teaspoon of cinnamon-laced honey each morning really has helped their arthritis. Sukanya's mother makes delicious samosas (little flour pastries filled with a potato and pea mixture). The students were excited about their new knowledge and made quick purchases of food and traditional Indian clothing. Our next stop was the new Hindu Temple. Nine of the deities have been installed and Sridhar, our tour guide, explained the symbolism of each one as well as the meaning of the architecture and the major holidays on the Hindu calendar. Our last destination was Spice of India, a grocery store devoted to a wide array of Indian food products, Bollywood films, and drug store items. Vasumathi, the owner, did not speak much English, but her young son was very conversant and had clearly been given permission to tear open some packages and offer them for tasting. Yatin and Medha explained the sort of Indian fast food and snacks popular with teenagers, what had too much spice for the uninitiated, and what would satisfy a sweet tooth on any continent. We also learned that if you want to be in the center of Indian cultural life in Grand Rapids, you stop by Spice of India on Friday night when the fresh vegetables arrive from abroad.

### Personal Connections

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A trip like this in and of itself is unique. But by far the most valuable part of the experience was the one we had on the bus in between destinations. At first, Roger thought to ask Parag to talk about Hinduism and Yatin about the Indian economy, but I didn't want students to experience things that they could find on the Internet. I wanted this to be a deep sharing of how Indian culture compares and contrasts to west Michigan culture. What happened on the bus is difficult to articulate. It was such a genuine experience. Medha went first. An accomplished businesswoman in India, Medha is now a student at Grand Valley State University where her husband works. Just like Manikyam and Sukanya, who were computer engineers in India and now own the Dollar Store, she has experienced a dramatic shift in her life situation. Medha is a Brahmin, the highest caste in India. She was immediately asked what was the hardest thing about coming to America. Without hesitation, she said "loneliness." She proceeded to describe how isolated she felt in the tall apartment building they had chosen to live downtown.

"In India, even if you live alone, you will have 20 or more contacts with people a day. Someone will drop by asking when your neighbor will be home, or someone will stop to try to sell you something. I felt that it was rude to go

I have always felt that exploring the diverse cultures within our region—Grand Rapids is the second largest city in Michigan—would be a wonderful way to travel without leaving town. Our cultural bus tours have become our most popular offering, with 57 seat buses filling up just a few days after the catalogs are distributed.

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to other apartments and try to get to know people. It didn't feel right."

Medha also talked about how, though she'd learned English from a young age, many of the same words had a different meaning in India and in America.

She explained: "For example, when a student gets an answer wrong in class, the teacher would say 'interesting.' Interesting?" Medha mused. "How do you mean interesting? I would think she'd say 'incorrect.'"

Medha was very funny and seemed so heartened that she was able to make Americans laugh that she got more animated as the trip progressed. When Yatin got up to speak, he said, "Well, I'll have to be Bill Moyers to Medha's Johnny Carson." Yatin is a professor of international finance, but he chose to talk about how differently Indians assimilate into American culture today than two decades ago when he first came to America.

"Then we all wanted to fit in. The first thing I did was learn the rules of baseball. Now, with the global economy, we have families who know they will only be here a few years, so there is little attempt to become more American. Indian families stick together and promote the Indian way of life here."

Other topics that fascinated our students were comparing the two couples' marriages. Yatin and Pradnya were the result of an arranged marriage, while Parag and Medha were a love match. Because Parag is not from the Brahmin caste, he and Medha received censure from her family, rather than the blessings and support that Yatin and Pradnya received.

Back at the Browne Center, an old stately brick mansion where our classes meet, we were greeted by Sunita, a lovely young lady and the daughter of one of Medha's friends who had come in a traditional sari to help serve the food that had been prepared in advance by Roger, Medha, Pradnya, and our student workers. The menu included chutneys, channa masala, dahl makhni, parathas, and julab mulan. After eating, students could view some of the many Indian fabrics brought back by one of our students from a recent trip there.

### Extending the Experience

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We wanted to put the trip in context, so at the start of their journey, students received a map of India that showed where all our hosts originally lived. They also received addresses and contact information for all the sites visited, directions to Indian restaurants in town, and recipes for the food that was served at the end. I know several students who have either taken relatives to visit the temple or gone back to buy groceries.

As of this writing, we have also completed Grand Rapids, Mexico, and Grand Rapids, Mediterranean. This spring we will travel to Grand Rapids, Bosnia. Future tours will include southeast Asia and countries in Africa.

This kind of trip provides many benefits. For those seeking to grow a more culturally diverse student base, I recommend making meaningful contact with other communities. The respect given to our Indian friends by our students has established a bond between our OLLI and these institutions, businesses, and professionals. After the bus tour, Medha wrote: "Parag and I absolutely loved spending time with the group. They were so warm, friendly, open, and lovable. We hope we made a few more friends here in Grand Rapids. It was a wonderful experience. We truly admire them for taking efforts to know about

our culture.”

The bus tours have given our students a chance to safely explore areas of town and businesses that they might at first find daunting. They now know from experience that a smile can break the language barrier and the businesses they have only driven by in the past are filled with friendly, helpful people.

Our bus tours are as attractive to male as to female students and I am seeing more couples taking the trip together. We have been planning them on Saturday afternoons, because many of our hosts are professionals. This allows more working people to take part.

Our cultural bus tours are free. They are underwritten by our Osher Grant (each one costs about \$850-\$1,000). However, only members are allowed. Before each trip, we’ve seen a surge in membership. In the future, when the trips’ merits are well-established, we will charge a break-even fee, but for now, it’s been a boon to our membership rolls.

### Tips for Planning Your Trip

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*Choose outgoing hosts.* It’s so much easier if you have something to show a prospective host, so feel free to go to <http://www.aquinas.edu/olli/curriculum.html> and download our past catalogs for descriptions. Share this article. Explore whether or not the individual is open to being asked personal questions. Some of our hosts have been paid a small stipend and others do not wish to be paid.

*Get ready to wing it.* Not all trips have the same level of detailed organization. We are still learning how to engage volunteers meaningfully while making sure all our bases are covered. We’ve made some embarrassing missteps. Our burners did not heat the authentic Mexican hot chocolate in time, for example, but the Day of the Dead bread was a big hit!

*Arm your OLLI contact.* I go on all the trips, but whoever goes should have landline and cell phone contact for each destination and on-site tour guide. St. Andrew’s Cathedral was beautiful, but our tour guide never showed up and I had no way to get in touch with her. As with all OLLI directors, I come equipped with a good sense of humor and a plan B.

*Grease the Wheels.* It’s possible your host will not know what to talk about. Ask some of your thoughtful students to come with questions and in your introduction explain that you’ve asked the host if they would talk about their personal experiences.

*Aim for Authenticity.* One of our hosts invited a European-American who has studied the Lebanese community in Grand Rapids to speak on the bus. Because it was already a done deal, I went along with it. But my feeling is that this is a time for people to speak about their own experiences, going beyond study to share personal feelings.

*Appoint a Timekeeper and Photographer.* Some of our tour guides, both on the bus and in businesses or organizations, lose track of time. It helps to have a specific itinerary. Also, we find these trips are treasure troves for photographs for our catalog. One of our students is a great amateur photographer.

We receive many letters of thanks for these trips, but this one from Linda and Jim Dodge sums up the responses we’ve had. “What a fantastic opportu-

We wanted to put the trip in context, so at the start of their journey, students received a map of India that showed where all our hosts originally lived. They also received addresses and contact information for all the sites visited, directions to Indian restaurants in town, and recipes for the food that was served at the end.

Travel the World without  
Leaving Home:  
Cultural Bus Tours are a  
Hit at OLLI  
at Aquinas

nity on the Grand Rapids, India, bus trip to have our eyes opened, our senses and taste buds awakened, and our knowledge expanded about the Indian community here in Grand Rapids. The Indian hosts who traveled with us on the bus were willing to share their lives here in such an open and honest way: how our cultures meshed and how they were able to preserve their way of life in a foreign country. We were astounded by the beauty of the Hindu temple. Being introduced to these businesses is as much fun as finding a new candy store. Every part of the trip made us feel alive and learning. Jim and I now fondly refer to these trips as our ‘food and faith’ outings.”

