

# The Review

Volume 3

Fall 2008

The Annual Journal of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes

Explorations by and  
about older learners



## In this issue:

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

a program of



## *The LLI Review*

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Print ISSN        1932-7625

Online ISSN      1932-7633

*The LLI Review* is indexed in EBSCOHOST, including *Academic Search Premier*  
and *Education Research Complete*.

For further information about how to obtain additional print copies of  
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Cover photographs by Tim Byrne Photography, Scarborough, Maine



## Welcome

When we began *The LLI Review* three years ago we did not know to what extent there would be interest in continuing this journal. It need not be said that directors, teachers, and other leaders in Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes are busy people and—let’s be frank—writing for a journal is not usually going to be a high priority. To my knowledge the “publish or perish” imperative, while still operative in many institutions of higher education among tenure track faculty, does not exist within Osher-sponsored or other lifelong learning institutes. (I’m reminded of the cartoon depicting two older professors looking at the department bulletin board. One turns to the other: “Poor Wilson—he published and published yet perished anyway!”)

Therefore I am pleased that manuscripts keep arriving at my desk in Maine and many of them are of excellent quality. In fact, after undergoing peer review during this recent editorial cycle we had to turn away as many essays and research articles as we accepted. These decisions are difficult to make, especially when an editor has to write a rejection letter to a colleague whom he knows has taken precious time out of a busy schedule to do the work required to prepare a manuscript. I appreciate the earnest investment all writers put into their articles and poems whether or not their work is being published in Volume 3.

This year we added a poetry editor. Many older persons, some studying in LLI-sponsored writing workshops and others not, compose poetry and have learned that *The LLI Review* is an outlet to publish their work. Although I have written a little poetry and read quite a lot I felt the need to bring somebody onto the editorial board who is experienced as a published poet and teacher of creative writing. I am pleased to welcome Pat Budd as the first poetry editor of our journal. Pat actually hales from the same home town that I do (Bloomfield, Connecticut) although we are a half-generation apart in age and never met each other until the University of Southern Maine began its lifelong learning institute in 1997. Pat spent much of her career as an engineer and more recently earned a master of fine arts degree in poetry. Her writing workshops in southern Maine are uniformly praised by students and I have had the pleasure of working with Pat on a number

of OLLI-related projects, so I have seen her talent first-hand. She is a welcome addition to the editorial board.

We feel that this is an especially well-balanced volume in that there are strong contributions in all the areas on which we focus, e.g., empirical research, memoir, best practice (or “promising practice,” which is the lovely way Maria Genné puts it in her essay about *The Dancing Heart* program in Minnesota), and creative writing. The two life stories that Bob Atkinson collected this year describe the unique contributions of luminaries in the field of human services and education. Jennie Chin Hansen has been a national leader in community-based care for elders and recently assumed the presidency of AARP. And for decades Arthur Chickering has been a creative force in adult and higher education by way of program development and a remarkable body of scholarship. I believe you will find reading Jennie and Arthur’s stories both educational and enjoyable.

Please share your print version of Volume 3 with a friend or colleague. I also want to remind you that this entire edition is fully available online at [www.osher.net](http://www.osher.net), as are those published in 2006 and 2007. 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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## Culture, Community, and Diversity in OLLI: A Case Study

Britta Pejic

### Abstract

*For the past two years, the author has investigated how the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Southern Maine might encourage members of Portland's growing immigrant and refugee communities to participate in its programming. Members of Portland's Southeast Asian, Eastern European, Russian, and African communities were approached to share their input on older age learning, what types of lifelong learning programs would be of interest to their communities, what kinds of classes might be taught, and potential obstacles that might prevent people from participating. During the latter stages of the research one interviewee from the African community was asked to teach a class at OLLI in Portland. The people who participated in this class were asked to think about ways in which OLLI might encourage Portland's diverse communities to participate in this institute's programming. The overall goal of this project was to encourage OLLI at USM and other lifelong learning institutes to think about their communities and to consider ways of developing programming to cultivate diverse membership.*

### Introduction

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In recent years concern has arisen within the leadership corps of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine about the demographic makeup of its members. Since the program's inception in 1997 membership has been relatively homogeneous, at least with regard to cultural and ethnic diversity. In 2006 Vicki Nelson-Lemieux conducted a study that asked members their views about diversity within OLLI. Nearly everyone Vicki interviewed commented that they saw a modest amount of ethnic diversity—membership consisted of “a melting pot” of Greeks, Irish, French, and Italian, albeit almost all of these were American-born. There was the perception of a sizeable religious mix of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. But members consistently commented that there were no African-American or Asian participants at OLLI. Also, from what members could tell, almost no Muslims or Buddhists belonged. A major conclusion of this

In recent years concern has arisen within the leadership corps of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine about the demographic makeup of its members.



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preliminary study was that members perceived OLLI at the University of Southern Maine to be “diverse, but not as it needs to be” (Nelson-Lemieux, 2006, p. 11).

Currently in Portland there is an aging Cambodian and Vietnamese population emerging from the wave of immigration that occurred in the early 1980s. There is also a large community of elderly Russian and Eastern Europeans. In more recent years, Portland has seen an influx of African refugees. Overall, there are an estimated 500 elderly refugees in the entire state of Maine (Catholic Charities, personal communication). There is a large concentration of this population in senior housing complexes such as Franklin Towers, Kennedy Park, and 10 Congress Square in Portland—all within close proximity to the University. With a growing diverse population of senior citizens in the Portland area, how could a program such as OLLI, with strong growth potential, act to involve these various communities?

### A Brief History of this Project

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For the past two years, I have been investigating this question. I approached leaders and members of various communities in Portland to find out what might draw a more diverse audience. We also discussed some of the obstacles that prevent people from participating in OLLI’s programming. I started by interviewing Vietnamese and Cambodian Portlanders, as these are two of the larger immigrant and refugee populations in this city. I continued with members of Portland’s African communities. Finally, I contacted members of the Eastern European and Russian communities. During these interviews, I met a Sudanese author who expressed interest in teaching a class on current and historical politics of Sudan. He eventually signed on to teach a four-week summer course at OLLI in Portland. Forty-six people signed up for the course. The follow-up course evaluation process prompted participants to think about how OLLI might determine ways to develop and promote diversity.

### Cultural Considerations: Obstacles and Attitudes About Lifelong Learning

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The first round of data collection for this study consisted of face-to-face interviews with 15 participants. Six of these were of older persons from Southeast Asia, six from Africa, and three from Russia and Eastern Europe. Ten of the interviewees were men. I will briefly describe findings from these interviews grouping by regions of origin.

#### Southeast Asia

In her book *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*, Frances Fitzgerald (1972) explains, “For traditional Vietnamese, formal education consisted of the study of Confucian texts.” Participants in this study from Cambodia also discussed the influences of Confucianism and Buddhism on an individual’s education over the course of a lifetime. Some of their comments are shared later in this section.

Younghwa Kee discusses adult learning and Confucian perspectives. She shares that:

The purpose of adult learning is to enlighten the people, to love the people, and to rest in “the highest excellences.” According to the *The Great Learning*, eight steps should be followed to reach the highest excellence: investigation of things, extension of knowledge, sincerity of will, rectification of the mind, cultivation of one’s personal life, regulation of the family, national order, and world peace. Adult learning is a guide to becoming fully human. (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 227).

It is evident that lifelong learning as it is understood in the United States shares certain philosophies espoused by Confucianism. It would seem ideal that a lifelong learning environment would be a welcoming setting for fostering learning for individuals who follow Confucian and Buddhist philosophies.

However, Allene Guss Grognet (1989) offers some insight as to what we might also assume about possibly older, lifelong learners in Portland’s Vietnamese and Cambodian communities. She explains that in Asia “it is not expected that one would start learning new things in the elder years.” A participant from Cambodia corroborated this idea by asking “How am I going to learn new skills? You know? Like you have to find room to put your belongings.” He elaborated by saying:

It’s the idea of Buddhism and Confucianism that you have to go through life cycles. You have a first stage and a second. You have an education period and the working period. And then the last stage you prepare yourself to be born again. Like an elderly stage. A final stage. You have to be relaxed and keep your mind as pure as possible from the world around you.

The statements of these participants exemplify some of the attitudes held by Southeast Asians toward learning at a later stage in life.

### Africa

Portland’s African immigrant and refugee communities represent individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Burundi, Togo, and Sierra Leone, with a majority coming from Somalia and Sudan. In 2001, it was estimated that 1000 Somali refugees settled in Lewiston, Maine. Hundreds more would later join families from the first wave in both Lewiston and in the greater Portland area (Bouchard, 2002). Portland, Maine, is also home to the largest Sudanese immigrant population in the United States (over 2000 have arrived in Maine during these last 12 years). (Simon, 2006).

Currently, the climate in Somalia and Sudan is very volatile in many regions. Since 1991 when General Muhammad Siad Barre left, Somalia has had no central government. In 1983, the Second Sudanese Civil War broke out. Since then, almost two million Sudanese civilians have lost their lives. Millions more have been displaced or have had to flee Sudan to spend years in refugee camps or to begin new lives in countries abroad. Lack of formal education for many Somali and Sudanese refugees who live in Maine can be attributed to the unstable political climate in both countries. In Somalia, the rates of adult literacy are strikingly low. According to the World Health Organization (2005), the percentage of adults who are literate in Somalia is 19% (25% males, and an alarmingly low 13% for females). The literacy rate in Sudan is also considerably low. In a 2006 article in *The New Yorker* magazine about Somali resettlement in Maine, it was stated that 100% of Maine’s

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Somali refugees have suffered from trauma (Finnegan, 2006). Sudanese community members have also lived through comparable situations due to unstable circumstances in Sudan and even in refugee camps in neighboring countries.

It is important to refer to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) to illustrate the very basic idea that safety is critical, especially for learning. It is lower on the pyramid and therefore necessary in order to move to these other needs; love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. In many ways, lifelong learning helps individuals meet these other needs. But it is not until safety is secured that further needs can be achieved.

Upon resettlement here in Portland, Maine, many of these individuals are placed immediately in ESOL classes at Portland Adult Education and area literacy programs. From what I learned as a literacy teacher at Portland Adult Education for two years, many of these individuals have never sat in a classroom, nor have held a writing utensil, for that matter. For most, seeking education is not necessarily voluntary. It is often facilitated by local agencies.

It is true that there is a high illiteracy rate among Portland's refugees. However, not all members of Portland's African immigrant and refugee populations have had little or no education. There are a number of intellectuals, authors, doctors, educators and business people living in Portland. Some of these individuals are known community leaders. It might be important to note how their potential involvement and presence at OLLI might affect them as individuals, and how this might have an impact on their respective communities.

It is also important to note that the institution of adult education is not an entirely foreign concept to either nation. Both Somalia and Sudan have had very extensive histories in the implementation of adult education and in the fight to end illiteracy. Although there is no recent material written on the history of adult education in these two countries, Hussein (1984) and Garanbaa (1982) offer comprehensive accounts of adult education programming in the 20th century within these two countries.

### **Russia and Eastern Europe**

One participant informed me that in Russian higher education many scholars and scientists continue beyond the equivalent of a Ph.D. This individual is also working here in Maine to refine and develop a system to help clean and purify bodies of water. What I was able to gather from our conversation was that because he had gone so far in his studies and had worked for so long as an engineer, he doesn't want to stop. Perhaps I can't say this about all members of the Eastern European and Russian communities but it does inform me of this possible conclusion—people are so educated in their respective fields, what would be the logic in taking classes for enjoyment and fulfillment in a lifelong learning institute?

Another participant was a woman from Russia. She was a civil engineer. She had heard about the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and told me she had taken a class. Toward the beginning of our interview, she said that a program like OLLI "does not happen in Russia." She followed up with an explanation that the life expectancy in Russia is only 66 years. She said that the retirement age for men is 65 and for women it is 55. She added "life is over after retiring." She also expressed that Russians are not as health conscious as Americans at this age.

This woman also commented on the transition from Communist Russia. She said “we all went through hell...we all lost our jobs...the construction industry collapsed.” She took an office management class at age 54, to start a new career, and finally retired three years later.

Of her experience at OLLI, she said that it was “so nice to see all the rooms filled with elderly people.” Contrasting this experience to a hypothetical one in Russia she said if you want to learn at an older age “they laugh at you. They say ‘go home and die.’” I took this to mean that in Russia, people die shortly after retirement.

Another participant was a former school teacher in Bulgaria. Our interview was rather short, but something struck me about this interview. When I had asked the question, “Is there something you could teach?” she told me after the interview that her heart jumped. She had gotten very emotional when asked this question. She even got teary-eyed when we talked more after the interview. Often times when immigrants or refugees move to the US their credentials aren’t recognized and they have to find an entry level job position somewhere. She is a trainer where she now works, which allows her to be employ some of her teaching skills.

### Other Obstacles

A number of people with whom I spoke mentioned time as a barrier to participating in OLLI. Many members of these communities work past the age of retirement. One of the reasons for doing so is so they can earn money to send to families in their home countries. Others explained that they were parents of teenaged children. Although past the age of 50, one participant shared that it wasn’t until resettling in the United States that they felt that their situation was stable enough to start families. He is a survivor of the Pol Pot Regime which took place in Cambodia in the late seventies.

However, the most basic obstacle to participation seems to be the lack of awareness. Of the 15 people interviewed, only one had even heard of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Paying more attention to marketing OLLI in immigrant and refugee communities could help address this important issue.

### Increasing Diversity: Suggestions and Recommendations by OLLI Participants

As I have explained above, during my interview process I had met an area Sudanese author who was interested in teaching a class. This participant studied economics and philosophy as part of his bachelor of arts at the University in Khartoum and subsequently he received his master of arts degree. He then became a politician where he was involved in “housing,” and “labor;” he was in charge of “the state of affairs” and “cabinet affairs.” His career as a politician was interrupted by the first civil war in Sudan, but he resumed work and then ultimately retired. He later continued as a researcher when he relocated to Harvard University where he was able to advance in his research to complete his first book. He is currently working on another book about John Gareng, the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army leader who died under mysterious circumstances during the summer of 2005.

This individual was introduced to a member of the Curriculum Committee at OLLI. A story about him and his class was subsequently featured in the OLLI

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newsletter. Forty-six people signed up for the summer OLLI course, which was entitled, "Power and Democracy in Sudan."

Because of logistical problems this summer course was not evaluated by the standard paper and pencil, end-of-course process. Therefore, my colleague Mike Brady and I felt this presented an opportunity to conduct evaluations by phone and at the same time query students about their ideas for increasing diversity at OLLI. In addition to course evaluation questions, each telephone interviewee was asked the following two questions: "Do you have any ideas you would like to share with the OLLI Curriculum Committee about sponsoring other courses like this one?" and "Do you have any other ideas you would like to share about how to increase ethnic diversity and multiculturalism at OLLI?" The following are data collected from these questions.

One idea that surfaced was that participants would like to see representatives from different communities be recruited as instructors. This would provide opportunities for these people to share their stories and perhaps even join and become active members of OLLI. In their own words:

I would love to see more courses like this. I don't like discussion courses that much. When we have so many immigrants in our community, anything would be interesting.

Having other people from different communities is a great idea.

Foreigners add knowledge to classes. We need diversity, although we do not have it.

Find someone from Somalia. Bring in other representatives of other communities.

Other participants' ideas explained further the importance of working with representatives of different communities. One woman, who is from France, explained that she lives in the same building with people from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. She shares a common language with these individuals, and therefore enjoys discussions with them. She expressed the importance of what has transpired in these nations and why certain individuals are living here in Portland, Maine. "Situations like Congolese and Rwandan. We should learn more about these...."

In referring to world affairs, one participant expressed the "more we know, the better we would attend." Another stressed the importance of learning from someone with firsthand knowledge and experience. This person stated "a person like this [referring to the Sudanese instructor]—he lived it as opposed to just reading an article." It is important to note, however, that where some individuals are willing to share about their personal experiences, others are not. Students and personal acquaintances have shared their frustrations with me about being asked about their uniqueness once an accent is detected. Approaching any individual and asking them to share about their experiences is always a sensitive issue.

One item, which surfaced in discussions with these participants was the fact that many had taken certain courses at OLLI that dealt with international and cross-cultural issues. One of these was entitled "Great Decisions," where different world-changing affairs were covered during a course session. One participant told me that Sudan was covered during one of these classes, which might have prompt-

ed certain individuals to sign up for “Power and Democracy in Sudan.” Another course, which had been organized by an OLLI instructor, was entitled “From Away and Living Here.” Guest speakers from different countries were invited to speak each week. I was told that this course had been offered several times and had received highly favorable reviews.

Participants seemed very enthusiastic in their suggestions. However, this consideration was mentioned.

I don't know what these people [people from other communities] can enjoy that we're offering. I don't know how much we need to change for what they might want vs. what we have always been. I don't know if we can be all things to all people and be what we have always been.

Although this point of view might suggest implications of exclusivity, there is something that needs to be addressed. Past course catalogs have listed classes such as Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, Frederic Law Olmstead and America in the 19th Century, The Art of Listening to Music, and The Symphony of Aging. These are not necessarily courses which are likely to attract diverse audiences. It is also important to note that the philosophies which are shared within the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute correspond with American culture of aging. William A. Sadler stated that:

Though the average life expectancy is 77 years, if you've had higher education and take good care of yourself, the chance of living to 90 or even 100 is becoming a real possibility for millions of people. (2004)

Some of the statements shared by the participants from the various communities suggest that this is not a sentiment universally understood.

## Other Recommendations

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One major concern which arose among all participants of this project was visibility. OLLI participants recognized this problem and suggested that the program reach out to area organizations that work with some of these communities.

As I had mentioned before, only one of the fifteen participants who represented the Southeast Asian, African, Russian, and Eastern European communities had even heard of OLLI. Approaching members of these different communities as part of this research ultimately had two functions; that of gathering important data, and that of facilitating public relations for OLLI. Participants who offered their time for the interviews were each given a course voucher for classes held at OLLI. As for the course which was taught by the Sudanese instructor, this person told me that word about his course had gotten out to other members of the Sudanese community. However it remains true that if a lifelong learning institute is going to work to develop diversity, it has to know about its surrounding communities and how to reach out to these people.

This brings us to another issue—language. This is not to say that all members of Portland's immigrant and refugee populations have had little or no education. There are a number of intellectuals, authors, doctors, educators, and business people from other countries living in Portland. However, it is true that upon resettlement here, many of these individuals are placed immediately in ESOL classes at Portland Adult Education and area literacy programs. Some of these students have

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advanced English skills, while others may have never sat in a classroom, nor have even held a writing utensil.

In the recent past OLLI has hosted service learning courses that deal with this issue. One such course, which experienced substantial success, involved students learning skills to become tutors in an ESOL classroom. As an ESOL instructor at the school that worked in cooperation with this OLLI course, I do know that several of these service learning students have chosen to continue to volunteer long after the termination of the course.