**Sue Stauffacher** is a current member of OLLI at Aquinas College and the former director. A recent NAACP Image Award winner, Sue has authored novels, picture books, and is currently at work on a culturally diverse series for Random House cultivating lifelong learners among the elementary-age set. Learn more about Sue and her work at [www.suestauffacher.com](http://www.suestauffacher.com)

## Memoirs Class

**Leight Johnson**

### Abstract

*A class in writing memoirs has been offered by the Johns Hopkins University Evergreen-OLLI program since the early 1990s and was taught for several years by a professional writing instructor. When she retired from teaching, it was decided to continue it as a member-led program. Members are encouraged (not required) to submit a piece weekly, which is distributed to the class and read aloud by the author. Critiques by the whole class are aimed at improving style and content, rather than punctuation and spelling. Class size is limited to 16 and subject matter can be personal memoirs, anecdotes, or essays.*

**mem•oir** [mem-war]: noun

*a historical account or biography written from personal knowledge or special sources.*

I sit in a circle of strangers on the first day of class, wondering what the hell I'm doing there. All these people around me look like they have something serious to say to the world. I doubt that I do.

I wrote that ten years ago, and I was wrong. Even though I didn't have the exotic backgrounds of some classmates (childhood in warlord China, growing up in Nazi Germany or in Quebec, speaking only French) I do have thoughts and memories to pass on.

Margaret, our teacher, drums into us the basics of creative writing: *Purpose, Design, Development, Voice, Authority, Clarity*, and explains what those terms mean. She also teaches us to ask ourselves:

- Is the title appropriate?
- Is there a "hook"? Does it catch your attention early on?
- Does it end on a memorable note?
- Are questions answered at appropriate times?
- Are there unnecessary distractions?

We discuss paragraph construction, use of details, character development;

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## Memoirs Class

so much to keep in mind.

As the weeks pass, I see progress in the writing as we learn to tighten up, to eliminate the qualifiers (“somewhat, sort of, very”), to paint vivid word pictures of places, to stick to the topic, include pertinent facts and omit irrelevant ones. We learn to rearrange paragraphs in the interest of emphasis and clarity, and to reach insights that make a story worth telling.

And, most of all, we learn to reveal ourselves. The group of strangers has become a gathering of friends. We have heard the ups and downs of each others’ lives. I have no dark past to expose, but I find that digging around in memory brings up situations that my grandchildren may someday find interesting. Without these memoirs they would probably never know of my grandmother’s venture as a tea-leaf-reading fortune teller, of my father’s description of Armistice Day in France in 1918. They wouldn’t know of my nearly being shipwrecked on an ocean sailing trip, or of my impromptu role as conductor of a funeral service.

So, in spite of my initial trepidation, I decide that this has been a useful exercise after all. Writing my stories has been immensely satisfying. I haven’t made it to E.B. White’s level, but I’ve gained the confidence to keep trying.

**Leight Johnson’s** writing career began when he was named Poet Laureate of his eighth grade class. A 1945 graduate of Yale, he served three years in the Navy after which he spent his working years as a sales engineer for Honeywell. A lifelong skier and sailor, he has been an Evergreen-Osher member for 16 years. A Memoirs Class participant for all that time, he is finally getting the hang of it.

## Legacy

**Martha McCoy**

*“Legacy” is the second of two memoirs published in this volume of The LLI Review written by a member of the Memoirs Class offered by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Johns Hopkins University (formerly The Evergreen Society).*

As we climb the concrete steps to the large, red brick house, I look up and see my grandfather standing on the porch waiting for us to reach the top. His gray hair and mustache adorn an expressionless face. Ice blue eyes shoot a laser-like glance toward us and silence our noisy ascent. He wears a gray suit, a starched white shirt, a gray and white necktie, and a white pocket handkerchief. His straight legs, anchored to the landing by black shoes, make him look like a granite statue. Greeting each of us with a handshake and a slight bow, he tells us to hang our coats in the hall closet.

As we enter the vestibule just to the left of the front door is my grandfather’s favorite possession, a three-foot high bronze statue of a young man, entitled Siffleur (Whistler). Positioned on a marble-topped pedestal, the Whistler’s gently pursed lips, whistling a silent tune, seem to offer a warm and somewhat carefree welcome—a sharp contrast to my grandfather’s dour greeting.

We remove our coats and place them in the closet on the assigned hangers (each of our names has been taped to a hanger). I quickly pat my jumper pocket to make sure that its contents are well-hidden and then proceed with the rest of the family into the mahogany-framed living room. Dark reds and golds, stiff upholstered furniture, and a Tiffany floor lamp with a fringed shade punctuate the room with a dated elegance. Grandfather holds court from his red wing chair by the front window.

Conversation about job status, family health, and financial matters fills the room. With the exception of an occasional jab in the ribs by my brother, or a surreptitious under-the-chair-kick by one of the cousins, we children sit silently, wishing we were somewhere else, anywhere else. Sliding my hand into the pocket of my jumper for reassurance that my secret package is still in place, I get ready to make my move.

Positioned on a marble-topped pedestal, the Whistler’s gently pursed lips, whistling a silent tune, seem to offer a warm and somewhat carefree welcome—a sharp contrast to my grandfather’s dour greeting.

## Legacy

Feigning a need for an emergency trip to the bathroom, I slip quietly out of the room. Looking over my shoulder as I leave, I see my brother, sister, and cousins rolling their eyes, probably wishing that they had thought of the “bathroom excuse” first.

I rush back down the hall toward the vestibule, anxious to visit the Whistler by myself. I think he is beautiful and want to have some time to look at him “up close.” I have never been able to understand why my grandfather, who wears a suit and tie to recline in a hammock, would be drawn to such a free-spirited image.

The soft hall light in the dark house lends a warm glow to the bronze figure. I run my fingers along the edges and tops of the Whistler’s scuffed boots. He feels smooth and cool. His full-sleeved blouse, carelessly tucked into slim trousers, is tied with a delicate, braided bronze lariat. The bottom of his flared vest rests on graceful hands, fingers tucked into the top of a wide cummerbund. By some magic, the Whistler’s eyes seem to be looking right into mine. Wisps of curly hair escape from under a large, flat beret that is perched at a rakish angle on top of his head. Circling the statue, I decide that the time has come to carry out my daring plan.

I reach into my pocket and carefully extract a tissue-paper package. Inside the package is a paper wreath of yellow, pink and blue flowers, surrounded by green leaves on which I have been working for weeks. I carefully place the wreath on top of the Whistler’s beret and stand back to admire my addition to his beauty. From behind me, a stern voice says, “I’m glad you like my Whistler.” Quickly, I reach up to remove the wreath.

“No, no, leave it there,” he says. “It looks just fine.”

And then my grandfather tells me how he had found the Whistler in Italy while he was on a business trip, about the trouble he had importing it into the United States, and how glad he had been when the statue finally arrived. He also tells me about moving the statue from room to room until he found a place where it looked “comfortable.” He says that he finally chose the vestibule because he thought that the Whistler would help people feel welcome when they visited his home.

From that time on, I begin to look at my grandfather in a different way. I soon prefer a seat next to him at dinner instead of requesting one at the opposite end of the table as I have in the past. I increasingly look forward to his discussions about the arts and I even begin to understand his dry sense of humor.

Later, he and I would meet for lunches, tour the local art galleries, and attend concerts together. During my college years, my grandfather became an entertaining and dependable correspondent. When he died, I felt a great void in my world. He helped to fill this emptiness by stating in his will that *Siffleur* was to reside in my care.

The *Whistler* now stands in the vestibule, just to the left of my front door, whistling a silent welcome to all who enter. He continues to remind me that a cold and formal shell sometimes can encase a warm and loving spirit.

**Martha McCoy** is a freelance writer whose scholarly works and essays have been published in numerous venues, including *Academic Therapy*, *Music Educators Journal*, and *Music for All Children*. Other publications include program notes for the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and the National Symphony Orchestra. Mrs. McCoy earned her undergraduate degrees at Waynesburg College and Penn State University; she holds master's degrees from Towson University and The Johns Hopkins University.

## Old Men

**Peggy A. Stelpflug**

I love old men,  
Their deliberateness,  
Their quiet charm.

I love old men  
Who hold their humor  
In their eyes, and  
Their wisdom in their thoughts,  
Willing to let others learn  
The way they did –  
Trial and error –  
The hard way.

I love old men  
Who look ahead  
Carefully considering  
Each step:  
Closing the curtains  
At dusk,  
Turning off the lights  
At bedtime,  
Checking the locks  
On the doors.

I love old men  
Who face death  
Matter-of-factly  
Like preparing for bad weather,  
Knowing there's not much  
To do about it

But batten down the hatches,  
Just in case . . .  
Zipping their jackets tightly  
About their throats.

**Peggy A. Stelpflug** is author of *Home of the Infantry: A History of Fort Benning*, graduated from Marquette University in 1953 and married William, an Air Force fighter pilot, in 1955. They moved to Auburn, Alabama, with their five children after Bill's retirement. Earning her master of arts and master of education degrees, Peggy taught English at Auburn University and Hunan University, China, retiring in 1991. She enjoys her OLLI classes, nine grandchildren, writing, and international travels.

## OLLI at Brandeis: Part of the Global Village

**Barbara Shapiro and Sharon Sokoloff**

### Abstract

*The International Friends Program is an intercampus, intergenerational program of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Brandeis. This article describes and provides highlights of that program as a context for a story that demonstrates two things: how one person can make a difference and the far-reaching influence of our programs. During an experience she describes as “an event of a lifetime,” Barbara Shapiro, OLLI member, was invited to Turkey by her international friend, Ahmet Can Celtikci, his family, and a non-governmental organization which sponsored her trip. There, she was honored with the “Children’s Friend Award” from the United Nations Children’s Rights Summit Organization of Turkey. She was the only non-Turk to receive the award, truly serving as an ambassador representing the United States of America, Brandeis University and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.*

### OLLI at Brandeis: On the Face of It

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People who participate in and observe the world of lifelong learning institutes (LLIs) know these programs are like a Russian matryoshka doll; many entities, each unique in its own right, each nested one inside the other. The first thing one becomes aware of at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Brandeis, the first doll, is the learning community. This is the vibrant entity that is the container for all the others.

The OLLI learning community at Brandeis includes two staples, about 40 study groups and 20 “Lunch & Learn” lectures per semester, in each of our two ten-week semesters a year. These activities take place in an atmosphere of conviviality and warmth, a hallmark of the program and a goal to which we continually aspire. The community, friendships (new and old), and collaborative working relationships are as vital to the success of the program as is the learning.

### The Connected University: Within OLLI

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Looking within OLLI at Brandeis, one finds an extensive and increasingly varied range of meaningful and mutually beneficial programs, activities, and working relationships between OLLI and Brandeis, a second lustrous doll. The major driving force underlying the connection between OLLI and Brandeis is the University’s president, Jehuda Reinharz, and his vision for “A Connected

University,” Brandeis is a relatively small academic institution and it is President Reinharz’s belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Based on this vision, the Osher Institute at Brandeis established a strategic priority of building intercampus and intergenerational programs in 2003, the program’s third year. These programs, activities, and relationships have expanded and enriched OLLI beyond measure. Moreover, our work to become an integral part of The Connected University has made faculty, staff, and students across campus increasingly aware of OLLI and deepened their appreciation of the program. Also notable, these programs and relationships have engendered the high regard and support of the Brandeis senior administration for our institute.

While this list is not exhaustive, here are some of the entities with whom OLLI has built, and continues to build and improve, beneficial intercampus relationships in the past six years: Rose Art Museum, Spingold Theatre, Office of the Arts, Office of Communications, Volen National Center for Complex Systems, the Department of Psychology, the Memory and Cognition Lab (all recruit research subjects for their many studies from the OLLI membership), many centers and institutes on campus (e.g., Crown Center for Middle East Studies, the Women’s Studies Research Center, the Center for Public Life, Justice and Ethics), the Hiatt Career Center (mentoring program with undergraduates), and three of the four schools at Brandeis: Arts & Sciences, the International Business School, and the Heller School for Social Policy and Management. (OLLI is part of the fourth school, The Rabb School of Continuing Studies.)

One compelling note that adds credence to the value of intercampus and intergenerational programs for all LLIs follows. In May 2008, the Harvard Institute of Learning in Retirement hosted a regional meeting of lifelong learning institutes from New England, a tradition (annual gatherings of our programs) that began with institutes in Boston and gradually expanded. At that meeting, in response to a range of questions about “how to ensure the sustainability of our programs,” Kali Lightfoot, executive director of the National Resource Center for Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, responded “Make your program indispensable to the institution” (Lightfoot, May 2008).

Clearly, Kali’s wisdom is more important than ever given these challenging economic times. It is our belief that the more we give the university including intercampus, intergenerational programs, supporting centers and institutes, fundraising for OLLI and the university, providing research subjects, providing graduate student scholars teaching opportunities and stipends, mentoring undergraduates, the more we become an integral and valued part of the Brandeis community. We are working toward being indispensable.

### The International Friends Program

Continuing our metaphor, open the second doll and one finds many little dolls, each representing a distinct intercampus relationship or program. The rest of this article focuses on one of the preeminent intergenerational programs at OLLI at Brandeis and one extraordinary experience that came out of it.

The International Friends Program (IFP) is a “matching” program be-

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## OLLI at Brandeis: Part of the Global Village

tween the Sustainable International Development (SID) Program at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis and OLLI. Its goal is to provide cultural exchange between SID students and OLLI members. With OLLI members and their families, SID students have a unique experience in which they receive support, assistance, and caring in the course of their transition to a new country, a new way of life, and a rigorous academic curriculum. OLLI members learn about other countries and have the opportunity to view the United States with a fresh perspective. In many cases, deep, lasting, multi-dimensional relationships unfold. This program is the good news in the world. Minds are changed. Lives are changed. This is lifelong learning.

The IFP is now in its fifth year. The IFP committee is responsible for running the program with staff support from OLLI and the Heller School. The first activity of the academic year is a reception attended by SID students and OLLI members during which some people “find each other” and matches are made. In other cases, SID students sign up to be matched and provide basic information, e.g., their country, if they are here with family or not, and what they are hoping for in a friend. OLLI members are invited to participate as “friends” and also provide information about their desires and/or what they are open to in a match. Then the IFP committee spends hours making matches.

In the first year of the program, 35 members were paired with 44 students. Since then, another 274 SID students have participated. They have come from more than 30 countries, mostly developing nations, including Ghana, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, China, Laos, Tibet, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Tajikistan, Papua, New Guinea, Thailand, Turkey, Costa Rica, and Belize.

Here are some highlights of the program. SID students celebrate Thanksgiving, other holidays and simple, meaningful family moments with their OLLI friends and families. Together, they visit museums, go to movies and concerts, take walking tours of historic Boston, view the fall foliage, go to the ocean (some students have never seen an ocean), and pick apples.

The IFP committee plans several events each year, e.g., brunches at several OLLI members’ homes; this fall we had five homes with 90 students and OLLI friends and family. OLLI holds a Coat Drive each October when members bring coats, sweaters, scarves, hats, and mittens. This helps students to endure our cold and snowy winters, as many of them come from warm climates and have limited funds.

SID students invite OLLI friends to Cultural Nights at the Heller School four times a year. Each event is sponsored by students from a different region of the world, e.g., Southeast Asia, regions of Africa, and South America. Students prepare and serve ethnic foods, wear the dress of their homeland, dance, lead us in singing, present original skits, and create and show PowerPoint presentations to familiarize OLLI friends with their countries. OLLI also organizes a cultural night—a Square Dance for which a caller is hired who specializes in neophyte dancers. Picture it! The evening begins with a potluck supper of American food, prepared by OLLI members.

In the words of Doris Breay, assistant dean of the Heller School, “Since its inception, the matching of international students and OLLI friends has been a great success. While we at Heller provide a wide range of services and support

for all students, we cannot always do what an OLLI friend can do: provide social, cultural, friendly, family-like environments that international students miss terribly when they leave their own homes and families behind to study at Brandeis. An occasional cup of coffee, a dinner at a friend's home, a trip to Boston; having an OLLI friend gives the students opportunities to share their own family stories and cultures, and to learn about our generous American culture. Through these last five years OLLI families have been there for Heller students in times of great happiness and severe stress. It is one of the joys of my job to help facilitate the International Friends Program" (Brey, 2009).

Some of these friendships last for years. OLLI members have traveled to countries such as Egypt to visit students and their families in their native countries. As one OLLI participant said, "We think we will be in touch forever." What follows is one extraordinary story told in the first person by longtime OLLI member Barbara Shapiro who has been a friend to many SID students. Barbara's story represents the final matryoshka doll, the heart.

### An Event of a Lifetime

I first met Ahmet Can Celtikci from Istanbul at the International Friends reception at the start of an academic year where OLLI members meet incoming SID students. He said I reminded him of his grandmother, who had died two days before he left Turkey for Brandeis. We bonded quickly. Ahmet is a bright, intelligent, delightful, young man. He brought as much, if not more, to our relationship than he received. He, along with our Ugandan friend, Judith, and other SID students, enriched the lives of my family and me for the years they were SID students. We have maintained our relationships over time.

Ahmet was integrated into our family as a good and caring son. He fixed leaky faucets, repaired windows and did other chores which he thought would be helpful. He told me: "The day I met you, my whole life changed. You and your family are my American family. I pray for you everyday."