Other suggestions for classes that might work within this format were discussed with two individuals, one a Vietnamese professor and another a Sudanese community leader. The idea of a gardening project came up. The participant from Vietnam shared the following idea:

I don't know about Cambodians, but Vietnamese, they love gardens...they have to grow their own vegetables in their own back yard....And in this country, they have too many tools. Too many seeds.... We don't know how it works, because the tools in our own country are very different from here. And the land...we don't know.

A Sudanese community leader shared with me that she was trying to get a gardening project together. She was concerned with the health of some of the elderly women who came to Portland from Sudan. Their diets had changed drastically and the foods, which were once accessible to them in Sudan, are no longer accessible here. Many have reverted to poor eating habits as they tend to buy lower quality food staples in area grocery stores. As a result, many suffer from diabetes and other health issues.

In addition to projects like these there are activities which could be organized and would be beneficial to all involved. About three years ago, I tried to get a women's conversational walking group started with ESOL students I had worked with involving area women who were simply interested in exercising, meeting other people, and sharing their conversation skills with ESOL students. Over the years students have shared with me their frustrations of not having the opportunity to practice the English skills, as oftentimes it is not spoken within their immediate circles. The Sudanese community leader to whom I have referred expressed that this would be a good idea as many of the elderly women she knew suffered also because of lack of exercise. However, the month I tried to get this project off the ground happened to be a very rainy one. I have yet to get it off the ground but will continue to try.

## Conclusion

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Some of these ideas and projects might require an OLLI brainstorming team to identify communities, area organizations who work with these communities, and what kinds of programming, particularly service learning and wellness promotion, might work well to bring the OLLI network closer to its surrounding communities.

The National Resource Center states that "each Osher Institute reflects the culture of its own university and its learning community" (2007). In 2008, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine will find its



new home in the Wishcamper Center in Portland. With the completion of the new building, the total OLLI membership may grow substantially from its current 1000. The program's presence in Portland will become more visible and ultimately a reflection of more diverse communities. With such growth in diversity among senior citizens living in Portland, and across America (Olson, 2001) the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in southern Maine has a great opportunity to provide leadership and guidance among other lifelong learning institutes in working with diverse communities.

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**Britta Pejic** grew up in South Portland, Maine, where she later resettled after having lived in Massachusetts, Texas, and France. She has been teaching ESOL to students at Portland Adult Education and at various worksites such as Barber Foods in Portland. Britta recently earned her Certificate of Advanced Studies in adult learning at the University of Southern Maine, where she spent two years collecting the data reported in this article.

## Field Trip!

By Virginia M. Butler

### Abstract

*For any retired teacher, field trips call to mind the most tiring and stressful days of the school year. By contrast, a favorite component of the University of Southern Mississippi's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute has been field trips where members have learned about Mississippi, New Orleans, and the surrounding area. For OLLI participants, field trips take on an entirely new meaning as they become lifelong learning opportunities, friendship initiators, and for this particular writer, fodder for the next story.*

**F**ield Trip! Words that strike terror in a teacher's heart have taken a new point of view. Gone are the days of 18 or so kindergarteners holding tight to a rope so nobody gets lost. Gone are the days of counting 21 second graders every seven and a half minutes to be sure they are still with me. Or did I leave school with 22? Gone are the days of reminding a junior high school boy, "Before you got that 32 ounce drink, I told you the bus was not stopping again until we got back to school."

Field Trip! Now it's an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute adventure. Members have paid their fees and shown up in the parking lot 20 minutes ahead of time so they can claim their favorite seats on the bus. The trip has been suggested by an alert member or two who saw a place they wanted to go. The Curriculum Committee approved the trip and put out the publicity. Sue Pace, the director-liaison made all the arrangements. Off we go on our quest—making new friends, visiting historic sights, viewing beautiful art, learning about the icons of our state. To be sure, there is an occasional OLLI member who thought the time we were to be back at the bus for the next leg of the trip was 1:30 instead of 1:15, but that is now Sue's problem, not mine.

It was on one such a trip that I experienced serendipity (lagniappe if you happen to be from Louisiana). After visiting the Mississippi Museum of Art, our OLLI group from the University of Southern Mississippi continued our excursion to the Eudora Welty House. As we toured the house and gardens, I made note of the things I had in common with my role model in my retirement occupation of

Field Trip! Now it's an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute adventure. Members have paid their fees and shown up in the parking lot 20 minutes ahead of time so they can claim their favorite seats on the bus.

## Field Trip!

choice—putting words on paper. Eudora and my mother worked in the 1930s under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration in Mississippi but never met as far as I know. As official state photographer, Eudora toured Mississippi, taking pictures and burning people and places into her mind that would later make their way into her stories. As recreation director, Mama entertained the people of Oktibbeha County with socials and games that would make their way into her repertoire as a young people's leader in the churches where my father was pastor.

When our guide told of Eudora's interest in children, I remembered my aunt's story of the reception she attended and the special time she took to talk to my younger cousin. Hannah had broken her arm skating, and Eudora held up the line to discuss her cast.

We viewed Eudora's desk overlooking the street where she gleaned ideas for her stories. I recalled reading a passage to my eighth grade students from Eudora's *One Writer's Beginnings*, the best selling memoir of her early years. She emphasized that one does not have to have a troubled childhood to become a writer. On pleasant Sunday afternoon drives, she sat on the back seat and instructed the adults in the front, "Now, talk." She listened and absorbed the stories. I, too, came from a fairly normal family and eavesdropped on conversations.

Our OLLI tour group admired Eudora's garden where she worked when she wasn't writing—a practice I share with her. My final connection came when we entered her house with books stacked in bookshelves, on tables, and in chairs. Her niece, who gave the tour, said, "If you visited Eudora, first you had to move some books to sit down."

My account of these connections called "Moving Closer to Eudora?" was published in *Once Upon a Time*, an over-the-back-fence magazine for children's writers and illustrators. That's not quite the Pulitzer she was awarded, but it will do.

Field Trip! Another field trip is a hike across campus at the University of Southern Mississippi to the de Grummond Collection of Children's Literature. Onva Broshears, OLLI instructor, and Ellen Ruffin, curator of the collection, take the group into the archives of a vast collection. We see H. A. Rey's illustrations of the monkey before he was named George and before he became Curious. We see the past in Kate Greenaway woodcuts from the time before technology revolutionized children's book illustrations. When we see personal letters between two authors griping about editors, we realize some things have not changed. We learn how to return and access this bountiful information. In my retirement occupation of choice, I have been taking notes. I see stories in the archives, and I shall return.

Field Trip! In the fall, off we go to Oxford, Mississippi, to see Rowan Oak where William Faulkner wrote his books and on to New Albany to visit his birthplace. Our tour includes the Union County Historical Museum and the Faulkner Gardens. Plants are labeled by name and quotes from Faulkner's works. Museum Curator Jill Smith requests visitors to write a garden story for the museum's book of memories. I know just the one. The first line will be, "The long arm of Mama's gardening began with her youthful green thumb."

Before we see the garden, Master Gardener Sherra Owen gives a fascinating plant lecture peppered with, "Now you won't find this in a book."

Sue Pace accosts Sherra after the lecture. “You need to write all this down for people to read.”

Sherra’s answer is short. “Never. I don’t write.”

Sue calls me over. She knows what I like to do. Sherra and I talk. I take notes.

Field Trip! OLLI has replaced the terror of those words with anticipation. Who knows when the next trip will uncover another story?

After 28 years of teaching kindergarten, second grade, and junior high gifted language arts, **Virginia McGee Butler** knew what she wanted to be when she grew up. She writes in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and continues to teach writing classes for the University of Southern Mississippi’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and the Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies. She and her husband, with whom she celebrates a golden wedding anniversary in 2008, also enjoy six grandchildren.

## From Academia to Old Age Pastime: Some Observations and My Personal Journey

**Sophie Freud**

### Abstract

*This essay describes the author's personal journey and observations as a teacher of older learners. Potential difficulties that may confront new teachers in lifelong learning communities are discussed, especially among those who had taught in universities prior to retirement. Three areas are identified: teaching goals, the nature of class members, and the contract with the "students." The author views the challenge of creating and teaching new courses, often on themes inspired by books she reads, as her old age pastime.*

Lifelong learning communities welcome new study group leaders who have recently retired from academia. The assumption is that such academics will simply continue their former pursuits in a new setting. Members subscribe to such courses, pleased with the opportunity of working with a "regular professor." But at times mismatches can develop, at least initially, between the former highly regarded educator and his or her class members. The following thoughts are to facilitate, for academics, the transition from academia to lifelong learning settings.

I have observed three interrelated sources of potential difficulties pertaining to teaching goals, the new nature of class members and what we can call the contract with the "students." I shall discuss each of these factors and subsequently give my own transition from academia to a lifelong learning community.

### Teaching Goals

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Study group leaders have the choice of staying within their own area of expertise, or else exploring another area of long-time interest. In the first instance, we have the advantage of a study group leader who is an expert in her field and thus a wonderful source of information and guidance. Some academics, especially if they taught pre-professional graduate students, rightly viewed the conveying of information to prepare their students for their future careers, as their primary obligation and objective. But conveying information is seldom an ideal goal for teaching older adults. Class members are quick to feel, often perhaps resentfully so, that all the expertise seems to be located with their study group leader, and that their teacher

neglects their own knowledge that might complement, or sometimes even contradict hers, with the potential for lively discussions. Even if the retired professor is reluctantly persuaded to submit questions to her students as reading and discussion guides, an information-focused academic may then turn the session into a question and answer process. There are, of course, study group members who enjoy collecting new information by merely listening and such an expert teacher would be an ideal match for them. But adult learners who prefer learning through an open seminar with mutual give and take would find such a didactic teaching style a frustrating experience. I have only outlined a potential difficulty here, because the best professors teaching in their own fields of expertise are often also excellent discussion leaders.

In the second choice we have a study group leader who has a deep interest in an area, perhaps a lifelong avocation, and a wish to learn more about it, given the incontrovertible fact that the best way to get to know a subject area in depth is to teach a course in it. Such a study group leader becomes a co-learner. He will approach his course with careful preparation (more preparation than that needed by an expert), enthusiasm and curiosity, in the manner of an explorer. He will have to lean to some extent on the expertise of his “students” who will be spurred on by this challenge. The danger here is that highly sophisticated learners may be disappointed by a study group leader who is not an expert in his field. But, as already mentioned, given that different adult students have different learning preferences, it is to be hoped that most programs will profit from a variety of study group leaders, experts and non-experts, didactic teachers and group discussion leaders, all categories with fuzzy boundaries.

### The Nature of Class Members: Dual Relationships

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Former academics are suddenly faced, not with young inexperienced students who do not question their professor’s higher status and wisdom, but with peers who may recently have retired from successful careers as doctors, lawyers, and Indian chiefs. It can be especially difficult and demand much tact if one of the Indian chiefs is also an expert in the theme of the course, for example, a retired cleric in a course on the Old or New Testament or a published poet in a course on poetry.

Dual relationships are forbidden—or at least heavily discouraged—in psychotherapy, but they are widespread in daily life although often prone to difficulties. Your pediatrician may also be your friend. You have started to mistrust his diagnosis of your child’s condition, but the friendship prevents you from seeking a second opinion. Your wife may also be your editor and marital conflict breaks out if you suspect her of carelessness.

In the adult learning community dual relationships are taken for granted. The chairperson of the program’s advisory council may be a student in your class. Does his opinion carry more weight than that of an “ordinary” class member? In my former teaching life my students were instantly critical if they decided I had a pet among them. Perhaps we have outgrown such childish concerns? Your close friend may also be your teacher, your student, or both. What if your friend is a disappointing teacher and you want to make some helpful diplomatic suggestions which are resented and threaten the friendship? Academics are naturally used to the fierce competition for status and professional rewards or theoretical conflicts that happen

Some academics, especially if they taught pre-professional graduate students, rightly viewed the conveying of information to prepare their students for their future careers, as their primary obligation and objective.

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in many departments, but at least their admired, envied, or despised colleagues are not apt to become their students or their teachers as they do in older mutual learning communities. One seldom hears of double relationship troubles, and perhaps older adults are inured to them, or else they may appear under different guises. I think they deserve some consideration whenever interpersonal conflicts arise.

### Contract with Students

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Academic faculties are used to settings in which students are constantly evaluated, rewarded with good grades for serious work or sanctioned for mediocre efforts. New study group teachers may not be sure what to expect from the “students” in a setting without credits, grades, or paper assignments. Moreover, the tables are suddenly reversed. Teachers, not students, get evaluated and not just once (in our setting), but several times. “Getting tenure was easy compared to the evaluations around here,” is an occasional joke among our study group leaders. Retired college faculty members who undergo course evaluations in lifelong learning institutes have commented that this was a ritual they had hoped not to encounter again in their new phase of life. They often come to the lifelong learning community not expecting evaluations of their teaching at the age of 68 or 77. Yet, we are reasonable people and are quick to recognize that in a democratic setting, evaluations by students must be part of the teaching territory. However, the one-way street of evaluations is somewhat of a problem. Study group members are not sanctioned if they come to class without having done their “homework” and while adult learners fortunately tend to be more motivated than younger learners, all study group leaders, both new and experienced, may need to “fill in” if class members come to class unprepared. Study group leaders may expect too little from older learners, mindful that class members are not full-time students but already highly accomplished older persons who often have many obligations and busy lives. I have had the experience in several courses in which the study group leader did not expect her students to have read the assignment and repeated in class what students should have read at home. I think in this setting more energy has to be spent to motivate class members to keep up with the expected readings than may be the case in traditional college courses.

I shall now come to my own experience with this transition from academia to teaching in a lifelong learning community, the Brandeis Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, trying to describe how I handled the necessary steps from the old setting to the new one.

### Old Age Pastimes

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Although I taught many different courses, in various settings, my primary identity had been that of a social work educator. My most important contribution to the curriculum of the Simmons College Graduate School of Social Work was a year-long course, required of all first year social work students, dealing with human development and theoretical therapeutic thought systems. I had devised this course, brought it with me to my appointment as chair of the human behavior sequence, and used much of my time updating the course with the most current research, replacing perhaps tedious readings with livelier ones and thus serving each

new generation of students an ever more perfect course, at least in my eyes.

After entering the Brandeis Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, I was wise enough to get acculturated to the new setting for two semesters before agreeing to make a proposal for my own course. I applaud myself for this decision because it gave me some opportunity to get acquainted with the culture of the new setting, the expectations, preferences, and disinclinations of my future students who were, I learned, not “students” but “study group members.” My own change of designation from professor (or professor emerita at this point) to study group leader carried with it definite implications for teaching. Circumstances showed, however, that I had not been attentive enough to this new culture.

I seized the opportunity of this new phase of my teaching life to turn to my lifelong love of literature, which I had abandoned reluctantly as a young person, a new immigrant to this country who was facing a practical career choice. Naturally, my immersion in psychology for half my adult life leaves a deep mark on my approach to literature.

I called my first course Violence in World War II, half of it dealing with holocaust violence, the other half with other forms of war-related violence. Years of reading on this subject meant that I was very familiar with this literature. I had, for example, even given talks on the compelling MAUS books by Art Spiegelman which were surely the highlight of the course. The course was received with satisfaction, but not with the enthusiasm I had become accustomed to from my many years of full-time teaching. Some of my choice of readings were questioned, and, above all, students apparently missed guiding questions for our discussions. I had never used such questions in my prior teaching and had to learn that they were needed in this new culture. I proceeded to improve the course, as I had been accustomed to doing, taking it for granted that a first course could not be perfect. When I was allowed to offer the course a second time, I had the very unusual experience of not having a sufficient number of subscribers. Gone were the halcyon days of required courses. The course, with its improvements, had to wait for yet a third offering in a new semester and after that, my reputation as a sought-after teacher was finally established. Not having enough applicants for a course I was offering was the first narcissistic blow of that kind in my whole teaching career. I hope this is a cautionary tale for other successful academics who find that their former reputation is not carried over to their new setting and that they might have to be prepared to deal with the indignity of having to establish themselves anew at an age when they expect deserved recognition.

Since I had not been a literature major, and had not had training in literary theory, I was definitely not the “expert” kind of study group leader. From expert scholar I transformed myself into a co-learner and introduced myself in each of my course descriptions as “a catalyst and facilitator of discussions.” I started to see my main contributions as choosing interesting readings and devising stimulating provocative questions to guide our discussions.

I had now taught Violence in World War II to my satisfaction and could let it go, while staying with the specter of that haunting war. A German friend from the “next generation” sent me the DVD of a movie he had made entitled “Fatherland” in which he confronts his father about his role in WW II. He also gave me a book in which a German author, Uwe Timm, writes and ponders about the life of his

Academic faculties are used to settings in which students are constantly evaluated, rewarded with good grades for serious work or sanctioned for mediocre efforts. New study group teachers may not be sure what to expect from the “students” in a setting without credits, grades or paper assignments.



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brother who had died in Stalingrad as member of the Waffen SS. With these two documents in hand, a new course formulated itself in my head. I called it “Germans Look Back at World War II and its Legacies.” The course evoked much interest in the whole community and I was asked to offer it again. But I, who had taught a similar course for 30 years running, was launched on a new path. I had discovered the fascination of seeking out relevant literature once I had established a course theme. It guided my search of readings, leading me in ever new directions. I had definitely found a worthy old age pastime. From now on I would create a new course every semester and this would be the challenge of my old age, never giving me enough time to think about the futility of life and the fearful future of our planet.

The next course arose from my reading a delightful book about group psychotherapy, Yalom’s *The Schopenhauer Cure*. I allowed myself, for this one semester, to teach a course in my own area of expertise which I was to call Psychotherapy for Better or for Worse. Could I please teach this intriguing course again? No, I can no longer repeat a course—it would interfere with my new life plan. I next came upon a new book by a favorite author, Kazuo Ishiguro, and I knew I had to construct a course around that secretly terrifying book. At the same time I also read a delightful book about a boy with Asperger’s syndrome, Haddon’s *The Curious Incident Of the Dog in the Night Time*, and my task became to create a course around these two books, which led to a course I called “It Was Hard to Grow Up.” Naturally, I found many excellent books fitting that title that I had to repeat the same course but with entirely different readings. The choice of books is limited by their length and I often spend a great deal of preparatory time planning which chapters could be skipped. Many books need to be taught over a period of at least two class sessions. Sometimes, when I found a text as captivating as *Fateless* by Imre Kertész, I have used three class sessions. I have, however, not solved the difficulty of discussing just a part of a book, especially when a number of class members have already read the whole book.