Ahmet returned to Turkey after his graduation from Brandeis in May 2008. Less than six months later, I received an invitation to come to Turkey to receive an award from the United Nations Children's Rights Summit Organization of Turkey. On January 18, 1995, the "Children's Summit of Turkey" became the first non-governmental organization made up of children to be accredited by the United Nations. Its purpose is to encourage students to use their right of active participation in decisions, plans, programs, and policies affecting children's lives; encourage free thought and expression of emotions; educate/inform children of their rights; and advocate for educational improvements.

While I was to be given the award on November 19, 2008, I was not formally invited until two weeks prior to that date and it was a total surprise. Ahmet sent both a formal invitation from the organization (in Turkish) and an e-mail explanation of why I should attend the ceremony. The invitation included two of my children in recognition of the family's role in our relationship.

Why me? When Ahmet's mother came to Waltham, Massachusetts, for his graduation, she felt the warmth, comfort, and closeness of the relationship we had established. During her time here, my family hosted dinners for her, for her sister from Turkey, and her niece from New York. We took a Duck Tour of

This program is the good news in the world. Minds are changed. Lives are changed. This is lifelong learning.

## OLLI at Brandeis: Part of the Global Village

Boston, visited the Public Gardens, Plymouth Plantation, and Newport, Rhode Island. We enjoyed the theater, concerts, and movies together. In the short time Ahmet's mother was here, we became more than friends, we became like family. When she returned to Istanbul she submitted my name to the Children's Summit of Turkey Award Committee in recognition of the friendship and support Ahmet had received while at Brandeis. The rest is history.

On November 19, 2008, in Istanbul, I received the "Children's Friend Award" from the Children's Summit of Turkey at an impressive ceremony. It began with the Turkish National Anthem. That was followed by a song Ahmet had written, for which he received first prize, for a contest when the organization was first formed. Many awards were presented that day. Seven of us received the Children's Friend Award. Six of the recipients were government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations or foundations, all from Turkey. I was the seventh, Barbara Shapiro, volunteer, activist, Brandeis University.

I confess I was excited, I was happy, and I was humbled. This was an experience of a lifetime. In my acceptance speech, which I gave in English and Ahmet translated into Turkish, I described OLLI. When the ceremony was over, Brandeis was on the tongues of many people who congratulated me. I felt like the Pied Piper when mothers approached me to ask whether I'd be their son's "friend" in America if they sent them there. One eleven-year-old panelist stood in line with his six-year-old brother to shake my hand and request my address and phone number for some time in the future when they might come to the United States to study.

My family and I remained in Istanbul for a week after the ceremony to explore the city. In a role reversal, our hosts escorted our family with warmth and sincerity. They completely opened their home to us, considered our dietary needs and traditions, and even shared recipes. Representatives of The Children's Summit of Turkey created our sightseeing agenda for the week. We were treated royally. Ahmet's father, who had been a chief architect for the renovations on some of the palaces we visited, proudly escorted us. His mother, while entertaining us, appeared on television to publicize the organization and the award. We were honored with private tours, where one phone call opened locked gates for us.

For this most exciting experience I wish to thank Brandeis University for the quality people they accept as SID students, OLLI at Brandeis for the community and program which facilitates these relationships, and Lyn Weiner, OLLI member (and who happens to be my sister), who conceived of and developed this extraordinary program and co-leads it with Steve Baran. Finally, I thank the United Nations Children's Rights Organization of Turkey for the great respect and appreciation they showed me, my family and our program.

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## Conclusion

One person had a good idea. Guided by her vision and leadership, two units on the Brandeis campus worked intently and hand-in-hand to build the program she imagined. "Work is love made visible" (Gibran, 1923). There are layers of meaning and love in this story. From the learning community that created the space for the International Friends Program, to the intercampus

partnership that made the program thrive, to the unique relationships between hundreds of international students and OLLI members, to one single relationship between an American woman, an OLLI member, and a Turkish man in the early stage of his career, to his family and his nation. We live in troubling times. And yet—"What a wonderful world" (Thiele, Weiss, Douglass, 1968).

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**Barbara Shapiro** has been a member of BOLLI at Brandeis University for four years. She is a graduate of Boston University, College of Liberal Arts. Barbara worked 42 years as a medical assistant and office manager for a private medical practice. As a patient advocate, she helped develop and institute a monitoring system for Massachusetts state hospitals for the mentally ill. She has also been a professional volunteer for 35 years at a national information and hotline program, located at WBZ Radio and Television in Boston, Mass.

**Sharon Sokoloff**, Ph.D., is the director of the Osher Institute of Lifelong Learning at Brandeis University, a model of excellence in the world of lifelong learning. She is the founder and principal of Opus II, dedicated to "inspiring and informing meaning and integrity in the second half of life" and is the president of the Life Planning Network. Sharon has worked in the field of gerontology since 1977.

## Good Morning

**Charles Francis**

Today, I just turned eighty  
Thus these musings weighty  
I know which today it is  
By what my pillbox says it is  
I never thought to trod the stage  
As long as this extended age  
And though my carcass isn't well  
I think I'll hang around a spell  
For each new day unwraps a zing  
I'd not have missed for anything

**Charles Francis** is a retired photographer who has taken writing classes at OLLI-San Francisco State since its inception.

## It's Not Easy

**Eloise Van Niel**

It is not easy being pink,  
Which radiates the wrong impression;  
For I am older than you think.  
I should be shriveled like my mind,  
Yet something rosy still survives.  
Perhaps my heart's the mastermind.

It's not so easy being green  
For in the grass I am not seen  
And in the garden I'm eclipsed  
By foliage and flowery fists

So I shall roam the city streets  
Where green is seen a welcome treat  
Distinctive on the dingy scene  
Except when traffic lights turn green.

**Eloise Van Niel** is a ten-year veteran of lifelong learning at the University of Hawaii. She participates in literature and writing courses and has led a group on writing memoirs called "Origins." A native of Cleveland, Ohio, she moved from Troy, New York, to Hawaii in 1965. She retired as head of the Arts Section of the Hawaii State Library and has published articles on Holland, Indonesia, and Malaysia, where she has lived as an ex-patriot academic wife.

## The Ethical Will: A Modern Approach to An Ancient Tradition

**Jean Sheridan**

### Abstract

*For persons of all ages and walks of life the writing of memoir and autobiography has become a national pastime. The ethical will, a time-honored tradition in Jewish culture, is a form that has been used throughout the ages to pass on life lessons and values; they are often appended to material wills. While this is an invaluable and admirable exercise, the tendency to write pedantically and chronologically can result in a document that is a drudgery to both write and read. In this course the classic formula is experiential and reflective. Writing prompts are added, thus enabling writers of ethical wills to fashion documents that will be read with pleasure for generations to come.*

Some years back, while listening to Public Radio, I heard a story about an elderly man, a father, grandfather, lawyer, who had written a letter to his family to be read after his death. In this letter he recounted some family history, reflected on his own life, made statements regarding his religious beliefs, and offered loving advice to those he was leaving behind. I was touched, not only because it was a stirring story but also because it seemed like such a reasonable idea. The document was called an ethical will.

My interest piqued, I began to do some research and learned that the ethical will is grounded in ancient Jewish culture. These non-material wills, *tzavaot* as they are called, were originally an oral tradition with roots in the Torah and the Talmud. In Genesis 49 Jacob gives the first *tzava'ah* to his twelve sons; Moses says stirring words of farewell to his followers in Deuteronomy 33. The book of Proverbs could be understood as a wellspring of advice from a wise elder to future generations. Other Biblical treatises, according to Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampfer in *Ethical Wills and How to Prepare Them*, deal with "future blessings, moral directives, and burial instructions." In later times, writers added personal history and ethical values and beliefs.

For European Jews in the Medieval and Renaissance periods these docu-

ments were a way to preserve their heritage in the face of forced conversions to Islam and Christianity. Written by male heads of households for their families and by rabbis who wished to leave a record for their congregations, they were “moral assets” for a people whose material assets were more often than not in jeopardy. They were framed mostly as informal letters, some brief and simple; some long, weighty, and heavy with detail; some later ones, as in the abrupt, urgent final communications of Holocaust victims, heartrending. How they were shaped varied widely depending on the personality and nature of the author.

Having read widely through bibliographical references and Internet sites, I decided to create a course around the concept and offer it at our OLLI at the University of Southern Maine. Several problems presented themselves, not the least of which is the term “ethical will.” Friends, family, anyone with whom I consulted discouraged me from using it, thinking that it was off-putting and unappealing. Nevertheless, I persevered; it is what it is, I reasoned; the term has history and resonance, and unequivocally references the great tradition. So be it. In the course description I would explain the nature, scope, and content of the material I planned to cover.

Not only was the use of the term ethical will to be surmounted, I also realized that the prospect of creating such an ambitious document would no doubt be intimidating to many. And there was an equal if not greater problem, the unfortunate but real resistance to writing many, if not most, students bring to class. To circumvent this fear, I called upon teaching practices I value. Among these are collaborative learning, which relies heavily on small group interactions, and writing-across-the-curriculum, which encourages frequent brief, in-class writing tasks shared in dyads, triads, small groups, or in general, depending on class size and the nature of the writing. In order to help students draw on past experience in an inviting, non-invasive way I drew on numerous texts that used experiential exercises. Many will remember the *Intensive Journal* process developed by Ira Progoff in the 1970s and the introduction of freewriting by Peter Elbow at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. These and other innovations individually or in combination have been embraced in educational settings and have helped to liberate classrooms from the clutch of the lecture. Howard Gardner’s revelatory multiple intelligences theory has also influenced me, so for each set of exercises, which I call Preparations (to be discussed later), I tried to include one of each. For every section of the will, expanded in my re-visioning from six to ten, I wrote an introductory explanation and gave examples of and suggestions for typical content.

A handout I distributed on the first day of class follows:

For European Jews  
in the Medieval and  
Renaissance periods  
these documents were  
a way to preserve their  
heritage in the face of  
forced conversions to  
Islam and Christianity.  
Written by male heads  
of households for their  
families and by rabbis  
who wished to leave  
a record for their  
congregations, they  
were “moral assets”  
for a people whose  
material assets were  
more often than not in  
jeopardy.

The Ethical Will:  
A Modern Approach to  
An Ancient Tradition

### WRITING YOUR ETHICAL WILL: A CREATIVE APPROACH

Ethical wills are life review documents which evolved from a time-honored Jewish tradition begun by rabbis and patriarchs of the past. Today people of all ages and walks of life are writing their ethical wills in order to preserve family and personal history and to pass down values, ethics, and beliefs. All of us, in addition to our lives within families, have made contributions in government, education, science, business, the workplace, religion, technology, sports, the arts, and our local communities. We realize that we have much to share and are moved by a generative impulse to leave something of ourselves behind.

I will provide the text as we go along. And so will you. It will be helpful to bring to class a three-ring binder with ten dividers and both lined and unlined paper. We will also be using 5x8 cards, magic markers, crayons, colored pencils, chalks, or whatever you prefer, so please bring a supply of these.

This is not a lecture course. I see myself, rather, as a facilitator whose role it is to help you bring forth your ideas and stories. Much of our class time will be devoted to working up the material of your wills. I also hope to create a supportive environment where all will feel comfortable about sharing something of what they have done.

For each section of the will I have developed a set of creative exercises that I call Preparations. These Preparations are designed to ensure that our work will not turn out to be a boring piece of exposition but something eminently readable. As a teacher of writing, I know that some do not like to write or are hesitant or insecure about it. The Preparations take this reality into account and offer a variety of alternatives. Many are based on the research of Harvard professor Howard Gardner as explained in the book, *Seven Ways of Knowing: Teaching for Multiple Intelligences* (by David Lazear). Each of us, Gardner came to believe, is inclined either by birth or conditioning to a certain way of learning: interpersonal (or extroverted), intrapersonal (or introverted), linguistic, mathematical, naturalistic, spatial, or musical. (Gardner later added spiritual, existential, and moral to the list although these are challenged.) Working with this schema and the writing and journal-keeping techniques I have used in my own teaching, I have collected and created suggestions that will appeal, I hope, to everyone regardless of individual preference.

So, whether you like to write in a journal, or bang a drum, or kick your feet, or talk with friends, or take long solitary walks, or doodle with geometric shapes, or keep a sketchbook, you will find in each set of Preparations something to your liking. One may be enough to spark your writing. Or several. They can go into your document just as you initially “play” with them or serve as springboards for your writing. Anything goes.

### The Outline

**OPENING:** This is a brief opening statement that dedicates the ethical will to specific persons or groups.

**FAMILY MATTERS:** This section concerns the past: the writer's family, including parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, other relatives and family friends; significant parts of the family's past, including events and anecdotes having to do with its cultural, religious, and ethnic origins; if desired, a review of the history of the times in which the family flourished.

**PERSONAL MATTERS:** Personal history, including the people, events, and critical decisions that shaped his family, work, and creative life.

**SPIRITUAL MATTERS:** The writer's religious and spiritual experience, past and present; persons who figured significantly in that unique journey; favorite Scripture passages, teachings, prayers, and rituals.

**PHILOSOPHICAL MATTERS:** Here the writer presents her philosophical, political, and social positions, ethical ideals, and values.

**DEATH MATTERS:** Thoughts about and preferences regarding death, end-of-life procedures, and funeral and burial plans.

**EDITORIAL MATTERS:** This is the time to sum up and refine what has been written, to decide what to keep and what to discard, to critique the quality of the writing.

**LOVING MATTERS:** The writer affirms, gives advice, and offers his hopes for the present and future generations.

**CLOSING:** Blessings, requests, and a brief summarizing statement.

**FUTURE MATTERS:** Now the writer turns to new material and imagines a rich dynamic future.

This ten-part outline answers the question of what to write about and breaks down this most ambitious undertaking into manageable units. No particular order needs to be followed; indeed it is better to let the psyche take charge here so that the writer can go from one section to another as memories and ideas begin to percolate.

How one attends to the technical aspects will differ from person to person. Some may prefer to work with a looseleaf binder and label sections according to the suggested outline, recording whatever is uppermost in their minds as it strikes them. No particular order needs to be followed; ideas are added to each section as they rise to the surface. Such a plan has the advantage of being portable, adaptable, and infinitely expandable, a good first place to take notes, moving later to the computer. With laptops and personal computers in common use, some will choose to begin right there, creating separate files—and backups—for each section. This is an optimal process, as it allows the work to be reread, revised, added to, and deleted from cleanly and efficiently.

This ten-part outline answers the question of what to write about and breaks down this most ambitious undertaking into manageable units. No particular order needs to be followed; indeed it is better to let the psyche take charge here so that the writer can go from one section to another as memories and ideas begin to percolate.

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For most sections I created about eight Preparations. Here is a sampling.

**OPENING:** Pick up some molding clay at an art supply or craft store, choosing a color you particularly like. Find a half hour or so when you can be by yourself. Play some quiet background music if you wish and take up the clay; a palm-sized piece is sufficient. Close your eyes and begin to work the clay, focusing your thoughts on the opening statement. Do not be anxious about remembering what comes to you; it will return. You can do this exercise anytime you are getting ready to write.

**FAMILY MATTERS:** Imagine that you are taking a walk with an ancestor who emigrated to this country. What would be on her mind? What would she look like, what clothes would she be wearing? Imagine her speech mannerisms, her choice of words, the sound of her voice.

Would she be excited or depressed, morose or joyful, serious or frivolous, fearful or courageous? Ask questions about her life. Tell her what you know of the family history since that time. What is her reaction?

**PERSONAL MATTERS:** Write down the names of people—heroes and villains, enemies and friends, models and mentors—who have played significant roles in your life. These can be public figures as well as people you have actually known. They can be in the sciences, the environment, politics, education, the arts, sports, religion. They can be characters in novels, myths, fairy tales, movies, plays, paintings, or operas. Select some and write briefly about how and why they affected or influenced you.

**SPIRITUAL MATTERS:** Try this on a pleasant outdoor day. Take a large sheet of art paper and some crayons, colored pencils, chalks, or watercolors, whatever you prefer, and go for a walk. Find a tree that you like and visit it. Paint or draw it as you imagine it in four seasons. Then study your drawings as if they were metaphors for your spiritual life. When has it been a bright spring green and idealistic? When has it flourished in summery fullness? When has it shriveled and faded or become dormant? What is your present spiritual season?

**PHILOSOPHICAL/ETHICAL MATTERS:** Create a spreadsheet and label columns for each aspect of your philosophical system: education, politics, sports, business, government, the environment, money, wealth, creativity, the arts, social justice, family, religion, selfhood, civic duty. Under each write your position and the actions you have taken to support it. You may also use 5x8 index cards for this. Keep it brief.

**DEATH MATTERS:** What is your first memory of death as a child or young person? Who had died? How did the adults in your life handle the experience and guide you through it? What were your feelings and behaviors at the time? Was it a rite of passage for you?

**LOVING MATTERS:** Imagine a gathering of your loved ones. Close your eyes and breathe deeply for a few minutes. Then, gently, one by one, take each of them into your consciousness, imagining their presence, lovingly observing them as they go about their daily activities. Imagine that, one by one, they are sitting before you and that you are telling them what you love most about them, what you remember about their lives, how you

feel about them at the present time, what hopes you have for their futures. After you end the meditation, write down what you remember from the experience and incorporate what you wish into your will.