Reading *Divided Minds* written by twin sisters, one of whom suffers from schizophrenia, led me to the wish of constructing a course about mental illnesses from the point of view of the patient or his or her family, setting once again a foot into my former academic life. The search for a “seductive” title is one of the interesting challenges we face, since we effectively have to market our courses to a choosy membership. After much deliberation, I am calling this one Personal Tales of Madness and Sadness, with some conviction that it will attract many interested study group members. While this course is only to be taught next spring I have recently been deeply moved by Sherwin Nuland’s book about his unhappy father. Thinking about a possible course, Kafka’s letter to his father instantly came to mind, as well as *Patrimony* by Philip Roth. A father-son book course is now formulating itself in my head to be taught a year from now. Will you help me with a catchy title?

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**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 Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Brandeis, Sophie was a professor for 30 years at the Simmons College School of Social Work.

## Late Life New Romance in the Movies

**Robert H. Dolliver**

### Abstract

*Late life is being re-conceptualized to include shifts, changes, and improvements in the lives of people who are “seasoned” or in their “second act.” One such change is the recognition that new romances sometimes do happen in late life. In this essay, a selection of films that cover numerous aspects of romantic life in later years are reviewed.*

### Introduction

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**M**ovies offer wonderfully evocative moments. We even form relationships with all kinds of movie characters and identify with some of them. Movies also provide us with pictures of events, interactions, and struggles which can prepare us to anticipate situations in our own lives. Seeing movies can promote vicarious learning, where we can learn by observing the personal experiences of others. In this essay movies are reviewed under eight topic headings, with pairs of movies selected to present different aspects of each topic. The vast majority of the stories in these 16 films are told from a female viewpoint. More will be said about this in the final section of this article.

### Desired Characteristics

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Probably everyone has considered which characteristics in a romantic partner are: (a) essential, (b) desirable, (c) tolerable, and which ones are (d) totally unacceptable.

In *The Rainmaker* (1956), Katharine Hepburn plays an older character who has never married. She indicates that she wants these characteristics in a romantic partner: “I want [pause] to make somebody happy. I want somebody to be glad he found me the way I’ll be glad I found him. I want him to be able to tell me who he is and to tell me who I am too.” Later, she adds: “I want a man to stand on his own two legs and I want to stand on mine.”

Shirley Jones (“Marian the librarian” in *The Music Man* [1962]), is also older and never married. She desires a different set of characteristics, which she sings: “All

I want is a plain man...a modest man, a quiet man, a gentle man, a straightforward, and honest man...And I would like him to be more interested in me than he is in himself, and more interested in us than in me. And, if occasionally he pondered what made Shakespeare and Beethoven great, him I could love 'til I die."

Those two sets of desired characteristics will undoubtedly differ from those of the reader. These movie-stories from many years ago reflect midwestern rural and small town settings. There is a sophistication, however, in that both these characters realize that they want a certain kind of interaction, a kind of partnership, rather than identifying static characteristics of their romantic partner.

### Body Image

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Many older women have a negative body image, leading them to fear that their nude body will be unappealing to men. In *Shirley Valentine* (1989), Pauline Collins plays an English housewife vacationing in Greece without her husband. She accepts the invitation of Tom Conti (who plays a waiter) to go for an excursion on his boat. At a secluded beach, they go for a nude swim and have sexual intercourse. Afterward, when Conti kisses her stomach, she says to him: "You kissed my stretch marks!" Conti replies: "Don't be too stupid, to try to hide these lines. They are lovely because they are part of you and you are lovely. So, don't hide. Be proud, huh? These marks show that you are alive, that you have survived... They are the marks of life." Collins' responses indicate that she does not believe him, but that she feels, nevertheless, that both she and her nude body have been affirmed by his comments.

In *Used People* (1992), Marcello Mastroianni ardently woos Shirley MacLaine. Mastroianni consults his friend who advises: "Sigh rapturously, like her beauty is so breathtaking [that] you have to swoon. Sigh like words fail you. Sigh for her lovely long neck, for her fine tapered fingers, for her full, welcoming breasts." However, Mastroianni's awkward sighing is not an effective way for him to express admiration of her beautiful body because MacLaine tells him: "You have some very peculiar behavior."

Many older women, shy about being seen nude, may want the lights turned off, and/or to be dressed when getting into bed when sexual contact is anticipated. This cautious approach is shown in several movies which are reviewed later: *Terms of Endearment* in the Pilot Light Lover section, plus *Camilla and Innocence* (in the Rekindled Love section).

### Romantic Illusion/Disillusion

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Fervent desires can lead to projecting those desires onto another person, leading to the illusion that the other person shares those desires. The usual, unfortunate result is disillusionment and severe disappointment. In *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1987), Maggie Smith plays a spinster who has sought, but never found romance. When she moves into a boarding house, she meets Bob Hoskins' character who lives in the same house. He notices her and initiates a relationship with her. Over time, Maggie imagines that he is interested in marrying her. But she is devastated when she learns that he is only interested in her money (of which she has very little) being invested with him.

Seeing movies can promote vicarious learning, where we can learn by observing the personal experiences of others.

## Late Life New Romance in the Movies

Maggie seeks solace in alcohol, and is asked to leave the boarding house. She then withdraws what little money she has, and checks into an expensive hotel and carelessly spends it. Hoskins hears about this, and again approaches her. This time he proposes marriage, but makes it clear that their business partnership is an important aspect of what he is seeking. In the last scene, Maggie is checking into a care facility, deeply disappointed that the marriage that she hoped for will never happen.

*Central Station* (1998, Brazil, subtitled) involves an older woman who goes on a journey with a 9-year old boy in search of the boy's father. The two of them head off on a commercial bus, then hitchhike with a lonely truck driver. The woman finds the truck driver to be kind in a way she has never experienced with a man, and they talk with each other about their lives. The three of them are mistaken for a family. The trucker becomes frightened by her advances and he departs, leaving the woman and boy stranded at a rural truck stop. In both these movies, the women are guided by their desire to marry and believe that their male companions have the same interest. But, when their relationships end, they become disillusioned.

### Pilot Light Lover

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"Pilot Light Lover" refers to a transitional relationship, which is relatively short, but nevertheless has long-lasting, positive effects. In his brief affair with Shirley MacLaine, who plays a very proper widow, Jack Nicholson's character in *Terms of Endearment* (1983) exemplifies this concept. Their first date begins with MacLaine's hair teased into a puffball and protected by a scarf. As they drive to lunch in his open convertible the scarf is blown off her head, out of the car, and her hair becomes unkempt. We sense this to be a warning of the coming disruption of her properly ordered life. After lunch, slightly inebriated, they recklessly drive his Corvette along the Texas coastline. This memorable scene ends with both of them thrown into the Gulf, and Nicholson making sexual advances. Later, after Nicholson has ended their romantic/sexual relationship, he travels a considerable distance to support MacLaine when her daughter (Deborah Winger) is dying of cancer. Later, he shows support for her by becoming involved with her grandchildren when they come to live with MacLaine.

*Bridges of Madison County* (1995) is also a well-known, popular movie starring Meryl Streep as the midwest farm wife and Clint Eastwood as an itinerant photographer. They meet while Streep's husband and children are away at a state fair. Their friendly, casual relationship quickly becomes romantic and sexual. The following four days together are special for both of them. Streep considers leaving her marriage to develop the new romance with Eastwood, but she does not. They never see each other again, but their lives seem to have been changed by their encounter.

The author Gail Sheehy introduces the term "pilot light lover" and focuses on the possible beneficial after-effects on the woman who has been left (Sheehy, 2006, pp. 123-126). She did not consider what seems to have happened in *Terms of Endearment*, where both Nicholson's and MacLaine's characters show lasting effects from their brief affair. Nicholson becomes more caring and supportive; MacLaine becomes less rigid, more flexible, and stronger. Their brief romance seems to have changed them both, although, of course, several factors could contribute to their transformations.

In *Bridges of Madison County* these sorts of transformations are not clearly presented and we have to infer whether there were ongoing beneficial effects. Streep says the affair helped her stay in her marriage, and to settle her into her life, perhaps with greater satisfaction. These results suggest an alternative to Sheehy's notion of having one's life "ignited." If the characters in *Bridges* become more settled and satisfied, perhaps it is because they have finally achieved the kind of passionate relationship for which they longed, feeling greater fulfillment and an increased sense of the completeness in their lives.

### Rekindled Romance

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The term "rekindled" denotes that some spark has been retained, which can be ignited again. In *Camilla* (1994), Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn play the late life rekindled romantic couple. When they meet again, after being apart for many years, they relive some of their earlier relationship and for the first time, consummate their love. Then, they repeat an experience in which they had previously parted company. However, this time, Tandy leaves with Cronyn. Later, she plays her violin on the beach with Cronyn as her appreciative audience.

*Innocence* (2000, Australia) is the story of two lovers who, years earlier, had a passionate affair, but they separated, perhaps forced by his parents. Amazingly, in their 60's, they find each other once again. He has been a widower for 30 years, and she is in a joyless marriage. Their passions are rekindled, and they decide to make love. The death of one of the lovers dramatizes the question of whether their love justifies this adultery, considering the hurt and upset it causes her husband.

Both of these movies attest to the power of rekindling an old romance even when, as in *Camilla*, sexual contact had been deferred. In *Innocence*, there are numerous flashbacks of these lovers as young adults in which they are constantly touching, snuggling, and looking lovingly at each other. These flashbacks suggest that their experience in late life is very similar to their passionate youthful love affair.

### Concerns of Children

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The adult children of the late life couple play important roles in the selection, formation, and ongoing success of the late life romance. *Roses Bloom Twice* (1977) is the story of a recently widowed middle-aged woman as she reestablishes her social life. One of the major themes is the over-involvement of her two adult children in that process. The widow's daughter, noting her mother's social isolation, pushes her mother to throw a party "to meet people." When an attractive man shows interest, both children become wary and apprehensive about whether he is a suitable person to be involved with their mother. The issue of sexuality receives the most attention in the movie. Her children watch closely, while the new couple is dancing, to be sure that the new man is not trying to seduce their mother.

Jill Clayburgh and Jeffrey Tambor, playing the romantic couple in *Never Again* (2001), become involved in spite of their declaration: "Never again." In one scene, they are together in bed and Tambor goes underneath the covers. At that moment, Clayburgh's college daughter walks into the bedroom with her boyfriend. Clayburgh does not want to acknowledge Tambor's presence to her daughter, and

These flashbacks suggest that their experience in late life is very similar to their passionate youthful love affair.

## Late Life New Romance in the Movies

even denies that there is anyone else there. After an awkward silence, her daughter finally points out that there is a man underneath the covers. Tambor then comes out and says: "We were very worried, but everything's going to be okay...I'm your Mom's gynecologist, so don't worry about a thing." He tells Clayburgh: "She [your daughter] really likes me." But Clayburgh replies: "[No] she thinks you're psychotic!" When caught in an embarrassing sexual situation, Clayburgh's character tries to avoid her daughter's judgments, but nevertheless imagines her daughter to be judging Tambor.

In both of these movies it is the mothers' children who show concern and their focus is on her sexual involvement. Both of these movie situations probably would be infrequent today with the greater acceptance of late life sexuality. However, there are other serious, realistic concerns which children or others might raise which are not shown in these movies: a criminal background, mental health issues, abusive behavior, drug use/alcoholism, sexually transmitted diseases, and/or seeking financial gain (as in *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearn*).

### Whether to Marry

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Whether to marry in late life involves different set of circumstances than for those who are middle-aged or younger. *Antonia's Line* (1995, Netherlands) is a movie about self-sufficient women. When her neighbor proposes marriage, Antonia instead invites him to come to her farm to do chores in exchange for hot breakfasts and tea. He accepts, and she eventually tells him that he cannot have her hand but he "can have the rest." They agree that "once a week is enough," and this proves to be a compatible arrangement for them over many years. Thus, they designed a committed, sexually exclusive relationship in which they maintain their separate lives and residences.

In *Conversations with Mom* (2004, Argentina, subtitled), the principal characters are the son and his 82-year-old widowed mother who lives alone. Mom always wants to cook for her married son, who often declines to eat with her. So, there is a constant supply of extra food, which Mom sets outside her door, thinking that a cat will eat it. She finds that her food gets eaten, but discovers the homeless man who is the recipient.

Over time, she invites him in to have supper, then to stay with her in her apartment. In the end, Mom and the homeless man are in an ongoing live-in relationship, but they do not marry. There is no indication that there is romance or sex, but they apparently have a warm companionship.

Not marrying may involve financial advantages, e.g., paying separate taxes, or retaining a deceased spouse's disability payments, retirement or health insurance benefits. Some couples do not marry in order to maintain separate finances, to protect their offsprings' inheritance.

### Caregiving

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At some point, ill health and death are part of being older; thus caregiving becomes part of late life romance. In *Tomorrow* (1972), Robert Duvall plays a hired hand in a 1930s rural southern sawmill. One day, a frail woman stumbles in, obviously fatigued, malnourished, and probably sick; she is also pregnant. He brings her

into the shack where he lives. In time, he discovers that she has been abandoned by her husband. Duvall, a simple and uneducated man, tends her with exceptional warmth and tenderness. A healthy boy is born, and shortly thereafter, the mother dies. Duvall becomes a warm and loving father to the youngster.

In *A Song for Martin* (2002, Sweden, subtitled), two married people end their current marriages to marry each other. But soon into their marriage Martin shows forgetfulness, even momentarily not recognizing his new wife. His memory losses increasingly interfere with his professional and personal life and he is diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The movie is very direct in showing his decline, which is quite painful to watch. His wife says that he has disappeared into himself.

Martin's new wife is hopeful that attending a concert and having a family dinner in a restaurant will be affirming experiences, but, instead, they are disasters. Martin and his wife interact with strong emotions, showing rage, and hurt, as well as an enduring, ongoing love for each other. She says that she hopes her love and support will sustain him through his illness, but it is not enough. Finally, he has to be placed in an institution; she visits him regularly, as he slowly ebbs away.

There are many differences between these two stories of caregiving. The tone of the first is sad, while the second is tragic, a difference which involves the two characters' expectations. In *Tomorrow* the male caregiver appears to feel successful, believing that he has done the best he could do for his woman friend. In contrast, the female caregiver in *A Song for Martin* feels like a failure because she was unable to ease her husband's illness. There is another important difference in expectations. The male caregiver had lived a very lonely life and the unexpected companionship of the sick woman more than compensates him for the work of tending her. The female caregiver had anticipated that her life would be even more pleasurable in her remarriage, but instead, it becomes filled with discord.

## Reflections

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The topic of late life new romance, as evidenced in the movies reviewed here, is in the domain of women. Of the sixteen movies reviewed, eleven are told from a woman's point of view; three (*Innocence*, *Never Again*, and *A Song for Martin*) are told with equal male/female viewpoints, and two (*Used People* and *Tomorrow*) are presented from a male perspective.

In reading on this topic I was interested to learn that some late life new romantic couples choose to "live apart together" (L.A.T.) The latter refers to committed couples living in separate residences, sometimes in different states or even countries; that is the "L.A." (living apart). The "T" (together) is their committed relationship, constant availability to each other, frequent contact, and regular visits to each other. Individual preferences of location, lifestyle, housekeeping (i.e., neatness, cleanliness), tastes in decoration may be involved in having two homes, which are visited regularly by the romantic partner.

For those who may want to seek late life new romance, Sheehy (2006) has this advice: People who really enjoy whatever they are doing become a beacon which attracts other people, possibly even including a new romance; be active, be involved, and be bold.

People who really enjoy whatever they are doing become a beacon which attracts other people, possibly even including a new romance; be active, be involved, and be bold.



Late Life New Romance  
in the Movies

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**Robert H. Dolliver** is retired from the University of Missouri-Columbia after 34 years teaching in the Psychology Department, working in the University Counseling Center, and being part of the inter-departmental graduate training program in counseling psychology. Since then his interests turned to various aspects of aging which led to his teaching in the Osher LLI at the University of Missouri-Columbia. In the fall of 2007 he again taught his course entitled “Old Age—Preparing for the Possible, the Likely, and the Certain.” More recently he has been the director of the January - May 2008 OLLI Friday Film Festival. He used movies in his campus teaching years ago, as he continues to do in Osher classes. The kinds of uses he makes of movies are demonstrated in the content of this article.

## Sea Glass

**Elaine Toher**

The beach calls  
I walk

Aqua-blue gift from the sand  
catches my eye, I stoop

Stone smooth and warm  
in my hand

Others are scouring the sand  
for a glimmer of glass

I was chosen for this beauty.

Retired from a large Maine teaching hospital as director of media services, **Elaine Toher** lives with her husband and their dog, Skampy, in Scarborough near the beautiful Maine coastline. Among her many loves are gardening, birding, and her close connections with friends and family. She has participated in many OLLI courses since retirement, most recently receiving encouragement in a poetry writing class.

## Gift

**Kelly Beller**

Once the thermostat was set at 60  
I visited a younger friend who used 52  
cooler was more important than warmer  
Somewhen, my preference changed without telling me  
I must have 68 to be comfortable  
who could schmooze at 52

I no longer recall that startling veer  
just the clear realization that  
what once was, is no longer  
and a propensity for warmer  
manifest in hats, sweaters, and scarves, newfound toys  
another of aging's mysterious gifts.

**Kelly Beller** is a retired, overeducated, former academic with pretensions in the participatory folk arts of singing, dancing, acting, storytelling, and cooking. She makes her home in Rochester, New York.

## The Roles of Old Maps: Linking Lifelong Learning to Special Collections Libraries

**Joel Kovarsky**

### Abstract

*The history of cartography is a rich and intellectually diverse field, containing elements of history, art, politics, science, geography, economics, and more. Few institutions offer courses in the subject. This article discusses an introductory course, now in its third year, developed for the OLLI at the University of Virginia. The class introduces lifelong learners to the available resources of special collections, and the use of maps as primary source historical documents. This course also highlights the idea of comprehensive and non-circulating collections, often of substantial monetary or historical value, with materials not simply important because of the text or individual image, but for their artifactual value. The article emphasizes the intellectual worth of linking lifelong learning classes to the varied resources of special collections libraries.*

It has been estimated that, at busy times, many hundreds of maps are downloaded per second from the Internet.

**W**hat do Dante Alighieri's vision of Hell, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's Middle Earth, the London Underground, FairyLand, and Operation Overlord have in common? They have all been mapped (Akerman and Karrow, 2007).

It is hard to imagine a day in the modern world where some sort of cartographic thought or display is not in use (Kovarsky, 2007a). It has been estimated that, at busy times, many hundreds of maps are downloaded per second from the Internet. Maps are part of our past, present and future—but they are much more than way-finding devices (Akerman, 2006). They are historical documents, revealing details about art, history, politics, science, travel, discovery, commerce, the growth of nations, and the way our mind works. Very few courses in the history of cartography exist (Campbell & Cohagen, 2003), in spite of the intellectual richness of the subject (History of Cartography Project). Most of the available courses are within the realm of standard university curricula.