**FUTURE MATTERS:** Consider what surprises may be awaiting you if you look for them. Notice the invitations you receive during the next few days and weeks. Who are the people you run into just by chance? What notices or announcements of cultural events, lectures, or community meetings catch your eye? What travel brochures come in the mail? What unexpected phone calls do you receive? What memory pops into your head? Do you have a dream about a faraway place or a long neglected relationship? Are you inspired to respond to any of these stimuli? Be impulsive. Act.

At the beginning of each class, I presented the introductory material and explained the content for the section we would be covering. We moved quickly to the exercises. The responses to these and other Preparations have had an effect in quiet and sometimes dramatic ways. One woman described her husband's memorial service in great detail, saying that it was the first time she'd had an opportunity to share her memory with others. Another wrote about herself as one of a trio of little girls on a spring afternoon in pre-WWII Brooklyn; it was later published in our annual magazine *Reflections*. Also published was a long narrative about the Jewish high holy days, including a grandmother's recipes and a drawing of her kitchen, remembered from the perspective of a child in a large observant family. As a way of documenting and reflecting on her personal history one student stayed with the exercise of taking a walk with an ancestor and wrote many reflective pieces in which the ancestor shared wisdom and insights. When asked to draw a room in the house of a grandparent, many responded gleefully, and the sharing was easy and enthusiastic. A former student, hurriedly on her way to class, called over her shoulder one day, "Hey, Jean, guess what? I planned my own funeral this summer!" A man in his 80s recreated a bitter verbal exchange he once had with his autocratic father and told the class that he had never spoken of it publicly before. During the discussion of philosophies and ethics I would ask students to share their opinions on a variety of topics. "I didn't know that I had any opinions at all until now," commented one woman. Always of particular interest to me was the discussion surrounding religion and spirituality, some unable to separate the two, others most willing to. All of this sharing, prompted by earlier individual work on the Preparations, increased the awareness of each for the other and helped them enter vicariously into life experiences formerly unknown to them and even alien.

I encourage writers to be innovative and creative when it comes to the shapes their wills will take. The document does not need to be entirely expository but could well be in the form of a photographic essay, for instance, include drawings, snippets of songs, poetry written or admired by the writer, collage; it could be in the form of a travelogue or a long philosophical essay, a brief letter or series of letters to persons living or dead, famous or fictional; a series of scenes or vignettes with or without dialogue. It could end up as a refined polished document or simply a collection of what transpired in each class. Above all, it should be true to the personality of the writer. And it should be preserved.

I encourage writers to be innovative and creative when it comes to the shapes their wills will take.

## The Ethical Will: A Modern Approach to An Ancient Tradition

In recent years the writing of memoir and autobiography has become a unique literary genre. The course offerings at our OLLI and I suspect many others reflect this trend. The impulse teachers of memoir most struggle against is the drive of the memoirist to write chronologically and in a way that gives equal weight to each and every experience, even the most insignificant or mundane. This deadens the potential impact of the stories that are wanting to come forth. To illustrate, I hand out in the first class a copy of an ancient Hasidic tale that imagines a dialogue between “Naked Truth” and “Parable.” Naked Truth, of course, has many lessons to deliver and puts them forth harshly, “without guile.” Naturally, they are resisted. Parable takes Naked Truth in hand, works with him, and “[dresses him] in story’s fine attire, with metaphor, poignant prose, and plots to inspire.” The story, of course, has a happy ending. I believe that the structure of this course, and especially its use of reflective writing and drawing exercises, helps to avoid the pitfall of poor “Naked Truth” and ensure that the resulting document will be both a pleasure to write and a pleasure to read.

I believe that some traditions should never be lost or allowed to fade into oblivion. The ethical will is one. To have documents such as these in circulation is a way to heal old wounds and break destructive family and cultural cycles. Someone may not read their wills today, I tell my students, but, even if their children show no interest or may even fear to read them, they can be assured that someone—a niece or nephew, a grandchild, some unknown stranger who happens upon it in years to come—will be grateful for the time and effort and emotional investment they put forth. And if, ultimately, only for themselves? Well, churning up the waters of one’s life, both shallow and deep, calm and troubled, is a way toward self-healing and psychological maturity, an invaluable gift in itself and something toward which we all strive.

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**Jean Sheridan** is a member of the University of Southern Maine OLLI which, happily, takes up a good deal of her time. At one time in her “former life” she was library director for the University of Rhode Island College of Continuing Education. During her years there she became intrigued with the fields of life-long learning and adult education and became an advocate for the democratic classroom.

## Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain

by **Oliver Sacks**

*Vintage Books, 2008*

*ISBN 978-1-4000-3353-9*

*Paperback, 425 pages, \$15*

**Reviewed by Adele Baruch-Runyon**

**M***usicophilia* begins as an examination of music and its interaction with the human nervous system; it expands to consider profound questions related to music and its role in the continuity of a sense of self. The book, written by Dr. Oliver Sacks, a prominent author and neurologist, is divided into four sections. The first two sections look at music and its complex, and at times, mysterious effects on our nervous and sensory systems. The last two sections continue to consider the biological effects of the musical experience, but they also look at questions relating to music's foundational role in our connection to community and personal identity.

I thought the first section was too long, perhaps because I found its many descriptions of music transformed into persistent problems terribly unnerving. Many of the people Sacks describes had once enjoyed music as a source of solace and pleasure until musical experiences, such as musical hallucinations, became intrusive and unwelcomed after neurological or sensory impairment. Interspersed in the descriptions of unwanted musical phenomena were descriptions of surprising, but not altogether unwelcomed, musical experiences. For example, after a post-encephalitic patient became reanimated from a relatively frozen state with medication, she began to immediately remember and record the raucous music hall songs of her youth.

The second section offers a fascinating discussion of a wide range of musical abilities with descriptions of how the nervous system may interact with sensory systems after sensory loss. For instance, Sacks describes the ways in which the cochlea in the inner ear forms an interactive feedback system with the cerebral cortex, receiving tones that become cortical representations, readily observed through imaging. One patient, a gifted composer with a damaged cochlea, no longer transmitted tones accurately to the cerebral cortex. But with the attention and focus developed in years of musical training, he was able to attend to the messages received by the cortex to "correct the critical representation created basically reorienting the representation of the notes" (p.136).

The third and fourth sections of the book continue to look at the ways in which musical capacities may preserve engagement to the larger community despite severe brain injury or disease. Full disclosure: I was trained as an arts

Sacks's investigations have profound implications for the older learner, especially as older learners cope with injury, disease, or gradual sensory loss. One is left in awe of both the vulnerability and the incredible plasticity of the brain.

## Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain

therapist early in my clinical training, and I am already well convinced of the transformative power of music. However, despite familiarity with many of the therapeutic applications of music, I learned a great deal about a broader range of applications of music therapy, especially for patients with dementia.

One minor weakness of the book is an over focus on the ways that music is a uniquely human phenomenon, ignoring decades of research on the bonding and communicative functions of some animal songs, such as the songs of whales (Suzuki, Buck, and Tyack, 2006). Indeed, one may argue that music is not what sets us apart from the rest of the animal world, but aspects of musical life connect us most fully with the rest of the natural world. Indeed the third section of the book describes the ways in which the developing brain may inhibit sensory connections and abilities (such as perfect pitch) in an effort to promote efficient linguistic functioning. This can lead to the speculation of whether some primates, without highly developed linguistic functioning, may have more finely developed sensory functioning than humans.

The most compelling stories in the book were those that illustrated the transformative potential of music in the wake of disability. Examples offered included individuals with Tourette's syndrome who found ways to channel and organize episodic movement through drumming. Individuals in the throes of clinical depression have found relief and comfort through the experience of listening to musical laments. Individuals suffering from profound amnesia were able to find expression, connection, structure, and a sense of competency through involvement in performing and listening to music. Those with severe dementia found pathways to communication, participation in group activities, and continuity of a sense of self through music making and musical enjoyment.

Sacks's investigations have profound implications for the older learner, especially as older learners cope with injury, disease, or gradual sensory loss. One is left in awe of both the vulnerability and the incredible plasticity of the brain.

In addition to music's role in helping individuals cope with injury and disease, musical expression may be an important outlet for older individuals as they enter what Gene Cohen has described as "The Creative Age" (2001). Both Cohen and Sacks point to indications that older individuals may experience heightened integrative functioning between the brain's right and left hemispheres. Cohen's research suggests richer neural connections as one ages and Sacks points to a lowering of inhibitions around executive functioning (and left brain dominance). Whatever the origin, increased communication across hemispheres points to the potential for heightened creative expression for older learners and an opportunity to fully engage executive and expressive capacities. *Musicophilia* demonstrates the ways in which music offers a perfect vehicle for the integration of these capacities.