It was for these reasons that in the spring of 2006 I developed and taught my first course at the Jefferson Institute for Lifelong Learning, now the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Virginia ([www.olliuva.org/](http://www.olliuva.org/)). The class, titled "The Roles of Old Maps: History, Art, Cartography, and the Building of Nations," was initially taught in four two-hour segments, arguably not even enough time to

## The Roles of Old Maps: Linking Lifelong Learning to Special Collections Libraries

introduce the subject. This has since expanded to six segments, each one and one-half hours in length, still just scratching the surface of this diverse and fascinating intellectual arena.

One of the necessary and enjoyable features of such an introductory course is to see “live” examples of the maps, considered primary source documents for the study of the history of cartography. Because I own and operate an online antiquarian map business, I am able to supply original examples for display and comment during each class session. This is supplemented by conventional lectures, using both standard 35 mm slides and PowerPoint.

In spite of the access to the above material, I did not think that was enough, and wanted to let the students know about the roles and values of special collections libraries, in this case with particular emphasis on early cartographic material. I am fortunate to live in Albemarle County, Virginia, home to the University of Virginia and its Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library ([www.lib.virginia.edu/small/](http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/)). I was able to arrange two of the sessions to be held at the library, using examples from their cartographic holdings. This not only gave the students perspectives on additional and important map materials, including early atlases, but also provided a way to showcase some of the library’s holdings. This develops valuable community inroads that might help in terms of recruiting future donors and volunteers, or suggest the possibility of other diverse educational uses of special collections materials.

Special collections libraries are unusual places—part library, part museum, part archive (Allen, 1999; Thorin and Schreyer, 1999; Traister, 2000). Their materials, often valuable both for artifactual and monetary reasons, generally do not circulate, so there is no familiar “roaming the stacks.” In addition, maps had often been considered mere supplemental illustration in terms of the history of the book, something that has distinctly changed in the last several decades (Tanselle, 1982).

The class I teach is limited in size. Initially it was restricted to 25 persons, but has now been reduced to 20. This is in consideration of the need for the students to be able to peruse the hands-on materials within the course, physical space constraints, and the inevitable security issues pertaining to the display of valuable historical documents (Kovarsky, 2007b). It has been gratifying that the classes have filled each of the years they have been offered.

This year, for the first time, in addition to the two sessions at the Small Special Collections Library, the remaining four sessions will be held at the Jefferson Library in Monticello ([www.monticello.org/library/index.html](http://www.monticello.org/library/index.html)). This allows me access to modern projection facilities (i.e., PowerPoint) and the ability to show students relevant materials on the Web during any of the six class sessions. In addition, a major map exhibit at special collections, pertaining to early maps of America and the USA, will be used as teaching material this year, something not always feasible. I could, in fact, see a course being taught via distance on the Web, although some adjustments would need to be made for demonstration sessions (Kovarsky, 2006). It is certainly possible to display some digital images easily online, using them as springboards for any number of discussions.



This image is from a ca. 1598 edition of Braun & Hogenberg's landmark and artistically magnificent, six volume, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*. This image can be used to initiate discussions of early atlases, the relationship of city plans and views to maps, art history, intaglio printing, and more.



This next image is an area close-up of an 18th century map of the Holy Land, showing a map within a map, and an image of the "horned Moses" (Melinkoff, 1970) holding the Ten Commandments. Other areas of the map have New Testament imagery. This can foster discussion about uses of the map by the church, various sorts of iconography used on maps in different eras, the purposes of these iconographic displays, and the technical and commercial details of map production.



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Linking Lifelong Learning  
to Special Collections  
Libraries

Other sections of the class discuss the idea of mapping in early indigenous societies, the varied links between art and cartography, cosmography and cartography, Renaissance surveying techniques, the types and care of paper used for maps, the problems of representing a three-dimensional world in two-dimensional space, and printing methods including relief, intaglio, and lithography. While this class is not meant to discuss modern Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing maps, it is difficult to ignore the popular face of Google Earth and the widespread interest it has generated.

The functional roles of maps for various national administrative purposes, such transportation (roads, stagecoach and steamboat lines, railroads, intercontinental flight) and voting districts are discussed. No discussion of the history of cartography would be complete without consideration of the military roles of maps, both in terms of active campaigns and commemorative functions.

In addition to the intellectual diversity of the history of cartography, the diversity of the students is also quite remarkable. Class size, as already mentioned, is necessarily limited, to allow for more spontaneous discussion, and to complement the hands-on sessions with the representative materials. Participants have included physicians, engineers, artisans, librarians, surveyors, attorneys, and a variety of retired university faculty members from assorted disciplines.

A few of the students bring more than a beginner's knowledge to class, which helps enhance and enliven discussion. The students are often just curious. These are not practical "how-to" sessions, and the evolving and cross-disciplinary scope of the history of cartography often defies simple subject classifications. A number of students, by the end of the course, have commented about their surprise as to the richness and diversity of the subject. The enthusiasm generated by the special collections segments was palpable and nearly unanimous.

The ability to integrate conventional lectures and modern technology, including browsing the Web, within the context of a single course structure has been an interesting experience for me as a teacher. The course and materials I use change each year depending on what I might have in my dealer stock, and also because of the shifting nature of Web resources, and the capacity to vary material selections from special collections. The staff of the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia has been open to having portions of this class held at their facility, much to the delight of the attending students.

As noted above, this will be the first year that the Jefferson Library at Monticello ([www.monticello.org/library/](http://www.monticello.org/library/)) has provided space for the remaining four of six class sessions. It is quite remarkable to have two such institutions cooperating with the local Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

The experiences resulting from these past three years of teaching lifelong learning classes have been invaluable for my own educational growth. I hope some of the descriptions provided in this short essay will spur similar centers to explore collaboration with a local special collections library. I also hope, at some future time, that increased options for distance learning will expand intellectual access to these remarkable repositories of historical documents. The technologies are already in place (Kovarsky, 2006).

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**Joel Kovarsky** is an antiquarian map dealer ([www.theprimemeridian.com](http://www.theprimemeridian.com)) and recent recipient of a master of science from the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He is also a retired physician. He has written several articles pertaining to the collecting and history of old maps and was a speaker for the 2005 Virginia Festival of the Book. He writes the “Recent Publications” column for *The Portolan* (journal of the Washington Map Society).



## Reflections of a New Curriculum Committee Chair

**Mary Collins**

### Abstract

*In this essay, the author reflects on her first year and a half as the new chair of the Curriculum Committee of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine. During this time several significant changes were taking place at the institute. The author confesses that she didn't know some important things and didn't know that she didn't know them. This, along with other confounding issues, led to unanticipated problems and strife. She writes this hoping that the solutions that were found might be helpful to others in similar positions.*

### Introduction

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As I write, I have been chair of the Curriculum Committee of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine for the past year and a half. And what a time it was. The charismatic, brilliant, creative, experienced, and able previous chair moved on to new endeavors, developing a new production of his puppet opera and instigating new courses. The Institute was undertaking a strategic planning effort as it celebrated its tenth anniversary. Finally, preparations were being made to move into our own new building, permitting us to offer classes six days a week and in the evening instead of the current Fridays-only schedule.

I was a relatively new member of the committee but had a background in teaching in an adult education graduate program—the reason, I guess, that I was asked to serve as chair. The previous chair, as is typical of such creative souls, was impatient of bureaucracy and carried most of the activities of the committee in his head. Further, knowing that the workload on the chair was getting too much for one person, he formed three new subcommittees just before he left. Without clear direction, these committees took off on their own, doing good, but not always desired, work. As is so often the case, I not only didn't know what I needed to know, but, also, didn't know that I didn't know it. In addition, we were being expected to plan strategically for the major change in scheduling. Predictably, we soon became

known as a “problem” committee or one that was “out of control.” By the time I had been in the position for about nine months I thought two-thirds of the committee might resign.

## The Issues

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One of the major set of issues that confronted us was our role in “vetting” faculty, determining their qualifications at the beginning and evaluating them after teaching. We assumed that these functions were part of our job. But, this OLLI has developed as a “pure” adult education model, with teachers and learners as equals. The organization assumes that our students do not need anyone else to intervene to assure the quality of their learning experience. Further, it encourages people to teach their passion and will give anyone who submits an appropriate proposal an opportunity to teach. We did not understand our limited role in this regard and we made a number of mistakes in finding it out.

A second major set of issues had to do with one of the newly formed subcommittees, Student Development. The general idea behind this committee was to develop ways of encouraging students to become more active members/learners and to become study group leaders or teachers. The assumption was that members might not fully understand the co-equal role that they have in this OLLI. The subcommittee assumed, however, that their assignment included finding new members and soon ran afoul of the membership committee. Further, as they explored ways to encourage more active involvement of members, especially looking forward to the opportunities in the new building, they transgressed into the roles of the Strategic Planning Committee and staff.

It didn't help that I'm very different from the former chair. My voice, in comparison to his, was small. I felt that even when I tried to get help or find solutions that I wasn't being heard or, more perniciously, was seen as simply whining; and I admit, sometimes, to my embarrassment that I did whine.

By the ninth month some long-term faculty were angry at us for infringing on their freedom; staff were alternatively “tiptoeing around us” or being frustrated by us; the previous chair's feelings were hurt because he felt that some of our changes implied criticism of him; the chair of the Advisory Board was having to attend all our meetings; and I was ready to quit, too.

## What We Did

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We needed to accomplish several things: 1) get clarity about our role and how to organize ourselves best to achieve it; 2) respond to the requirements placed on us by the strategic plan; 3) begin planning for the transition to the expanded schedule; and 4) mend our fences. Even now I smile when I remember one of the key committee members saying to staff, like a chastised little boy who has misbehaved again, “We are trying to do better.” And we were.

## Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

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In order to clarify our role and to make transparent our responsibilities, we created two documents. One was a set of guidelines that spell out how we are struc-

By the time I had been in the position for about nine months I thought two-thirds of the committee might resign.

## Reflections of a New Curriculum Committee Chair

tured and how we function. We kept three subcommittees but changed them to more adequately reflect our responsibilities. The Faculty Recruitment Subcommittee is responsible for finding the additional faculty we need for our expanded schedule and to attempt to achieve greater diversity. They will assist new faculty in preparing their first proposal and in other ways as needed. To help with this, we created a “new faculty packet” which is sent to anyone who is interested in teaching at OLLI.

The Course Development Subcommittee is responsible for receiving the proposals and creating the schedule for each session (four sessions each year with a total of about 100 classes). They also identify gaps and duplications in the curriculum. And the Faculty Development Subcommittee is responsible for assisting new and experienced faculty to further develop their teaching skills.

The second document was an annual timeline of activities for which the committee is responsible. Unlike the guidelines, which we hope will have some stability, the timeline may change each year.

Just to give an idea of the time and effort required to develop these simple tools: the guidelines went through 13 drafts before being approved; and the timeline half a dozen. And, of course, it was in putting in writing what we thought we should be doing that our different assumptions were unveiled. However, I do believe we now have an agreed-upon structure and roles that will permit us to be effective and efficient.

### Responding to the Strategic Plan

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The strategic plan asked the Curriculum Committee to create a plan to diversify the courses and faculty and to create courses that would attract the still working population of younger seniors. These latter courses would be offered in the expanded evening and Saturday hours. Remember the floundering Student Development Subcommittee described above? I asked them if they would be willing to be responsible for developing this plan. And they responded magnificently—no whining there.

They created a plan that makes us more proactive—both in recruiting faculty and in identifying needed courses. It was their work that led us to create the new subcommittee structure described previously. They reviewed information from a number of other lifelong learning institutes and made several recommendations that were not included in the plan but which are safely stored in my “to-do” file, to be brought forward once we are in the new building.

### Transitioning to the Full Week Schedule

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During the first ten years of our existence, USM’s OLLI has been able to offer classes only on Fridays due to space limitations. Students were limited to two choices each session—one morning and one afternoon. In the new building, we will offer classes every day, morning and afternoon, and a couple of evenings as well. While the number of daytime classes is not expected to expand greatly, scheduling will be more complex; and there will be additional evening and weekend classes and expanded winter and summer sessions. There also will be opportunities for more

flexible scheduling of shorter and/or longer classes and using different formats and technologies.

To manage these changes we've created a new proposal form that asks faculty to specify the days and times that they can teach. We'll send this out twice a year, once asking for fall and winter proposals, and then for spring and summer. This is going to require all of us, but faculty in particular, to plan further ahead than in the past. It will require, as well, a much expanded catalog of courses and a longer timeline for developing it.

### Mending our Fences

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I hasten to say that all of the issues and problems involved good people of good will. There were honest differences of opinion about how to achieve quality and serve our faculty and members well. Several key committee members worked long hours creating the documents and plans described above. Unfortunately, some of those members ultimately felt compelled to resign as a matter of principle.

There are always residual consequences in these kinds of situations. I expect all of us have lingering feelings of anger and regret. I know that I do. It is my hope that the measures that we've taken will restore peoples' confidence in the work of the committee. Parenthetically, I might say that in spite of the problems, we successfully fulfilled our primary function of offering our members over 100 courses last year and again this year. I also believe that we've positioned ourselves for the new challenges of the future.

There is an organizational idea known as "parallel thinking." Parallel thinking starts with different assumptions that never get tested. It is like parallel lines extending infinitely into the distance never to meet. That's what happens when good people make different assumptions, don't realize it, and proceed to act on those assumptions. That's largely what happened here. Once we put some of these assumptions in writing the differences became visible. And while it was awkward (sometimes painful) to work things through, and not all of us made it through, I hope and believe the mending has begun.

**Mary Collins** is a retired adjunct associate professor of adult education at the University of Southern Maine. Prior to teaching she served in a number of research and administrative roles at USM and other universities. She now takes courses regularly at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at USM and is the chair of the Curriculum Committee. Other volunteer activities include serving as a docent at the Portland Museum of Art and selecting books for the homebound patrons at the local public library.

Parallel thinking starts with different assumptions that never get tested. It is like parallel lines extending infinitely into the distance never to meet. That's what happens when good people make different assumptions, don't realize it, and proceed to act on those assumptions.

## Life Stories, Autobiography, and Personal Narratives

**Robert Atkinson**

Remembering our life story is a way of reminding ourselves who we are. It is also how we can leave our legacy for future generations. Our story *is*, after all, who we are. It is the only way others really get to know fully how we see ourselves, what is most important to us, and how we want to be remembered.

This year, 2008, is also important for many reasons. Twenty years ago I founded the Center for the Study of Lives to record and preserve the life stories of people of all ages and backgrounds. This year it has changed its name to the Life Story Center, moved to the OLLI National Resource Center, and launched its new interactive Web site ([www.osher.net/lifestorycenter](http://www.osher.net/lifestorycenter)), where it is now offering a unique combination of guided, interactive features for telling, reading, and sharing life stories. Please take a look at it, and join us in helping to meet our goal of creating the world's largest life story archive, a place for anyone and everyone to leave a written legacy of their life.

In this issue, we feature the enlightening life stories of Jennie Chin Hansen and Arthur Chickering. One of the things they have in common, as you will read, is that as young adults who were not necessarily in the best position, both were courageous, bold, and convincing in presenting their cases to those who had the authority to admit them to the college of their choice. And they both made those who admitted them look good after taking a chance on them, as they both went on to distinguished careers.

Speaking of legacies, Jennie Chin Hansen has accomplished three firsts for the 39 million member AARP in becoming the first nurse, the first Asian-American, and the first boomer to be president of its Board. She went from a research assistant at an unknown nonprofit to the leader of world's largest nonprofit membership organization. In the process, she was instrumental in developing On Lok Senior Health Services, a then-small, community-based project, into a family of organizations that now serve as a prototype for PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly), a national Medicare/Medicaid model, primarily by living out and applying the cultural and family values she acquired from her immigrant parents, thus at the same time ensuring their legacy.

A 1970 graduate of Boston College School of Nursing, when there were few options available to women, Jennie Chin Hansen decided to interview the dean about the program she was interested in. She then stood out as the only Asian female in the undergraduate and graduate student body at the time. Feeling the “sense of social responsibility” of that era, she was drawn to rural public health nursing and cared for older people, very much aware of their desire to maintain their independence and dignity and to stay in their community. On Lok became the perfect opportunity for her to continue this work in the multicultural immigrant neighborhoods of San Francisco. It also became the perfect setting for her to give her parents the dignity and respect she had provided for so many others. Her story of how she decided to discharge her father from a Boston hospital “against medical advice” to accomplish this is truly inspiring.

In addition to being AARP president, she teaches nursing at San Francisco State University and is a senior fellow at the University of California, San Francisco, Center for the Health Professions. Her son Erik may have the best perspective of all on her life. He said in a speech to honor her 25 years of service at On Lok, “While I am awed by the accolades she’s received and positions she’s been nominated to, she is by far more amazing to me as a mother than any of her professional titles.”

Arthur Chickering was the child of divorced parents, in the 1930s, rebellious, with behavior problems and more of an interest in playing cards than studying. It wasn’t until his third try at college, and after two years in the Army, that he finally applied his innate abilities when he designed a major that truly interested him, with the help of a group of faculty who responded to his individualized needs.

This led him down a serendipitous career path of having one new and perfectly fitting position lead to another. He was the right person in the right place many times in building a distinguished career in higher education. Having many key mentors at various stops along the way, he began as a teacher of diverse at-risk adolescents, found his niche in experiential learning at Goddard College, moved on to help develop Empire State College, pioneering an individualized approach for adult learners, was in the midst of the earliest explosion of lifelong learning, and again found himself in the right place at the right time during his retirement years when he helped develop a Vermont OLLI. His career has been rich in authenticity, integrity, conviction, and balance in merging his professional life with personal investments in family, friends, and community.

These two life stories speak eloquently and loudly for following one’s passions and living by one’s values.

**Robert Atkinson** is 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.

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## To Put Our Oars Together

**Jennie Chin Hansen**



*Jennie Chin Hansen*

I've never really taken the time to write a story about our family. There've been surrogate opportunities when others have done interviews over the past years and I've been able to "piece together" a bit of a life story. My son had actually asked me to do a reflection some time ago, so I thank you in advance for this gift of completing a project I've only thought about.

I'm so grateful for these amazing gifts that come across in life for me. Because I have these opportunities, it's so important for me to steward these resources well. It strikes me is that there's a special responsibility, a moral imperative, to be in service to others because some of us have been given opportunities that others may not have had. Thank you for this luxury of engaging in some reflection, because the pace of daily life is just so full that carving out this space and uncovering things that perhaps haven't had a chance to be articulated or integrated out loud is a true blessing.

My parents were both immigrants from China. Of my four grandparents I only met and knew one of them, my paternal grandfather. In fact, I wrote an essay about him, related to caring and his holding my hand. I remember that he was very old and bent over, but he was very playful. You wouldn't know it now, given the weight that I carry, but when I was young I had chronic tonsillitis and wouldn't eat. He would be playful with me trying to coax me to eat. I knew what he was doing when he'd race with me to finish our respective meals. I knew that he cared about me. We both knew what he was trying to achieve, and I respected that.

My parents were probably more direct about my eating issue, but my grandfather had a sense of play and understanding, perhaps of what it was like for a little child to not be forced to eat. I appreciated that he was just trying to achieve the same goal as my parents, but, he was just playful in that process.

My father, as an adult immigrant, although highly educated in China, ended up working in restaurants due to his limited English speaking ability. He served in the U.S. Army during WWII in the European front, learned some functional English and became a US citizen as a result of his military service. During my growing up I recognized he held a blue collar job working in restaurants which he truly enjoyed, but I also knew that he had a tremendous literate background which he nurtured by his self-taught English.



In contrast, my mother, who grew up in a village and did not have much beyond an eighth grade education as was customary for girls, was really very bright. One of the things that I recognize is that when I encounter people, for example, when I ride taxicabs in cities (which I do especially in Washington, D.C.), so many of these drivers have tremendous backgrounds in their native countries that may not be obvious just because of their ostensible current blue collar job.

That experience, with my parents as immigrants and living through their first level of opportunities in this country, impressed on me that intelligent individuals who had much to offer may not be recognized by the more influential population. To this day, I have some of my greatest brief conversations with taxi drivers, and even the person who drove me to my hotel today. He is from Ethiopia and knew so much about our political dynamics, economic infrastructure, the futuristic trends here, yet he happens to be in a role as a sedan driver.

People have capacity, intelligence, wishes, and desires, whether you are poor, middle class, or upper class. There is a whole underbelly of real people who have potential and knowledge that we need to respect and understand. As a result, I transfer my background, having been raised by immigrant parents and knowing their capacity, to many others I come across who may not have been born here in America.

It's not just those in power, but all of us who make the greatness of our country possible. I think we all have the desire and wish to both do well and be an important part of society here. These two kinds of childhood influences, my grandfather and my parents, were really significant for me.

I didn't speak English when I went to school, so by default I was in the immersion approach to learning language. I understood how isolating that can feel. I can still remember how my brother took me to school the first day and he told my teacher that I didn't speak any English at all. He just made sure that I knew how to get to the bathroom, and I was on my own.

I remember cleaning all the bathrooms when I went to use the bathroom. I think I was so stressed at first that I just stayed there; in fact, I found that I was unable to actually use the commode if I heard anyone else in the room!. When I was finally by myself in the facility, I cleaned all the toilets there, just because I knew it was something that I could do. That was THE kindergarten experience I can remember.

Another cultural value I learned was that of interdependence. I remember taking my mother for her citizenship test. I think I was seven years old when she qualified as a resident to take the test. I would coach her on learning the exam questions that she would have to take. I just found myself not thinking about it at the time, coaching my mother English so that she could pass the citizenship test, but the intergenerational aspect of teamwork for the family good and that she'd be a "full member of society."

So I think respect, intergenerational awareness, the responsibility we had for others, and my parents helped throughout my life. Just the fact that they gave willingly and with no expectations but knowing it was the right thing to do, is why we take care of our family. That sense of caring for others, providing respect and assuring dignity was essential to my growing up.

Some of my influence from them came a little later, too. I can still remember

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having these really late night or early morning conversations with my father about art. Here this man is working in a restaurant with a whole other dimension about him that wasn't able to be expressed. He painted a bit, and he had a deep sense of beauty and philosophy. I could see the multiple dimensions, multiple reflections, of a man I saw working hard to provide for his family, yet there was a very larger dimension of him that I discovered and appreciated when I was older.

Another thing that I think was one of the greatest gifts of growing up is that my father trusted my decisions even from a young age. He conveyed that whatever decision I made, was probably the right decision, so he didn't second guess me. When I made a decision, say, to go to graduate school, my mother was worried that I might get too much education and thus take myself out of the marketplace of finding a husband! That was the belief from the traditional world in which she was raised.

But she went along with it, and I just knew that they trusted that whatever I decided they would accept and support. That was a little unusual for growing up in an ethnocentric community where there were certain things that girls were expected to do or not do at that time.

My parents allowed me that expression differently. My father was always a little bit cautious. He didn't want me to get physically hurt and things like that, but my mother was always an adventurer. I would always tell her when I did some risky kinds of things, and I would let her know in advance, but I wouldn't tell my father until afterwards. She was somebody who was a risk taker and allowed me that freedom to test different things, whereas my father was the kind, sweet man who believed in me.

Those two sets of gifts, of trying something different on my mother's side and knowing that my parents would accept my decisions, from my father's side, gave me core gifts of exploration and believing that if I tried something I could do it.

I just felt very, very lucky. My mother was just a hoot, in that she was very different from a lot of the other immigrant Chinese mothers in our community. She liked to travel and she liked eating pizza, which is just so unusual in a kind of first generation ethnic community, trying different foods and enjoying them! So today whenever I go any place different, I will try whatever the local specialty is, just to test out something different. She loved discovering new things.

I think in my early school years I was just a regular good student. I didn't stand out *per se*, and it wasn't until probably college that sprouting my wings started to occur. I went to an all girls public school, Girls' Latin School in Boston, that had a tremendous influence on me. It was a rigorous British-styled school. I took two years of Latin and two years of French, but that ability to have a very British structure was very helpful to me.

I liked being in an all girls school. At that time it was very common in Boston. All the public schools were actually sex segregated in high schools. Some of the girls kind of bristled that we couldn't cheerlead at the boy's Latin school. That was somewhat important to me, but the sense of community by going to an all girls school seemed to be very helpful to me in terms of my ability to develop. I participated in some of the clubs but didn't rise to any leadership positions. It just gave me a kind of comfort zone to being in a same sex school at that particular time.

I was very active in our Chinatown community in Boston with a Maryknoll nun's community center. It was what I would call the Americanization of the com-

munity of Chinese children, all of whom came from a very ethnocentric Chinese culture. That was a powerful experience, understanding how to set a Western table because we basically used chopsticks and a spoon. We didn't use the kind of table settings that I know well today.

The nuns introduced us to the Girl Scout world. We had an all Chinese Girl Scout troop. We earned and wore badges. That became such an important social anchor for many of us to interface with the broader world of being "American." I'll never forget that became my introduction to American food. We had some camping experiences so it was a very wonderful exploration and set of discoveries for us.

There was one nun who had a great impact on me. She spoke English with words that I didn't understand. They seemed to be complex words, and that factor, added with my Latin school background, gave me the boost to learn language really well. As a result, I have the kind of Latin root vocabulary that I continue to rely upon and really enjoy the use and construction of language. I really trace that interest back to her.

I was able to locate her just a couple of years ago. She was no longer a nun, had married, and now lived in the Washington, D.C., area. I contacted her, having not been in touch with her for 45 years, and met with her for tea. She was stunned to realize what an impact she had on my life. It was just great that I could thank her so directly for the difference she made in my growing up. Since this interview I have transitioned to my role as president at AARP and invited her to my transition dinner where I was able to acknowledge her during the evening. One never knows how individuals can come into your life and really touch your life.

The nuns also had a volunteer auxiliary of single Catholic women who wanted to help in the community. I was assigned a woman who would visit with me periodically. I remember she worked downtown in the department store in Boston called R.H. Stearn, which was one of these elegant old department stores. She worked in the glove department, and would take me occasionally for lunch.

Through junior high and high school, as well as early college, I can still remember that she would take me to lunch. I had some part-time jobs in college, and thus I wanted to pay for her lunch, but she said no. I remember her telling me that it was not necessary, but that some day I'd have the opportunity to do this for somebody else. That was a very important experience for me. These were the kind of social underpinnings, and the values that people have conveyed that made such a deep impression on me.

When I was in high school, I ended up volunteering at hospitals. I was a candy striper for years and really enjoyed it. I thought the setting of a hospital and helping people heal and get well was the thing to do. At that time there seemed to be just a few options for women to go into given the role models I had seen. I was still drawn to nursing anyway, because the sense of caring for others was something that was probably fairly deep in my sense of who I was. I enjoyed being helpful, and I also enjoyed science.

At that point in time, women more or less went into either teaching or nursing. I had the opportunity to go to Radcliffe, which would have been a very different experience, but I actually felt intimidated going from our Chinatown community to something of that nature. So I didn't take up that opportunity, but one thing I did do is interview at different colleges.

I could see the multiple dimensions, multiple reflections, of a man I saw working hard to provide for his family, yet there was a very larger dimension of him that I discovered and appreciated when I was older.

## To Put Our Oars Together

When I decided to go into nursing, I actually met with different schools. I had a series of questions that I asked the deans, and to this day, I'm amazed I had the audacity to do that! The dean of the School of Nursing at Boston College where I eventually went, Rita Kelleher, who recently turned 100 years old, tracked me down, about five, six years ago. She remembered that she thought it was just so unusual that a student would actually come and interview her about her program.

I have no idea what gave me the guts or the right that I thought that I could interview the schools to decide where I wanted to go, but I just did it. I ended up being the only Asian female in the entire undergraduate and graduate campus at the time. Even though I obviously stood out now, I had an incredible experience in college. I'm happy to note that I have also gone to visit Dean Kelleher at her assisted living facility where she lives today.

When I learned I was to be awarded an honorary doctorate from Boston College, I called her to share this news. She was so delighted and especially since I am the first nursing alumna from our School to be accorded this recognition.

It was at Boston College when the most exploration really occurred for me. I had a chance to hear my voice. I also had the opportunity to learn about leadership, perhaps not in a direct way but by default. I ran for student government on campus and ended up one of the two nursing students who sat on the university senate. My best friend, Nancy (Turletes) Murphy, held the other seat.

It was during that part of history, in the late 60s, that there was something very significant in the air that we were breathing. It was the period of civil rights and the Vietnam War. I was part of that whole energy of the campus and the nation of other young people at that point. I think that was the heyday of awareness and a sense of social responsibility that became a very important anchor of influence in my life.

I realize this harkens back to my earlier comments about just respecting the integrity and the capacity, the emotional as well as the intellectual capacities, of all people regardless of their formal education or economic status. That was something formed very deeply, that sense of social justice was built in from personal experience that evolved from living through those times.

I feel that I was just born in times with parents and with influences that allowed me to accrue a particular sense of how to look at humanity. That way of seeing the world continues to this day in my life and work. I have respect for institutions yet find opportunities for change from within. Social justice, democratic means, capitalism. That's my three-legged stool.

I had little exposure to the commercial or market-driven world until these most recent years. I would say that a lot has happened actually in the past couple of years to help me appreciate that dimension in our democracy with market forces that drive change. The possibility of what the market does, without judgment of good or bad, is a powerful force for change, in addition to the more traditional advocacy approaches and infrastructure building of communities that I've experienced.

This comes as a later life blessing to realize a much more holistic picture of what our incredible democracy allows us to do in our society here. That's been a growth piece for me that I've built on to the social justice and democracy components. Through AARP I've learned so much more of the multiple dimensions that make it possible to enable a vision for a decent society.

When I was in nursing education and training, I had a chance to peek under the surface level of health care in hospitals. I realized how hierarchical it was as well as how disrespectful it could often be to both patients and people who were not physicians or in the top echelon in the system. I don't think that it is structured intentionally but I just really didn't like that. That fundamentally disturbed me, even though it was a structure intended to help people. The way it was executed didn't seem to allow for the fact that we were working together on behalf of people's well being.

When I was tending to a gentleman about to have his leg amputated and heard a doctor speak to a group of interns about him as if he were a commodity, I couldn't help myself. I went to the doctor and said, "Couldn't you see what you were saying about him was doing to that man?" I thought and felt this is just not right! I actually developed an aversion to hospitals and decided soon afterwards that despite conventional wisdom, I would work in a community setting.

I just found that the structure and the deep-seeded culture of acknowledging people by hierarchy rather than having the work of what had to be done as the driver was not something that could be achieved in the hospital systems I experienced. I ended up working more in people's natural environments, bringing a set of knowledge and skills that would enable their life to be better and setting up systems that would hopefully allow them to be more capable. Bringing my expertise or learning to an environment to understand where people were, and then together we create something that has usefulness and meaning, probably started quite early from the strong reaction that I had in hospitals.

One experience that I remember very vividly was when I worked as a hospital nurse's aide during a summer while I was in college. My social group was the nurses' aides and kitchen staff. During break time we would have tea and toast in the kitchen and the nurses would all go off separately. This one wonderful person, who was a kitchen aide, said, "You know, Jennie, you really are such a nice person. I just hope that when you become a registered nurse that you don't become like them." That was a very powerful statement that I've never forgotten.

I palpably experienced how differentiated the hierarchical crowd with power was from the rest of us. It wasn't that there were understandable differences, but it was how we were regarded. I was then part of the team scrubbing the beds, helping with the hygiene, which I knew to be vital work. The ability for a system to respect people for the fact that we're all working on behalf of the care of people was something that I found wasn't really easy in that structure. The respect, dignity, and contribution that a team of people doing work on behalf of a purpose was something I just didn't find easily manifested in hospitals from my lens at that time.

I opted for community nursing, where you work with people directly; you use your judgment, make decisions, and consult when you need to. I worked as a community health nurse for a time and then I ended up also being a public health nurse in Idaho. I found that helping people maintain their health again enabled their wellness.

I remember when I worked in this public health office in Moscow, Idaho. A gentleman came in just panicked. He said he was bleeding to death based on what he observed when he went to the bathroom. I calmly asked him what he ate the day before, and it turns out he ate a lot of beets. It was just something as simple as that. He was so relieved! I thought it was just great that I could do something as

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simple as that to help provide the knowledge to reassure him he was okay.

But I also learned about what it took to influence change in farm country the hard way. At first I didn't understand the local mores of what was important at first to that community. I had all this information about how to assess the public health of a community. I saw that there was a high pregnancy rate, as well as child abuse, along with other health issues that could be altered for the better health of this community.

The need seemed obvious, to me, at least. But despite my "fancy research" and laid out "facts," the decision makers weren't there. I learned a humbling lesson about knowing what's important to people before trying to convey how important you think it is to try to change something. Change management 101!

That was a huge lesson for me about influences, the appropriate way and time of action for any kind of system change. You really have to put in your time, do your homework to appreciate what's really important to people, and what would be the levers to create effective change. So it took more than a year and a half, but positive change did occur. I completely changed my approach to addressing this particular issue. I learned a life lesson during this attempt to be a "helpful change agent" in a logging and farming community. As they say, there's no "I" in the word team.

You do need to get the facts, but you also must understand the politics and package the information so it makes sense to the people you are trying to serve. If you want people to really help others, you have to realize what is important to them.

Around this time both my mother and my father's health had been declining. My father had had his first stroke during that time, and so I was running back and forth from Idaho to Boston as a kind of long distance caregiver. And right around that same time my husband was diagnosed with cancer, a brain tumor. And I was also pregnant. So we were expecting, my father had a stroke, and my husband had cancer. It was a very stressful time in my life. I was kind of managing my father's care all from a distance. I would have to fly back to Boston, where my parents were, at the same time my husband also was so ill. We got through it, but I understand the stress of the caregiver role.

My husband died from his brain tumor. I was a widow with a year-old toddler and the whole question would be: do I move back to Boston to take care of my parents? I had moved to San Francisco where I was working as a researcher at On Lok Senior Health Services.

There was something about just being there. You could feel the changes. Here were really smart people ready to try something new in the way we could care for frail elders. The executive director, Marie Louise Ansak, at that time said, "Why don't you bring your parents out here?"

That was a huge blessing and a gift because I knew that people could be cared for differently despite their impairments. I first brought my mother out with me, and she lived with me for a few months. Ironically it was my father who used to take care of my mother and now he was the one in the nursing home.

I would take her to work with me and she would get great services during the day. At home I'd care for her as she tried to manage, including her incontinence. I still remember stripping the bed sheets before work, going daily to the laundromat in order to manage.

But when I went to see my father in Boston, I was lucky then to see, along

with a colleague's assessment, that my father actually had greater capacity than many of the physicians at the nursing home thought that he did. I didn't agree with their treatment and decided we were going to bring him to San Francisco. So I discharged him "against medical advice;" there's a term for that, called AMA.

He had a feeding tube that went down to his stomach, which I removed before we got on the plane. With my limited budget I had bought an economy seat. Given how frail my father was, the wonderful staff at United Airlines ended up giving us first class seats. So here's my father on the plane, impaired from two strokes and having had a feeding tube, sitting in a first class seat. Of course they served food during that time, and they had shrimp. I looked at it and I said, "Do you want to try this?" When he nodded "yes," I cut it up, and he actually ate solid food for the first time in probably seven months on this plane.

His first meal was there, and that was just amazing. I found that he actually had some swallowing capacity. They had not focused on that ability he had. He was taught to swallow again and he never had the stomach surgery that they had planned on.

That night, when I helped my father and my mother into my bed, they slept together for the first time in seven months. I honestly felt that if either of them had died the next day, it would have been all right because I was finally able to put them back together again. Here were two people who had worked so hard, had struggled through so much. They had had the courage to leave their native country, losing their social order of power and hierarchy. How could I let them have an end to their lives that was less than dignified?

After my father started at On Lok, the physical therapists worked with him so he was able to stretch out his body again, to unfurl his tight muscles. His medications went from fourteen in the nursing home to three. And he had a chance to know his grandson for five more years.

One other real impressionable time that I had in nursing school that relates to my father and food is when I was probably a first-year nursing student. We had what we used to call hobos at that time. It was not the homeless, but it was the same thing and this was in the middle of winter in Boston. I worked in the big public hospital, Boston City.

There was this elderly man who was a patient on my assigned floor. We served meals from these big food carts. We had oatmeal in a big vat, and I remember serving him a bowl of oatmeal. I was so impressed that this was like prime rib to him, and how much that really meant to him. So again, just recognizing how things are relative. People get used to luxuries and all, but it's so important to remember how things are relative to the individual and communities.

Another thing I remember during this same time was when I was this perky 19-year-old nursing student caring for older people. I came upon another individual like this man who said he didn't feel there was anything to live for. But as a 19 year old, I didn't have a lot of insight. I just said, "Don't worry. You will get better. You'll do all right."

And it struck me at that moment that I was setting my life stage and my values on this gentleman whose life was very different. I realized then how important it is not to put our values or our perspectives onto other people. Between the oatmeal and the ability to recognize there was reason for him to feel depressed. It was

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fine that I would be pleasant but it wasn't always necessary, or always helpful to be Nurse Sunshine, for somebody whose life course might be very different from mine.

So there were many awakenings by viewing the perspective of the other person that I learned very, very early on that being the expert and wearing the "I have the experience. I'm giving you what might be beneficial for you," lens, and to avoid that whole inadvertent paternalism that can occur in people who are "caregivers."