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## The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die

by **John Izzo, Ph.D.**

*Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008*

*ISBN 978-1-57675-475-7*

*Paperback, 178 pages, \$15.95*

### Reviewed by **Linda Ruholl**

**A**s baby boomers struggle to redefine the meaning of later life, researcher John Izzo suggests we incorporate elder wisdom. Izzo conducted qualitative research over a two-year period as he interviewed a spectrum of people age 59 and older in an attempt to distill their wisdom. Izzo is a Canadian psychologist with a gerontology focus, as well as a graduate degree in divinity.

*The Five Secrets You Must Discover before You Die* is based on conclusions from the author's work with over 200 individuals from diverse ethnicities, cultures, and occupational backgrounds. Rizzo and his collaborators asked a number of open-ended questions including, "What has made you happy in life?" "What events brought regrets?" "What would have made a difference if you had known it sooner?"

Izzo says the *first secret* older people say we must discover is the need to live with intention. Don't just let life happen. Ask yourself what makes a "good day?" Live each day so that it can be a good one with its specific qualities unique to you. Wise elders say they often experience a "good tired" which symbolizes having made a substantial effort. A "bad tired" may mean one has lived somebody else's idea of a good day. Izzo's subjects were clear that it takes discipline to hear the inner voice that tells us what really matters, as well as courage to follow through with appropriate actions.

The *second secret* is the wisdom of leaving no regrets behind. Interviewees recommended moving toward what is desired, as opposed to what is feared. Izzo's subjects claim that taking risks does not usually lead to regret but refusing to take risks does. They almost always said they would take more risks if they had their lives to live over again. Imagine the best things and aim toward them. Many seniors reported "crossroads" in their lives, times when they had to choose to go one way or the other. Success cannot be guaranteed; only failure can be guaranteed.

The *third secret* noted in the interview series is the conscious choice to make love a priority in our lives. Love in this sense is not an emotion, but rather a conscious choice. Elders were consistent in believing that memories

Izzo's subjects claim that taking risks does not usually lead to regret but refusing to take risks does.

## The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die

of loving relationships and happy experiences are central in our days of dying, with little thought to possessions or past accomplishments. Elevate people over things and spread kind actions throughout the world. Make someone else's day every day with kind words. When you die, people won't remember what you did and said; they will remember how you made them feel.

The *fourth secret* is living each moment fully. Celebrate the great gift of life. Enjoy it completely. Wise people develop the ability to feel gratitude for each day and live each of their hours fully. Contentment is a choice and does not hinge on external events. We only have power in the present moment. We cannot change the past. We have no power in the future either. We can only change the present in the hopes it may influence the future. As one elder is quoted having said, "Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow; it can only rob today of its joy."

The wisdom to give more in life than you take is the *fifth secret*. You can't take anything with you at the end, but what you give will remain. We live in a borrowed world. We can each change it for the better, so make a difference in the lives of others. Touch as many lives as possible. Change begins with us. When one person stands up, people notice. Serve as a role model. Each life has some core expectation that gives it meaning. Lose yourself in that meaning and you will give more in life than you take. We don't get to see the difference we make. When you finally die, there will be sadness but also celebration.

Many of Izzo's suggestions echo the work of other inspirational works, for example Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life* (2002). However in Rizzo's book there are no religious undertones and the author's liberal use of personal anecdotes holds the reader's interest. The recommendations are more convincing because they are backed by research. One criticism of this book is that little is communicated to the reader about the research methodology. However, one can observe a number of the actual interviews in a three-DVD set with the same title as the book. This video series originally ran on the "Biography Channel."

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## How We Decide

by **Jonah Lehrer**

*Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009*

ISBN 978-0-618-62011-1

Hardcover, 302 Pages, \$25

### Reviewed by Rick Lamb

Jonah Lehrer describes the human brain as the most complex structure in the known universe, but cautions that it is an imperfect mechanism when it comes to decision making. In his new book, *How We Decide*, he goes inside the brain to explain how its operations generate the decisions we make. He begins with the assertion that research over the last two decades challenges long-held assumptions about the supposed superiority of the rational brain and the dangerous unreliability of the emotional brain.

“Decision making” is defined broadly to encompass the full range of discretionary actions, from choosing a spouse to stopping at a traffic light, to selecting the words for a poem. These decisions can be the product of conscious reflection, emotional impulse, or, most important in Lehrer’s view, a combination of both. Examining the relative reliability and utility of these differing “brains” (actually differing functions within the same brain) is what this book is about. Lehrer begins by acknowledging that much of Western intellectual activity is based on the assumption of the superiority of rational thought over emotional impulse. As Plato put it, it is the role of the rational charioteer to control the wild horses of emotion. However, Lehrer states unequivocally that this view is “simply wrong” because modern brain science has shown that the biological processes of rational thought often operate in combination with emotions to produce decisions that can be good, bad or indifferent.

Two distinct operations of the brain have been long recognized in Western theology and philosophy, accompanied by the belief that the emotional brain tends to distort both thought and action. In *How We Decide*, Lehrer counters this view with evidence drawn from research and life that shows that the brain’s duality is far more complex than Plato’s model of good versus bad. Instead he describes an imperfect but nonetheless exceptional mechanism of compromise and integration. It may not be perfect, but hopefully there is room for improvement.

Lehrer calls upon recent research—much conducted in the last 20 years with the introduction of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)—to support and explain this expanded understanding of the brain’s operations. Finally, he says, it is possible to study the living, working brain in action. Lehrer is particularly

In his new book, *How We Decide*, he goes inside the brain to explain how its operations generate the decisions we make.

## How We Decide

effective in making this complex subject matter accessible to the non-scientist. One especially appreciates his brief, but vivid examples of critical decision making by real people in actual situations. These include star quarterback Tom Brady's inability to explain how he makes the split-second decision to throw to the "right" receiver; the airline pilot who safely lands his damaged plane by consciously deciding to ignore years of training, and a psychopath who "rationally" decides to kill others without experiencing any emotional qualms or constraints.

Lehrer also describes a number of elegant experiments that demonstrate how easily the rational brain can be fooled. For example, he cites the many experiments with blind wine tastings that show that if subjects believe a wine costs more, they report it tastes better. This happens even when the prices are fictitious and the wines identical. Lehrer then provides evidence of the brain activity that can produce this outcome with the finding from another experiment. This one followed the same design with one exception: the subject underwent an MRI while tasting the wine. Again the participants selected as the best tasting wine the one they thought was most expensive. Meanwhile, inside the participants' brains the scans showed that the only time the prefrontal cortex showed any activity (e.g., took notice) was when the subjects were told the supposed price of the wine. This demonstrated the proclivity of the rational brain to favor hard data, even when irrelevant, rather than emotional input.

Although Lehrer tends to emphasize the limitations of the rational brain, he does not ignore the errors resulting from the action of the emotional brain. For example, he cites compulsive gamblers who, despite their knowledge of gambling statistics, become so distressed by losing that they keep doubling their bets as if previous losses increase the chances of future wins. In these cases, MRIs showed that losing generates a stronger negative chemical response than does winning a positive one. As a result, compulsive gamblers seem more strongly motivated by the desire to not lose than the desire to win. The desire to "get even" propels them to pursue a strategy prompted by emotion, not logic. (For the uninitiated, if you flip a coin 999 times and it always comes up heads, the odds for it to come up tails on the 1000th toss are still only 50-50).

While many of the limitations of human decision making have been long recognized, Lehrer makes the underlying biological processes comprehensible to those of any age who have not quite given up on thinking. This is no small achievement in an area of study so complex that even its subspecialties have difficulty communicating with each other.

Today we know that rational decision making, based on the conscious evaluation of seemingly relevant information and experience, is the function of the prefrontal cortex, which also happens to be the most recently evolved area of the brain. It also has the capacity to compare and integrate rational and emotional chemical signals. According to Lehrer this process is critical: *one could not exist without the other*. When the two agree, the resulting chemical signal makes us feel good; when there is a conflict, the result is a feeling of anxiety. A similar process takes place when the issue is a choice between a variety of positive options. The one with the highest level of dopamine gets priority—to the decider it just feels better. This process has been confirmed by the study of

individuals who have experienced injury to the area of the cortex responsible for this process. Their brain is unable to differentiate between choices, leaving the individual without the capacity to make even simple decisions. Lehrer describes one such person as spending hours just trying to decide what tie to wear. A brain that cannot feel cannot decide between multiple choices.