And again, it's about believing in all of our capacity. I think that we all have much more going for us than is ever both fully recognized or used. Not always believing in the "experts," having, at times, a certain degree of skepticism, and using some common sense, goes a long way.

I had been with On Lok nearly 25 years. In developing the program, we were asking, "Why can't we change the rules? Why not let people age in place, in their community?" Imagine living 70-plus years a certain way. Why should the things that had such meaning for you all those years not be part of the final years of your life? We identified the core ingredients of health services, ways that existing services didn't come together really well, and reformulated this so that it really worked for the local community. Our driving philosophy was care with dignity and respect for cultural values. Our approach actually produced a quality of service that people were happier with.

The teamwork at On Lok is really interesting because physicians were a part of our system, as well. Of course, doctors are highly respected and regarded for their role and their expertise and things that only they can do. But in order to care for somebody who has multiple complexities that are not just medical problems, I love that On Lok took into account all these other people who had something to contribute toward the well-being and the capacity of the people we care for.

Even though nurses and social workers are educated to deal with depression, something we found out was sometimes it was the janitor who had the best relationship with the people being cared for. Sometimes we brought them into our team because they're part of the helping and caring process for that individual.

It doesn't mean that just because I have a master's degree and a credential in a particular focus that I may be the best person to have the most helpful impact for this individual. One of the things that I loved about On Lok was that we shared this technical knowledge, but maybe it's a different person who actually does the implementation. So it's not about me, it's about our goal, and that is the person you are caring for.

We would have staff who might not be formally educated but understands what the intervention was designed to accomplish and could be part of the team to carry it out. An analogy might be a good football team. You know the quarterback has a certain role, yet sometimes things don't quite go right. Still, we all know where the goal post is so somebody else picks up, and we keep going for the goal. This team aspect is something that I love about the whole On Lok and PACE program. We're clear what our mission is, and it's not about just us as individuals, even though we may have specific academic preparation, licenses, and experience. But we put our skills on the table for achieving our goal.

I think we get often too stuck on credentials. That's not to take away from the hard work that people put in to achieving those credentials and experience, but cre-

dentials should be a means to serve. They shouldn't be an end to themselves.

Even today, as I've had some experience now resuming teaching nursing again, I have a heightened sensitivity to the background, perspectives, and the skills that the nursing students bring.

We had a recent episode in a seminar where the students were talking about the cycling of patients through the emergency room because many end up using the ER like their health clinic. There were some reactions, some twittering from the students, oh yeah, they see that. Another student said, "Oh, we shouldn't be judging people so readily on this. My father has diabetes and he was in a diabetic coma; they thought he was a drunk." In reality, he had a reaction and they treated him as though he were one of these frequent fliers, as they call them. Not only was this an important point of the individual, it gives us the time to question why does our system even operate in this manner, treating an ER as a primary care site?

These are learning moments. You have to give people the regard and respect they deserve and not just pass judgments on them. It's very important to recognize the other people on the team. I brought up the example of the janitor in the ER who knows a lot of what's going on and can be reassuring to the other people so that he or she actually is part of the team.

Again, it's the humanity and respect that there are other people besides professionals with whom we work as a team. That's something that I find pleasure in now, helping students not get into "we are the professional and they are the paraprofessional." It's about the fact that we do have different roles but we still are here for a core purpose together.

Having been a parent gives a richness and awareness of the huge responsibility we have in shaping and supporting the life of another person who's going to steward this world's resources when we're gone. I've had a tremendous and wonderful relationship with my son, Erik, especially when I was a single parent before I married my current husband, Philip Abrams (who, incidentally, was his second grade teacher).

Having an incredibly supportive husband, who is amazing in his support for my work, is a treasure and blessing. He both enjoys what I do and participates in what I do. I play a little golf with him. I play golf poorly, but I enjoy it when I'm there, and he really likes getting me out for the five or six hours where I'm not totally focused on other kinds of issues. I also delight in orchids. I have well over 100 orchids and just love to go to orchid shows.

And then finally, I love to read. I continue to enjoy reading about the beginning history of our country and the amazing leadership that occurred when we went through the revolution. It's amazing to me that our country is not founded on one ethnicity's set of principles and beliefs! As a child I loved reading stories about how people lived and managed their lives. I used to go to the library in Boston every week and check out the maximum number of books which was one a day. I'd read about these people's lives and that inspires me to this very day; for example, Abraham Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt's lives, and so many other people who faced adversity and addressed issues for the greater good.

John Gardiner is another person I so admire for the legacy he's left in terms of the whole concept of servant leadership. I get inspired by people who are clear in their goals, and people who have stories of disability and manage to achieve amaz-

And again, it's about believing in all of our capacity. I think that we all have much more going for us than is ever both fully recognized or used.



## To Put Our Oars Together

ing things. It renews me when I have a chance to read about this. My husband and my son tease me. They say, "Oh, she watches these AT & T commercials and cries when there's emotion." You know, the depth of people's connection and struggle to what life brings about always inspires and renews me.

In community health, one cares for the whole age continuum. When I was a public health nurse in Idaho, I was intrigued with older people and their fierce independence. These people had few or no resources, were so isolated in rural communities, but had an absolute tenacity and dignity to make it on their own. My interest was piqued in the appreciation of older people who really wanted to maintain their abilities and their dignity to live as strongly and independently as possible.

We all have heard the saying that the older we get the more we realize what we don't know. The sense of discovery and the sense of delight is part of the lifelong learning that allows us to do that. I can't imagine that anyone could ever be bored because there's so much to both learn and to share with others.

I think the whole interest in lifelong learning is not just about the content but about the context, as well as the ability to be part of a social network. I think we need to feed our souls and our intellect; we need to nourish the realization that we are sometimes part of something larger, that there are other people with whom we can have that communion, and share in the energy and the fun. We learn something every day that adds to the weaving of new textures to our brains and hearts. We've learned that our brain is so much more plastic and able to learn and create new connections.

We can gain so much from lifelong learning as an approach to life and living. I just think that lifelong learning sets the stage for a constant state of wonder which is something that allows us the childlike appreciation of discovery. It's something that was brought up by Kali Lightfoot, the director of the OLLIs, the joy of learning. The ability to be in that sweet spot of joy is something that is about delight, and about contribution and openness, that can each add to the richness of each others' lives.

One of the things that I have loved about my work at On Lok that I think will be instructive for my future is helping us all understand that everyday issues really shape policy. What we encounter everyday and what we hope for affects all people, and despite one's partisan lens, there's an ability to find a greater umbrella of good and understanding.

We were able to transcend parochial perspectives and say there is a universality in these matters for our whole society. We appealed to the Democrats when we passed this legislation that was about providing care for vulnerable populations and to the Republicans when we were able to be more cost effective. Between the two sets of core values we were able to cross this bridge and create a new law that was bigger than one party or another.

That ability to find the common principles and ways of solving problems is something that I really relish. Now in particular, because we have so much gridlock in our political process, the ability to find those common elements that are about the stewardship of our responsibility for America's well-being is something I really look forward to figuring out and contributing to.

How can we de-politicize this process, and speak to the fact that we need to have a society that can be helpful to all people, and that has a sense of the future

that we want to both contribute to and build toward?

The role that I have at AARP will allow me access to that kind of lens and focus. Not to say that this will get solved overnight. I only have a couple of years in this role as president. These issues have been building for a long time, but I would love to use my history, my core values, and experiences directed towards the public good to contribute with meaning and substance to the yet-to-be-written chapters of our aging America.

Especially important is providing healthcare and long-term care as well as long-term economic security in the United States. By sheer timing these are the main foci of AARP also. But it is also time to bring attention to the underlying need for this society's moral compass to point American culture beyond its short-term focus on immediate problems and to the horizon issues that we need to solve in the decades ahead. So I find myself taking the next steps of my journey as part of the generation of leading-edge boomers with a sense of responsibility for advancing our next social movement.

I feel I have some control over keeping things moving on this marathon of effort, because it's not going to be a sprint, that's for sure. I get the opportunity in various ways, when people invite me to meetings like this, or when I have a few words to say when I get my honorary doctorate at Boston College.

It all helps to seed that message. There are things we can shoot for and things that we can do today. This is part of our compound interest of change. This is something that I hope to help carry during this time, and probably for the rest of my work in the future.

It's an evolution, that's for sure. I find that my lifelong learning allowed me, in my heart and in my head, a way to continue to leave a soft but good footprint but for the fact that I existed. But there are many footprints that we need to corral together.

There's perhaps a metaphor for me. I took rowing lessons with an eight person crew about ten years ago. It was funnier than all get-out. When we first started rowing in the boat, our oars were going all over the place. Over time and with work, we rowed well together. So for me, the metaphor is we can go far when our oars are all dipping in at the same time, in the same direction and using our respective strengths and skills. When it does come together, it feels like we're flying and there's such a sweetness when we achieve that. You can feel the ease, the rightness. There is magic. I hope we can put our oars together and fly towards the magic of a great America.

I think the whole interest in lifelong learning is not just about the content but about the context, as well as the ability to be part of a social network.

## Turning Toward Challenge

### Arthur Chickering



*Arthur Chickering*

On my mother's side, her father was a carpenter and had a plot of land with an apple orchard on it and he built houses. He had a cow and chickens, a kind of small subsistence agricultural operation. He had a fairly substantial apple orchard and they sold apples in the summer. They had a stand down on the Boston-Worcester turnpike. I still remember when that went in; it was the first divided four-lane highway in the country. I used to ride my tricycle up and down the trolley tracks that ran from Boston to Worcester in those days.

My grandfather was a hardworking man. He was tough. He cursed quite a lot but he was very egalitarian and really exemplified a lot of Puritan values. My grandmother, his wife, was a typical grandmother for me. She was always very warm and caring. My grandfather and my father built the house that we moved into when my folks got married and where I was born. It was only maybe 300 to 400 yards from my grandparents, so I spent a lot of time in that house. My grandmother always had cookies and doughnuts and stuff for me.

I would work around the place with my grandfather when I was a kid, doing odds and ends, helping prune apple trees and pick up apples. Those basic New England values of hard work, egalitarianism, honesty, and integrity were very much built into my mother and got pretty much built into me.

On my father's side, his parents lived a ways away in Framingham. I grew up in Natick, about 20 miles outside of Boston so I didn't see them a lot. That side of the family had a kind of checkered background. His father was fired for some kind of misbehavior, petty theft I think. My father was a traveling salesman, and he and my mother didn't get along very well. My folks were divorced when I was nine and my mother went to work in Boston, commuting from Natick, as a secretary. She had graduated from high school but didn't have any college education. Of course not many women did back in those days, the 1920s.

When they were divorced, we had to move closer to town so she could walk to the train to ride into Boston where she found employment during the Depression. I was born in 1927, so when they were divorced it was 1936, right in the middle of the Depression, and the money was very tight.

I remember her bringing her \$27-a-week check home. She had this little green box with three by five envelopes in it and she would carefully divide up her paycheck into money for food and clothing and other necessities. Although I never really felt poor, I was very conscious of the importance of every penny and nickel.

In those days it was very rare for folks to get divorced. In school I was kind of a unique phenomenon. I was in the fifth grade when they got divorced so I was basically raised by my mother.

The divorce arrangements were such that on Sundays my father would come and get me and we'd go off and spend time together. Sometimes we'd drive up to Brattleboro, Vermont. By that time his parents had moved up there where his father was employed by an aunt who had quite a lot of money. My mother was 20 and my father was 22 when they got married, so they were pretty young parents. We spent Sundays together and it was a friendly relationship.

For years, as many kids do, I kept hoping they'd get back together. But by the time I was in high school it was pretty clear that wasn't going to happen. So I grew up with that small town New England Protestant ethic built pretty well into me.

I was a pretty rebellious kid. I didn't get along very well with authority. I was kept after school a fair amount in elementary school. I was fairly small for my age, five feet two when I was a senior in high school. In elementary school there were a couple of kids, Billy Bernard and Paul Naymaris, who used to tease me. I had about a mile walk to and from school, and they would waylay me on the way home.

Billy was a pretty rugged farm boy and Paul was just kind of a hanger-on. One day, Billy and I got into a little argument during recess so I hit him and we had a fight. I managed to prevail and he and Paul never bothered me after that. In some ways that was a good lesson and in some ways not such a good lesson because I became a pretty macho adolescent.

When I was in junior high school, I'm sure I had what nowadays would be called Attention Deficit Disorder. I couldn't sit still and I was a behavior problem. In the seventh and eighth grade we were divided into divisions A, B, C, D, E, F and G on our academic records and ability. I was in division E, and I was giving the homeroom teacher such a hard time that they moved me up to division F and my schoolwork actually improved because I had an English teacher who was able to deal with me and a couple other teachers who were more caring and understanding.

By the time I was in the tenth grade, my mother was working and she managed to get me a scholarship to Mount Herman School up in Greenfield, Massachusetts, a small private school. They were very egalitarian and had a work program, but I was also good card player and had a behavior problem there. My grades bounced up and down depending upon the subject. My mother, poor soul, had to drive up there periodically to try to straighten me out and deal with them, but I did manage to graduate from Mount Herman, 103rd in a class of 107.

That was in 1944. In order to bypass the draft, I registered in what was then called the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program. They sent me to the University of New Hampshire in the fall of '44. There were about 30 of us there in this program. We were put up in dormitories and had a full program of college courses. I still was not interested in learning.

Actually, later on I got an honorary degree from the University of New Hampshire College of Lifelong Learning. I assumed that this was the first time that

She had this little green box with three by five envelopes in it and she would carefully divide up her paycheck into money for food and clothing and other necessities.

## Turning Toward Challenge

the University of New Hampshire had given an honorary degree to somebody they'd kicked out about 40 years before. I told them that I was a three letter man at UNH, and all three letters were P's. They stood for poker, parties, and pretty girls. That's what I concentrated on at UNH, so I ended up getting kicked out of that program in December of that year.

At the time my mother was working in Middlefield, Connecticut, outside of Middletown, where Wesleyan University is. I went down to live with her when I got kicked out, and then I went over to Wesleyan to see if they would admit me. I knew I would be drafted the following June or July, turning 18 in April.

I went in to talk with the admissions officer, Ralph Bischof. I remember him so clearly. I told him I'd like to enroll as a commuting student for the spring semester because I'd be going into the Army. I told him I'd like to get a semester of higher education in before that.

He said, "Send me your academic records and we'll see what we can do."

I said, "If you see my academic records you'll never admit me to this place."

He said, "We never admit anyone without seeing their records."

So I got my records from Mount Herman. I didn't tell them about my UNH experience and he didn't ask me about it for some reason.

He called me in about two weeks later, as he said he would, and said, "You were right. We've never admitted anybody to this institution with an academic record like yours. But it's curious, your grades are terrible and your academic achievement scores are pretty poor but your general ability score is very high. How do you explain that?"

I said, "The explanation's pretty easy. I've never studied. I've never been interested in academics. I've been interested in a lot of other things. I tell you what, if you set any grade point average you want according to whatever testing arrangement you want, I'll give you this semester's tuition and if I don't meet your average, I'll go home, since I'll be a commuting student."

He said, "I never had that kind of proposition before. I'll give you a call."

He called me in five days, and I went in and he said, "You've got a deal. You give us your tuition and you have to have a B average on your midterm exams. If it's not a B average or better, you're out of here."

So I went back and for the first time in my life I didn't have anything else to do. I was there alone with my mother. It was winter, and so for the first time in my life I studied. I ended up with Bs on my midterm exams and finished the semester in good shape.

Then I went off in the Army for a couple of years. Of course, when I came back in '47 to Wesleyan they were only admitting valedictorians and salutatorians, although there were quite a number of us veterans there. I was able to get back in and moved into a dormitory.

By that time my mother had remarried and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. But once again, I didn't really invest time and energy in academics. I continued to work my way through college winning a fair amount of money at bridge, poker, gin rummy, and introducing people to baccarat.

I was on probation for the first two semesters and it came time for me to declare a major in the middle of my sophomore year. I had gotten interested in literature and in the interaction between literature and social conditions. A little ways

into the semester I went in and talked to the dean and I told him what I was interested in.

He said, "There is such a thing as comparative literature. If you talk with Fred Mann who's the head of the French department and Juan Roura who's the head of Spanish and Fred Millet who's head of humanities and Norman O'Brown, head of Classics, and if they'll agree to arrange a combination of courses for you and do a comprehensive exam, you can have that kind of major."

I said, "Thank you," and walked out of his office at 10:30 in the morning. By 5 o'clock, I had met with all four of those people and they all were delighted to see a little spark of intellectual interest. At that time Wesleyan only had 750 students.

So I had that kind of major and I went from being on probation to being a B and A student, with grades good enough to get into the Harvard Graduate School of Education two years later.

That response to my individual interest despite my past history really turned me totally around when it came to learning and academics. I'm sure my lifelong investment in individualized education in higher education is very much rooted in the fact that that was such an important kind of openness, responsiveness, and thoughtfulness that I received there at Wesleyan.

I got a master of arts in teaching degree in teaching English at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The courses in the School of Education, except for a wonderful educational philosophy course with Robert Ulick and a pretty good course on the psychology of education with Robert Sears, were pretty much a dead loss, as far as I was concerned. But the literature courses I had across the street were excellent, and I did a master's thesis comparing Proust and James, which was a wonderful experience.

I did my practice teaching out in Newton, Mass., which had a very good high school, with a wonderful English teacher, Mrs. Armstrong. I got about halfway through it and I can remember her jumping up and down and up and shaking her fists saying, "Teaching is not telling!"

That has stuck with me ever since. Then she went on to say, "Teaching is asking questions, making students think, not just telling them what you think."

That had more impact on me than a semester-long teaching methods course that I had had at the Graduate School of Education. That thirty seconds is scratched on my mind.

So I went back and I tried to do things differently. As I gave students a chance to give their reactions to the novels, I found that what they were doing was playing out their own issues with their parents, and with authority and with each other, against the characters. I found I was more interested in dealing with them around those issues than in literary criticism.

I was oriented toward a Ph.D. degree in comparative literature at the University of Wisconsin but that started to raise questions about that orientation. I was reading the *Saturday Review of Literature* and I saw myself as the next John Ciardi, a literary critic.

In the meantime, I had met my current wife and during that spring semester she first agreed to marry me and then a week before an engagement party that my mother planned, she told me that she never wanted to see me again and cancelled the engagement.

I told them that I was a three letter man at UNH, and all three letters were P's.

They stood for poker, parties and pretty girls.

## Turning Toward Challenge

We were both in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She was working for a school for the blind in Watertown. That summer she got a job with the New Jersey State Commission for the Blind and was working at Camp Marcella in north Jersey.

I was working on the receiving desk of the Cambridge City Hospital in the maternity ward from 11 at night to 8 in the morning and working at a machine shop at Harvard from 1 to 5 in the afternoon to make enough money to live on and also taking a couple of courses. One Friday I started to drive down to see Jo in New Jersey. She had agreed to let me come down and visit. But I fell asleep at the wheel in Wellesley, Massachusetts, at a stoplight there. I figured I couldn't make it to New Jersey so I turned around and went back to Cambridge and spent the weekend sleeping mainly.

But I did get down there eventually, and she agreed that we could get married after all. We got married Thanksgiving day, 1951. We honeymooned up in Hancock, New Hampshire, at my mother's place.

Meantime, I had found out that there was such a thing as school psychology. So I got myself into the school psychology doctoral program at Columbia, and started commuting from south Jersey. Then I taught part-time at the Moorestown Friends School and had other teaching and coaching jobs.

The next year I got a job teaching a seventh grade class in Rahway, a kind of wastebasket class, kids whose IQ range was from 59 to 110. My job was to teach these 25 boys and girls everything but music and art. The student variability was huge. I had a couple of pre-pubertal black kids and a 16-year-old blond who was built like and looked like Marilyn Monroe, so I learned an awful lot about trying to deal with student diversity that year.

There was a 15-year-old and a 16-year-old kid, one Italian and one Irish, who were probably off the scale in terms of ADHD. I had nightmares about them, though we ended up good friends. We corresponded for a while after that.

During those three years I was going to school nights while working on my Ph.D. degree, and Jo was working on a master's degree.

Then in '55, I got a job as a school psychologist out in the Woodmere-Hewlett School system with a wonderful woman called Verna Wentling. At that time, '55 to '58 when I was there, school psychologists basically functioned as clinical psychologists in the schools. They'd do diagnostic workups and they'd create a caseload of 20 or 25 kids and they'd do psychotherapy with them.

That's the way they did their work. But Verna Wentling, fortunately for me, had a real community health approach. We would do diagnostic workups but we'd refer the kids out for treatment, and then we'd work with the teachers, the principal, and the superintendent on conditions that were hurting the kids, the larger educational and environmental issues. That really got me into interaction between educational environments, student teacher relationships, teaching practices, and their impact on student mental health, student learning, and student development.

A school psychologist friend of mine got a job as the academic vice president at Monmouth College in New Jersey and the president there wanted to start a teacher education program. We had talked a lot about our difficulties with teachers so he invited me to come over and be department head to create a new teacher education program.



I did that and Jo and I moved to New Jersey with three of our four kids we had then. I didn't know much about teacher education but the one thing I felt strongly about was that anybody going into teaching ought to get out into the schools right at the beginning and first see whether they really wanted to be teachers. More important, they should have those experiences built into their coursework because my experience taking all the courses and then having practice teaching at the end of that experience was dysfunctional in many ways. When I was hired, the president said he wanted to have the best teacher education program in the state.

I said, "That sounds great." When I got there, I inherited four additional faculty members that had been hired and I commenced to build relationships with local schools in the area and created an advisory board of teachers and principals to help us get people out in the schools. The faculty members all worked to try to get students placed in relation to their courses.

In October, the president called me and really blew his top. He was a pretty irrational, paranoid guy. He had about four locks on his office door. He was upset because I had done all this stuff in the community that I hadn't consulted him about. But his main point was that this is going to be very expensive, and how were we going to build the dormitories they need if they didn't have a lot of revenue from the teacher education program.

My reply was, "I thought you were interested in quality not quantity or dollars."

I had one teacher, Lyle Eddy, who had come from Emory University, teaching methods courses. Our first students that fall were practically all teachers who wanted to take courses to upgrade their credentials. Lyle was asking them to take a look at their teaching practices through the lenses of methodological theories and they were finding that very challenging personally and intellectually.

They complained to the vice president of academic affairs who told me to fire Lyle Eddy because of the complaints. I went and looked at Lyle's classes and I thought they were great.

I went back and said, "I'm not going to fire Lyle. Here's what's going on. These people are getting a terrific educational experience if they'll try to learn from it."

The other thing going on that fall was that Monmouth was going through its first accreditation visit. The faculty was using the accreditation visit as a way of asserting faculty prerogatives when it came to curriculum, academic freedom, and governance. He was used to running the place like a dictator. There were 12 department heads, and I was one of them, that gathered together to challenge this whole dynamic. The process involved getting reports from all the department heads and faculty and then putting those together.

Our report came out, and he had a handpicked executive committee that would read all those and create a draft that was a complete whitewash of what we had said. That was my introduction to the politics of higher education.

Lyle and I had been involved in that during the fall. He was a very solid faculty member from Emory University and knew what universities were supposed to be about, much more than I did actually. After the semester break, when we came back in mid-January, we each got letters saying that our contracts would not be renewed at the end of June. But the letters arrived on February second and the university agreement with AAUP was that we were to be notified no later than February first.

That really got me into interaction between educational environments, student teacher relationships, teaching practices, and their impact on student mental health, student learning, and student development.



## Turning Toward Challenge

On that technicality, we got some monetary support from AAUP and hired a lawyer. We spent the spring in that litigation. The president tried to buy us off. We met with the board, and he offered us each a couple thousand dollars to go away quietly. In 1959, \$2,000 was a fair amount of money, given the fact that our salaries were about seven thousand, or so.

We didn't go away quietly. When the other department heads came back that September, the 11 remaining active wrote a letter to the Board offering their resignations as of the following June if the president was not removed. By October, he was president emeritus.

Meanwhile a faculty member down there told me about this interesting college up in Plainfield, Vermont. He knew about my enthusiasm for progressive education and experiential learning. We found a job at a halfway house outside Rutland, and I got interviewed by Tim Pitkin, then president of Goddard, down in New York.

Goddard had just gotten this six-year Ford Foundation grant on curriculum organization and they needed an evaluation coordinator. Tim offered me that job and we moved to Plainfield in September of '59.

All that evaluative research from '59 to '65 really got me into all the literature and all the issues concerning teaching and learning and college environments and student development. Then Tim Pitkin, Ernie Boyer, and I got a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health for a project on student development in small colleges trying to use research to improve educational quality in these very diverse small colleges that were part of the Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges which has now become the Council for Independent Colleges.

The combination of the research at Goddard and the research at these other institutions provided for the basis for *Education and Identity*, the book that got a National Book Award from the American Council on Education in '59. That kind of took me out of the woods of Vermont and onto the national scene.

I had maintained a good relationship with Ernie Boyer, the chancellor of the SUNY system. We had worked together on the project on student development, so I was invited to go to Albany with a group of about a half a dozen other people to react to a prospectus on this new institution. I didn't realize at the time, but that day-long meeting really was for a half a dozen potential candidates for a new position.

I got the call inviting me to be the founding academic vice president of Empire State College, which I accepted. At first, Jo and I, and our four kids, thought we would move down to Saratoga Springs. But there was a nice new high school being built right here in East Montpelier, and our kids wanted to stay in our beautiful farm out there and go to that new school. So they never ended up moving down here, although after a couple of years Jo got a job at the Albany Learning Center. So she was down there with me for a couple of years but other than that I would drive up Friday afternoon or Thursday night and go back down on Monday.

I had focused entirely on typical college-aged students in my own research and writing and never really had anything to do with continuing education or adult learners, but that got me into that whole arena in a very significant way. In the early 70s, you may recall, there was the flood of mainly women returning to college. There was a huge amount of interest in and ferment about how to respond to these adult learners. The average age of our Empire State learners was 35. We had only

10 percent who were under 25 years of age. We had students who were in their 50s, 60s, and 70s. We had one graduate in her early 80s in those early years.

It was a very exciting time. The Carnegie Foundation created a million dollar grant that led to the creation of the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning, CAEL, which later became the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. They put together a group of a dozen quite different institutions across the country that were trying to respond to this flood of adult learners.

From '70 to '77, when I was VP at Empire State, we were part of that whole explosion of concern about lifelong learning and adult learners. When I left Empire State to become a distinguished professor and director for the Center for Higher Education at Memphis State University, I got two successive four-year grants. One was for higher education for adult learners involving a dozen institutions around the country. We worked with them to make changes so that they would be more responsive to adult learners.

That seven-year period at Empire State and then the eight years in the Center for Higher Education at Memphis State, with those federally funded projects helping institutions adapt to adult learners and educate them more effectively, really immersed me in that whole world. I did a lot of writing and different books came out of that.

It was fun when Debbie Worthley got a group of people together in Montpelier [for an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute]. I learned about it by chance. Jo and I were invited to go to this first organizational meeting and found it very interesting and very worthwhile.

I had retired back up here, and was working part-time at Vermont College, and then back at Goddard, so I agreed to chair the steering committee with Peter Meyer who I had also known in the CAEL context. We co-chaired the initial steering committee for a while and then he withdrew and I chaired it for a while and handed it off to Bob Rosenthal last year.

It's very clear that older adult learners have a very broad range of interests and are very lively folks. Actually, when I was at George Mason University I helped a local group. I was interim dean there for 18 months in the Graduate School of Education and they came to us and wanted to start a lifelong learning program. I helped them do that. They were wonderfully lively people, great to work with, very competent, and very politically savvy. They knew how to get things done.

It's clear that in any of our developed countries, and certainly here in the United States, education in later life and learning throughout life is a terribly important ingredient.

When you look at the data on life expectancy, Alzheimer's, and other factors having to do with older folks, the contributions of being active, not just physically active but intellectually active, and of being involved and engaged in larger social issues, just plain intellectual issues in music or art, are critically important.

A very high proportion of the population is really thirsty for opportunities to do that, to have these new experiences and be entertained by new information and by meeting other people who share those interests.

So the Osher project, on a national basis, seems to me to be tremendously helpful and important. I just felt it was great fun and very interesting and a very worthwhile way to invest some time and energy in helping get this unit started in central Vermont.

It's clear that in any of our developed countries, and certainly here in the United States, education in later life and learning throughout life is a terribly important ingredient.

## Turning Toward Challenge

Debbie invited me to be on a statewide board and that's been interesting to share in her creation of this whole statewide operation here. It's just been a very interesting experience, but after five years it was time to let other people take over this whole enterprise.

By then we had a good strong board. Our membership is not huge but it's been very stable; we have a devoted corps of people. I felt good about the people who were moving into various leadership roles. The last couple of years it's been going very, very well. I'm sure my international travels and my encounters with diverse cultures and with diverse people of all ages reinforced my sense of the value of the whole Osher enterprise.

I guess one theme that has characterized my past and sticks with me is turning toward challenge. Early on I realized that what was most meaningful for me was to get myself in situations I didn't know how to deal with and to have to then develop the knowledge and confidence that would enable me to function in these new situations. The project on student development was really the first experience of that. As a young professional, my only experience had been at Monmouth College and little old Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. I had never run any kind of project and that introduced me to a huge diverse range of institutions.

Then taking on the academic vice presidency to create Empire State College was a huge challenge. I knew a lot about education but I had really never had any experience with public universities or with public higher education systems.

Then when I moved from Empire State to direct the Center for Higher Education at Memphis State, I had never had anything, aside from my dismal experience at Harvard, to do with a school of education in any kind of professional role. And my international travels have always been driven by the interest in experiencing new cultures and new contexts, to figure out how to function in them and understand them and learn from them.

So whenever something comes along and I have an opportunity to learn how to do something I don't know how to do, I go toward it.

The other major learning is that time is all we have in this life. How you spend your time is the most important decision you can make. I was lucky to realize that very early on. In my 20s, Jo and I were starting to have kids and I have always protected time for my family and to some extent for myself. I've been very intentional about trying to create a balanced existence.

I've been reflective pretty much all my adult life about how I'm allocating my time and energy. I certainly have poured plenty of it into work, but even when I've been in administrative roles, I've been able to write and publish. When I wrote *Education and Identity*, I wrote it from five to eight in the morning while I was doing that project on student development in the later years. I'd go to the office from eight to lunch or one or two and then I'd come home in the afternoon and spend the afternoon around the place and with the kids.

Another example is that there was a lot of very heavy hitting politically and emotionally going on when we were creating Empire State, as you can imagine. But when I had the opportunity to go to Guatemala for six weeks to finish a manuscript, I said, "Empire State will still be here when I get back." I didn't think I'd be kicked out, so I went down there and we had a wonderful six weeks, with Jo and

our three daughters and got the book written. Sure enough, when I came back all the problems were still there but I was still employed. So that's the other key orientation that has been important.

I guess the third thing, in making those choices about taking on challenges and in balancing my time, has been, first, doing things that I felt were socially useful and important, but also doing things that would be fun and interesting. That was part of the challenge issue. Right now, my primary criteria in how I decide to take on something is it's got to meet some social need, it's got to have some social value, and I've got to enjoy it.

Our world, as I experience it and learn about it, is moving from relative simplicity to relative complexity; it is moving from relative chaos to relative order. We humans play an active role in evolution.

We create the future through the more or less conscious choices we make, as we reflect on current and past experiences. Through these choices we create ourselves and participate, for better or worse, in creating our world. I see myself as an active participant in God's creation. Another way I think about it is that I am a conduit for the universe's desire to think about itself.

This may sound presumptuous. I don't feel all that significant. I see myself only as a tiny grain of sand on the infinite beaches of time past, time present and time future. But, shaped by oceanic forces, I am a grain of sand that has some grit and durability. Without me the beach would be diminished.

Conceptions of "God," the universe, immortality, and such ineffable matters anchor my professional work and give purpose and meaning to my personal investments in family, friends, and community.

Given this orientation my challenge is to try to understand this growing universal complexity as best I can and lead a life consistent with that understanding. So that's the way I think about myself and my history.

I see myself only as a tiny grain of sand on the infinite beaches of time past, time present and time future. But, shaped by oceanic forces, I am a grain of sand that has some grit and durability. Without me the beach would be diminished.

## Wow!—An Intergenerational OLLI Experience in Waterbury, Connecticut

**Ruth Glasser**

### Abstract

*A routine U.S. urban history seminar for traditional students turned into an adventure when OLLI members participated in a parallel and intersecting class. Younger and older students got to know each other, together watching and critiquing an historical fiction film. Both groups of students participated in an historical tour of Lower Manhattan, with the traditional students as tour guides for the older adults. This article describes the specifics of this collaboration and suggests that it was a highly successful experience in intergenerational education that is worth reproducing in the future.*

It began as a regular old American history seminar. Thanks to OLLI, it ended up being much more than the sum of its parts. I had taught URBN 241W: History of Urban America twice before in my six-year career as a lecturer in the Urban and Community Studies Program [UCS] at the University of Connecticut's Waterbury campus. It is a core course within the UCS major, and the "W" means "writing intensive." Thus, the course comes laden with expectations that it will explicate major themes in American urban history as well as improve the students' writing.

I, however, had even greater expectations for the outcomes of the course. As someone who freelanced in the public history realm for years before succumbing to academia, I believe that historical research should always be shared with the larger community. I also think this sharing motivates the students to do their best. In my version of URBN 241W, therefore, I have always tried to give students an opportunity to create some meaningful experience that culminates in a project intended for a larger audience, rather than a paper that I will presumably read and discard.

In Waterbury, a de-industrialized, multi-ethnic city of a little over 100,000 people, many opportunities exist to do interesting public-oriented urban history projects. So the first time I taught URBN 241, students created a multifaceted primary source-based history of the block on which our university stood, culminating in a set of posters that have been exhibited to the larger community numerous times. The second time the course was taught students collected and compiled the

history of the Walnut-Orange-Walsh Neighborhood [WOW], an impoverished community about a mile north of our school. For this project, the college students worked in tandem with middle school students from the neighborhood. They met at the WOW Learning Center, where they analyzed primary sources and interviewed community members. Final products included a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the neighborhood and a set of tri-fold displays on that history that were donated to the Learning Center.

But this third time around, in the fall of 2007, there was a new possible audience and set of collaborators: members of the OLLI program that had been established at UConn/Waterbury in the spring of 2007. After consulting with Brian Chapman and Rita Quinn, OLLI director and program assistant, respectively, we decided to try a loose partnership between the urban history course and a new OLLI course.

The linchpin of the collaboration would be the history of a Lower Manhattan neighborhood that no longer existed: The Five Points. The subject of an eponymous, meticulously researched and engaging book by Tyler Anbinder as well as the film *Gangs of New York*, directed by Martin Scorsese, we felt that this notoriously riotous community would form a great subject of study for both traditional and older adult students. A focus on this community would be an entertaining way to sneak in the history of the urban U.S. in the 19th century, not typically a favorite subject for traditional college students, to say the least. On the other hand, we suspected that the types of older adults who joined the course might well be avid history readers who would both learn and contribute a lot to the course.

We decided to structure the older adult course as what might be called a parallel subset of the traditional class, with some intersecting points as appropriate. What this meant in practice was that while the traditional students would get the soup-to-nuts survey of American urban history from colonial times to the present, the OLLI class members would come into their session a little later and end a little earlier than the traditional students. Thus the college students spent a month slogging through theories of urban history and colonial history before starting Anbinder's *Five Points*. These students, who met on Monday afternoons, read the Anbinder book starting at the same time that the OLLI class began in late September. OLLI members, who now met on Friday mornings, would read it as well and their class, entitled 'Hooligans or Hard Workers?', would focus specifically on the history of the Five Points neighborhood during the 19th century.

Thus what was a book used essentially as a 19th-century case study for the traditional class was the core of the OLLI class. The two groups, however, would meet for a two-part screening and discussion of the movie *Gangs of New York*. These meetings would give them a chance to get acquainted before the big day of companionship and collaboration—an all-day Saturday bus trip to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and then to the site of the disappeared Five Points neighborhood, now Chinatown and part of the Civic Center and Little Italy areas of Lower Manhattan. The URBN 241W students would be preparing and conducting the Five Points piece of the tour, each discussing a theme that she or he would be writing about for a final paper, before an audience of OLLI members.

Engagement between the two groups was not spontaneous but rather had to be engineered. My class, consisting of a dozen students in their late teens and twen-

We decided to structure the older adult course as what might be called a parallel subset of the traditional class, with some intersecting points as appropriate.

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ties, encountered the OLI group, some thirty ranging in age from their fifties to their eighties, for the first time in late September in the campus's Multi-Purpose Room. The older adults and traditional students sat apart from each other as they watched the first half of *Gangs of New York*. As might have been predicted, the OLI students sat in front, the traditional students in back. I had everyone introduce him or herself, and the traditional students were asked to mention what subject they would be writing about for their tour portion and for the final paper. Discussion afterward involved both sets of students, but in a more parallel than interactive way, i.e., with members of each constituency raising their hands and contributing to the discussion, which was lively nonetheless.