Another process of the prefrontal cortex involves the valuation and retention in memory of positive experiences. Repeated reinforcement of a good experience heightens a feeling of pleasurable anticipation. However, the greater the anticipation the greater the feelings of disappointment if the event is not repeated. The strong chemical signal resulting from this disappointment has greater cognitive impact than the initial positive experience. As a result the cortex is more likely to retain (remember) positive experiences and to anticipate their repetition in similar situations. If this does not happen, the resulting negative chemical message (experienced as disappointment) has greater impact than the original positive experience. This explains the physiological basis for what educators call the “teachable moment,” i.e., the tendency to learn best from our mistakes. However, this strong negative reaction to being wrong can also cause some individuals to become risk averse, avoiding and even fearing information that contradicts past learning. This helps explain the biological mechanism that reinforces the attachment to established ideas and the resistance to new ones. Not everyone is a lifelong learner; ignorance can be bliss.

*How We Decide* is not a self-help book so it does not provide a list of ten simple steps to solve complex problems. However, it does embody a more subtle and probably more powerful strategy for improving one’s decision making. To quote Lehrer:

“Whenever you make a decision, be aware of the kind of decision you are making and the kind of thought process it requires . . . The best way to make sure that you are using your brain properly is to study your brain at work, to listen to the argument inside your head” (pp. 249—250).

The most exciting thing about *How We Decide* is that it compels the reader to pursue the very process the author recommends: Just reading about how the brain works makes one focus on the operations of their own brain; and there is reason to hope that the brain learns to be a better brain by thinking about itself.

“OK,” you may ask, “But what does this have do with Tom Brady finding the right receiver, or the airline pilot ignoring the old rules in order land the plane safely?” The answer is simple: In both cases their rational brains played a role, but in the end, “It just felt right.”

In addition to being an associate editor of *The LLI Review*, **Rick Lamb** has taught and co-authored research in the field of adult learning.

## Your Personal Renaissance: 12 Steps to Finding Your Life's True Calling

by **Diane Dreher**

*Da Capo Press*

ISBN: 978-1-60094-001-9

Paperback, 276 pages, \$15.95

### Review by **E. Michael Brady**

During an age of unprecedented exploration and creativity, people who lived in the era we have named “The Renaissance” were empowered by a sense of calling or vocation (from the Latin *vocare*, “to call”). It was thought by many artists and scholars that humans of all ages and professions were called to a vocation. Believing that their life held divine significance and that each individual possessed a unique set of talents that needed to be discovered and applied, people of the 14th through the 17th centuries aspired to one of a myriad of honored vocations: painter, poet, priest, carpenter, humanist, mason, community leader. Their identities were informed by a sense of personal destiny, faith in a meaningful universe, and their place in it.

Diane Dreher’s new book has a lot to say to seasoned citizens who, in their 60s, 70s, and even 80s may be seeking a calling for the next stage in their lives, including new pathways of learning, growth, and service. In fact, linking the current search for vocation to the experiences of men and women who lived in the Renaissance is the subject of a remarkable OLLI course taught by the author at Santa Clara University (See Dreher’s essay, “Renaissance Lessons for Today,” in Volume 1 of *The LLI Review*).

This book offers a unique blend of theory and practice. Theory comes by way of historical vignettes, contemporary research in cognitive psychology, and findings in the social sciences about decision making and life choices. The fact that *Your Personal Renaissance* also has practical dimensions may be inferred by the book’s full title and its table of contents in which the author lays out in 12 chapters a plan for discerning the direction one might take in both the short- and long-term future. At the end of each chapter are useful suggestions, questions to ask oneself, and other ways to move forward in the hard work of discerning and acting on the next phases of one’s personal vocation.

Those with an interest in the Renaissance will read stories about important artists (e.g., Michelangelo and Leonardo DaVinci), writers (John Donne, Thomas More, William Shakespeare), scientists (Galileo, Thomas Browne), philosophers (Renée Descartes, John Locke), and religious leaders and mystics (John Calvin, Catherine of Genoa, Ignatius of Loyola). One of the few criti-

cisms I have of Your *Personal Renaissance* is that most of the stories the author chooses to tell about these important historical figures are brief, sometimes only a few sentences in length. I would have liked more detail, at least in some instances, about the individuals Dreher calls upon as “guides” or exemplars of principles and practices for finding one’s true calling. Nonetheless, this book offers a rich mélange of brief portraits of both famous and obscure Renaissance-era people.

Despite containing a number of lists and personal assessment exercises there is a palpably meditative or contemplative tone to this book that I happen to like but which may not be welcomed by some readers. The author has published previous books on Taoism and even one entitled *Inner Gardening*, so using philosophical, poetic, and spiritual language has been a long-term practice. The fact that many OLLIs and other LLIs offer well-attended courses in philosophy, religion, and related matters suggests that older learners will gravitate strongly to a book that unashamedly addresses spiritual issues and questions. Gratefully, although she teaches in a Catholic university with strong Jesuit traditions, there are no doctrinal or dogmatic intonations in this book.

I became a fan of Diane Dreher’s work when I first reviewed her aforementioned essay for publication in the inaugural edition of this journal. I also had an opportunity to attend a workshop on the topic of Renaissance lives and the lessons they teach that the author facilitated at a national OLLI conference several years ago. Professor Dreher is a remarkable teacher and writer and I enthusiastically recommend this book if, like many of us, you are struggling to discern your calling for the next phase of your life course.

**E. Michael Brady** teaches adult education and gerontology at the University of Southern Maine and edits The LLI Review.

*The LLI Review***The Annual Journal of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes**2010 Call for Papers

The LLI Review is an annual publication of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes' National Resource Center. The mission of this peer-reviewed journal is to present original research and provide thoughtful and engaging commentary on issues related to learning among persons over the age of 50. To accomplish this goal the review publishes work by members of the OLLI national network as well as by gerontologists and educators working and conducting research in the field of older adult education.

The following submissions are welcome:

- Articles describing a completed empirical research study (maximum length, 5,000 words)
- Research briefs/abstracts (500 words)
- Essays that involve a critical review of literature and/or original thought on an issue that is salient to mature learners but which is not necessarily based on empirical data collection (5,000 words)
- Book reviews (750 words)
- Articles that describe "best practice" in curriculum design and/or teaching in LLIs (2,500 words)
- "WOW! Programs"—These are detailed descriptions of especially creative or successful courses or programs. What took place? Why was it so successful? (2,500 words)
- A personal story (memoir) related to older adult learning (2,500 words)
- Brief fiction related to teaching and/or learning in later age (2,500 words)
- Poetry (no maximum length, but brief is preferred)

Manuscripts should be prepared in Microsoft Word, double-spaced, and use 14-point font. Four hard copies should be mailed to the editor, and an electronic version of the manuscript should be e-mailed to the editor.

All submissions will be read and evaluated by a panel of reviewers knowledgeable in the areas treated in the manuscript. References, citations, and the general style of manuscripts should follow APA style (as outlined in the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association). Only manuscripts that have not been published elsewhere will be considered for publication in The LLI Review.

**Submission Deadline: January 15, 2010**

**Submit manuscripts to:** E. Michael Brady, Ph.D.  
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mbrady@usm.maine.edu

To discuss a manuscript idea before and/or to otherwise communicate with the editor, please send an e-mail to the above address or call (207) 780-5312.





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## Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes

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The first Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) was started as Senior College at the University of Southern Maine (USM), in Portland, Maine, in 1997. In 2001 it was renamed after the Bernard Osher Foundation made a generous gift that enabled the program to expand its peer-taught courses and other activities for adult learners, ages 50 and over. The Osher Foundation

has now funded more than 120 Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes on campuses of colleges and universities from Maine to Hawaii. No two institutes are alike; each provides a distinctive array of courses and activities for seasoned adults interested in learning for the joy of learning.

In 2004, the Osher Foundation designated the Osher Institute at USM as the National Resource Center for Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes. The national center facilitates the exchange of information, solutions, and experiences among institutes throughout the country. It publishes this journal, plans an annual conference, and provides a number of ways that the OLLIs in the network can connect with one another.

[www.osher.net](http://www.osher.net)

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## The Bernard Osher Foundation

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The Bernard Osher Foundation was founded in 1977 by Bernard Osher, a respected businessman and community leader. The Foundation seeks to improve quality of life through the support of post-secondary scholarships, lifelong learning institutes, integrative medicine programs, and—in the San Francisco Bay area and the state of Maine—arts, cultural, and educational institutions. The Honorable Barbro Osher, Consul General of Sweden in San Francisco, chairs the Foundation's Board of Directors.