However, this meeting was not the true intergenerational experience or the kind of bonding that I wanted the two sets of students to do before their bus trip. It seemed important that the traditional students could visualize and get a feel for their tour audience, just as the OLI students should get to know their guides. Beyond the tour, I felt that both groups could share valuable insights with each other on the Anbinder book as well as the Scorsese movie. So the next week, when the second half of the movie would be shown, I decided to take action. As both sets of students filed into the class, I asked the traditional students to each find two OLI 'buddies,' because the ratio was about 2:1. Telling the younger students that the older ones 'didn't bite' got a laugh out of all of them and seemed to relax the atmosphere considerably. The students dutifully mingled and per instructions, introduced themselves more informally to each other. During the viewing of the second half of the movie they could be seen occasionally whispering to each other, something I might not have tolerated in a traditional classroom but which I welcomed in this setting. After the movie was over, I asked each group to discuss the movie, considering its dramatic effectiveness as well as its fidelity to the history depicted in the Anbinder book. The room was abuzz with animated conversations, and the discussion was much more integrated! The two groups had finally communicated in a direct and meaningful way.

Over the next few weeks as both groups anticipated the trip, tour guides and audience had taken on a new air of reality. I would remind the younger students periodically that their tours had to be both well-researched and interesting because they had an educated, demanding, and therefore tough audience—and they believed it because they had a context of names, faces, and personalities. The older adults and I would anticipate what they would be learning on the tour, since we had the luxury of discussing the Five Points in depth in our tightly focused sessions. The traditional students and I had over time built a map with an itinerary based upon the historic Five Points places they had selected to speak about; this pre-tour map was shown to the OLI class to whet their appetites.

So the day the tour rolled around an air of camaraderie and anticipation pervaded the front hallway of our building, despite the fact that it was 7:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning and a gloomy, damp, chilly day at that. There was much back and forth banter as the two groups of students and other campus community members—some 50 in all—boarded the chartered bus. As stipulated, the traditional students had each prepared brief illustrated outlines of their tour subjects, and these were given out as packets to everyone to prepare them for the trip.

The bus trip was also enlivened by our fortunate acquisition of a bus driver



who would only give his name as ‘Winkie Wackie.’ Winkie turned out to be a self-taught ‘sociologist’ with tons of facts about New York City at his disposal. He was a familiar figure, it turned out, to some of the seniors, as he led his own tours and hikes in various parts of Connecticut. Winkie regaled us with tantalizing tidbits of New York lore as we drove down to the big city.

Once down on the Lower East Side, we split into several groups to take two slightly differently themed tours of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. There were seniors and traditional students in each group, so once again they had a chance to interact with each other as they explored the narrow dark hallways and tiny rooms of this marvelously preserved slice of late 19th- and early 20th-century immigrant life. Lessons learned from Five Points came spatially alive as we climbed the sharply angled, narrow, dark stairways described so vividly by Anbinder [built deliberately steeply to save as much room for rentable space and underlighted to save utility costs]. Students of all ages asked the tour guides questions. OLLI members, perhaps primed by the lively and personal discussions of immigration and ethnicity we had had in the classroom, shared their parents’ and grandparents’ reminiscences of immigrant life, much to the benefit of the younger students.

We broke for lunch, with tour members dispersing in little groups to patronize the wonderful Asian, Italian, and Jewish restaurants throughout the area. After lunch, we walked together from the Lower East Side to Chinatown for the student-led tour of the vanished Five Points. The group joked and laughed, asked questions, and shared historical information as we strode down the Bowery, passed near the entrance to the Manhattan Bridge, and entered Chinatown.

Then the self-guided tour portion of our day commenced. For some two hours we meandered around Chinatown and Little Italy. Each student in the history class stood in front of a previously selected building or site (for many of the original buildings had been destroyed as part of an early version of urban renewal) and narrated its significance. A pair of students, for example, stood on the steps of the New York County Courthouse just south of Chinatown and explained to the group gathered in the adjoining plaza how the apparently neutral civic sites surrounding us had once held the Old Brewery. The Brewery had been a particularly notorious example of slum housing, and was described by the students as part of a general explanation of housing conditions for the typically poor denizens of the Five Points. We looked just behind us to imagine what the gray stone plaza would have been like more than a century and a half before when it was part of Cow Bay, an African American and Irish immigrant area of almost unimaginable squalor. Other students explained the layered multicultural histories of two Catholic churches in the area, the Church of the Transfiguration in Chinatown and the Church of the Most Precious Blood in Little Italy, both of which we were able to explore inside and out.

OLLI members provided a real, challenging, but also coaching audience for the traditional students, asking pointed questions yet also encouraging students to venture boldly into the area of public speaking, clearly a new experience for some of the presenters. OLLI members laughed heartily at jokes, roundly applauded as each student finished his or her presentation, and privately praised students as the group walked between sites.

The bus ride home was full of exhausted people but also extremely festive in

Telling the younger students that the older ones ‘didn’t bite’ got a laugh out of all of them and seemed to relax the atmosphere considerably.



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atmosphere. It was to be the last formal contact between OLI members and URBN 241W students, but individuals from both groups would periodically tell me in the weeks that followed that they had run into each other in the streets or honked at each other as they passed in cars. Waterbury is a small enough city that such “coincidences” happen every day, fortunately for the spirit of our intergenerational experiment.

Both groups agreed that the collaboration between generations had enhanced their learning experience throughout the semester. Both camps also agreed that more intensive collaborations were in order. OLI members described feeling invigorated by being surrounded by young people and desirous of even closer contact. Traditional students enjoyed the insights and memories of the older adults, and appreciated conducting their first tour for this challenging but supportive audience.

As of this writing, therefore, we are “plotting” something new—an integrated version of HIST 278: History of Latinos in the U.S., another course I periodically teach to traditional students. OLI members specifically asked for courses related to Spanish language and Latino cultures, so it seemed like a good time to take out HIST 278, dust it off, and redesign it as a course that both OLI members and traditional students could attend together. Typically I include an oral history component in this course—students find Latino migrants or immigrants to this area whom they interview. These interviews, in addition to forming part of their grade, giving them a chance to deploy newly acquired interview skills, and deepening their understanding of Latino history, are also placed in our continuously growing archive of oral histories of new immigrants to our region. In this new version, seniors and traditional students will pair up to do interviews, a prospect OLI members queried have professed themselves delighted with. Who better to interview community elders than other community elders, after all?

**Ruth Glasser** received her Ph.D. from Yale University in 1991 and is a lecturer in Urban and Community Studies at the University of Connecticut. She is the author of *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917 - 1940* and *Aquí Me Quedo: Puerto Ricans in Connecticut*. She is co-editor of *Caribbean Connections: Dominican Republic*. Ruth is currently teaching an OLI research seminar called “Neighborhood of Memory” involving gathering and interpreting primary materials on a Waterbury, Connecticut, neighborhood.

## The Writers Circle

**Charles Francis**  
**Susan Hoffman**  
**Laila Kramer**

### Abstract

*The Writers Circle is a program which is part of the OLLI curriculum at San Francisco State University. Participants in the circle write memoirs, short stories, historical fiction, and/or other genres, read their manuscripts to their classmates and receive feedback. Below are an introduction by the founder and facilitator of The Writers Circle followed by two examples of memoirs produced last fall.*

### Introduction

These stories were written by two writers from The Writers Circle at San Francisco State's OLLI. Although both essays are autobiographical, the creative work of The Circle spans a range of genres and topics. Keith, a long term care nurse, writes a narrative chapter of every person he has cared for including a series on the biannual trek he makes with his aging parents from their farmhouse in the Midwest to their Florida trailer. Margaret, a former school teacher, writes of growing up in Chillicothe, Ohio, as an African American adolescent whose matter-of-fact encounters with racism are poignant and chilling. Thelma, a pioneering investigator, writes a mystery thriller inspired by a wrongful death suit she worked. Renee and Michele are emeriti faculty. Renee is in the thick of an expansive, richly nuanced historical novel of Russian immigrants at the turn of last century. Michele, a native of France, experiments with fiction, plays, poetry, and surrealism.

The two selections which follow this introduction were among those read the last night The Circle met in the fall of 2007. Charles Francis in "By-Pass" shows a bemused detachment from the medical team and technology that saves his life, only to be brought back into his body by an amusing exchange with an intuitive nurse. Laila Kramer's "A Gardener of Jazz and Yes" shares her love for words, music, and dance with her grandson. They carry the meaning and message of a lifetime of experiences, a wisdom and knowledge of self, what it means to love, and how to make sense of the unexplainable. Overall, their voices and stories serve to remind us of the importance of the older protagonist, for the wisdom and spirit brought to our culture when it focuses on longevity.

Overall, their voices and stories serve to remind us of the importance of the older protagonist, for the wisdom and spirit brought to our culture when it focuses on longevity.

## The Writer's Circle

## Background on The Writers Circle

From the beginning, we designed the SF State OLLI program to target the "cultural creative," a term coined by sociologists and used by marketers to connote someone who commits time and resources to social justice and the environment, cares deeply about relationships and is involved in self-actualization and creative expression (Ray and Anderson, 2000). We wagered that by appealing to an audience of older adult learners who are inner directed and socially concerned we would attract people inclined to participate in the creation of an ongoing learning community.

We developed a six-part curriculum that included Artmaking and Storytelling. (Note: The other five areas of the SF State OLLI Curriculum between 2003 - 2007 included Science and Technology, Redefining Aging, International Affairs and Current Events, the Urban Curriculum, and Wellness). The intention was to provide OLLI members with a wide range of "platforms for self-expression" from memoir writing to performing monologues to composing blogs. Soon, there was a cadre of 100 members who were devoted to creative writing, eager for more skills training, different genres of writing, and more opportunities for critiquing, reading, and disseminating their creative work. A weave of writing courses was added. However, there was still something else that was needed in the mix of course offerings.

Some members were writing everyday for three to eight hours a day. Others needed a deadline to help discipline their writing practice. They were writing personal essays, chapters to historical novels, chapters to memoirs, poetry, and song lyrics. The opportunity to be with others and read their work every week or every other week provided the impetus participants needed to keep writing.

The idea of The Writers Circle first came from one of the small writing groups that emerged from the Memoir Writing course. We based the Circle's structure on the SF Writers Workshop (one of the country's longest running writing groups). The adopted structure was simple: everyone would sit in a circle; people would be given 15 minutes and encouraged to read for half of their allotted time, giving 7-8 minutes for feedback. Readers were asked not to comment until after everyone had spoken (a hard thing to manage). A constructive remark focused on what was working in the story or sought clarification. The emphasis was on guiding people to find their natural voice, to tell their story for its full emotional impact. The grammarians were kept in check and asked to make their recommended changes on the print copy of the story rather than take Circle time. The instructor as facilitator would start and end the circle as well as protect the 15-minute limit for each reader.

The enrollment limit for the Circle is 16 people, which allows 8 people a night to read, with an assumption that people read every other night in the Circle. Each week's Writers Circle is preceded by an e-mail from the instructor or teaching assistant to inquire who would like to read the following week. Members respond to the e-mail ("reply all") and attach the piece they are currently writing and revising.

The Writers Circle meets once a week for each five-week term, for a total of 20 weeks a year. The writers who participate say:

- "The most rewarding part of Writers Circle is discovering the fascinating experiences of your fellow writers."
- "Without feedback, it is hard to tell whether your descriptions of places, people and events are understood. The Writers Circle provides critical but supportive listeners."

- “Being complimented on your writing by fellow writers is a great feeling; the Writers Circle provided this for me.”

The beauty of the Circle is that the learning is implicit. There are no formulas or accountability measures to drive its success. No proposed methodologies. It is the power of practice and an attentive, caring environment. The writers listen to themselves and others and, inevitably, they become better writers.

By Susan Hoffman

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Ray, P. and Anderson, R. (2000). *The cultural creatives: How 50 million people are changing the world*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

#### Bypass

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One day, I decided to get a check-up at the Veterans Administration Hospital. I did this to assure that should my HMO refuse to pay for any needed expensive health care procedures, I would have some coverage. While visiting my sister in Houston the previous year, I had suffered angina attacks and had an angioplasty and a stent insertion done in Methodist Hospital there and Kaiser-Permanente had been reluctant to pay for it.

On the way from the VA parking lot to the emergency clinic, I experienced some chest pain—the first I had since the stent insertion. I mentioned this to the triage nurse: to my surprise, she immediately put me into a bed in the emergency room and called for an EKG, a blood exam, and a cardiology consultation. After several hours of poking and prodding, they ordered me to be admitted and moved me upstairs to the cardiac ward. The next morning they performed an angioplasty exam and then told me that I needed immediate bypass surgery, the two remaining (unstented) coronary arteries were so blocked with plaque that I might suffer a coronary occlusion at any moment.

During my prior career as a medical photographer in the VA medical system, I had filmed several bypass surgeries and then followed photographically the patients' rehabilitation afterward. So, I was intimately acquainted with this surgery and its sequela and I had resolved that should I ever be faced with having to undergo it, I would firmly decline. When I told the cardiologist this, he contacted my family. My nephew is a physician in Houston and he flew out to San Francisco to act as a mediator between the VA surgeons and me. My nephew explained to me forcefully that to decline the surgery was suicidal and unacceptable. He said that after discussing the proposed procedure with the surgeon in charge, he had complete confidence that the man was competent to do the job. He said there were many newly adopted improvements in the procedure and that it would not be nearly as bad as I was imagining. His deep concern that I remain alive made me realize that there was more at stake than just my choosing to risk annihilation. I reluctantly agreed to do it—then awaited apprehensively that dread appointment in the OR.

The following morning, shortly after dawn, several of the surgery team visited me, which only heightened my anxiety—but then the anesthesiologist showed up. She was a petite young Asian; intelligent, warm and obviously super-competent.

We wagered that by appealing to an audience of older adult learners who are inner directed and socially concerned we would attract people inclined to participate in the creation of an ongoing learning community.

## The Writer's Circle

"You are the one on the team who is on my side, right?" I ventured.

"That's right," she assured

"And should those guys start to do anything iffy in there, you'll stop him, right?" I knew she was empowered to do this.

"You can depend on it," she said firmly.

With that, I lay back on my pillow and consigned myself to the care of fate. Soon, two orderlies dashed in with a gurney and quickly moved me onto it. In the prep room, a very impersonal nurse's aide shaved the lower part of my body and my chest. Then, apologizing, she painted me with ice-cold iodine solution. I was wheeled into the OR and slid across onto the operating table, which was also ice-cold. About this time my lovely Asian protector, with a reassuring pat, started the injections that sent me off to never-never land.

The first thing I was aware of was movement, I was on a gurney being rapidly wheeled somewhere. Then, I heard voices; at first concerned, then anxious. The gurney stopped. I felt hands on me, doing things I couldn't understand.

"Oh shit, he's fibrillating! We're losing him! Get those leads reconnected to the pacemaker, NOW!"

The disembodied voices faded out and I was left all alone in silence.

"Well, old pal," I say, "Looks like we've finally come to THE END. So, what are you feeling? Fear?"

"No."

"Regret?"

"No."

"Then what!?"

I searched my feelings for something I could identify. My eternal curiosity and the reassurance that whatever happens was o.k. by me, was all that I could sense.

I awoke sometime later in a darkened room. I saw I was connected to electronic monitors and realized I was in the cardiac intensive care unit. There was a wall of glass, through which I could make out distant other units and nurses walking to and fro. The room also had an outside window and it appeared to be night out there. I had no idea how long I had been unconscious. I began to feel a burning pain in my chest and in my legs. I became alarmed as it quickly increased in intensity.

"Don't worry, I've just given you a hypo through your IV tube. It should start to take effect soon and will handle your pain."

In the dimly lit room, I could just make out that a nurse was standing at the foot of my bed holding a syringe. I began to recall what I was doing here and was filled with dismay imagining the trauma that my body must have suffered. I wondered how much time it would take before I could dispassionately examine my awful wounds. I soon lapsed back into blessed unconsciousness.

Something unknown awakened me sometime later. Approaching me on tip-toe was a cute, blonde pixie of a nurse. This vision was drop-dead gorgeous, with big blue eyes and a bunch of flaxen curls under her nurse's cap. She addressed me in a secretive, conspiratorial manner.

"Mr. Francis, did you know that you sleep with your mouth open?" She whispered. "...You look something like this."

Here she closed her eyes, cocked her head to the side, and retracted her lips over her teeth, to create the impression of a toothless old man. The transformation was so amazing I was struck dumb.

“It’s not a pretty picture, Mr. Francis.” She solemnly concluded.

“Please, please don’t. Don’t make me laugh. My chest. Have mercy.” I warded her off with my palm and put as much pitiful pleading into my request as I could muster through my painful repressed giggling. She seemed smugly satisfied with her performance though and quietly left my room. Even now, whenever I recall her impish face, I break into a grin.

By Charles Francis

## A Gardener of Jazz and Yes

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In the middle of my siesta one afternoon in October 2004, just before getting ready for my dance class, I was awakened by a telephone call. Sleepily, I picked up the receiver.

“Hello?”

“Mom.” It was a long-dragged out “Mom,” the kind that precedes some important news. “You’re going to be a grandma,” my newlywed son, Erik, told me ever so sweetly.

“What? WHAT?” was all I could manage to squeak out. After hearing the details—that the baby had a strong heartbeat and would arrive in the spring—I was so flushed with joy that I don’t remember much else of our conversation.

On the way to tango class and over the next six months, I embraced this treasure we would receive. I wondered how I would form a close, loving bond with my grandbaby when he lived so far away. I began dusting and sorting books that I had saved from Erik’s childhood—Dr. Seuss’s magical adventures, Chanukah stories—and I made a list of the music I would play to cuddle with the baby as I danced him to sleep. Should I start with Vivaldi or Gershwin or Coltrane?

In late April, during Passover and under a full moon, my grandbaby, Forest, was born. This magnificent child shared his birthday with my blessed Aunt Honey. The goddesses encircled us, lighting the path for a magical journey.

I took several trips to southern California after Forest’s birth to cultivate a strong bond between us. In August, 2006, Erik, his wife, Theresa, Forest, and I spent an afternoon at a Los Angeles beach. Walking hand in hand toward the water with my 18-month old grandbaby, I heard familiar sounds from my childhood—organ music coming from the carousel. As the colorful array of ceramic horses slowly danced by us, Forest and I chose our horse, an elegant caramel-colored palomino. Holding Forest very close to me, we delighted in the rhythmic rocking of the horses to spirited music as the ocean breezes brushed our faces. When the music and the horses slowed down, then halted, Forest turned his head around and his huge, ocean blue eyes found mine. Gleaming with joy, he said simply: “Try again.” On the second go-round, perhaps Forest, too, re-connected with our first days together when I nestled him in my arms and danced circles around the living room to Cuban *Son* after each feeding to get him to sleep.

Leaving the carousel, we all walked along the beach, awash in the joy of the day. Erik picked up his tired baby and carried him on his shoulders as Theresa and I followed along to the car. We settled in for the long drive to the airport to catch my plane home to San Francisco. It was around 4:30, “cranky hour,” when only

I awoke sometime later in a darkened room. I saw I was connected to electronic monitors and realized I was in the cardiac intensive care unit.

## The Writer's Circle

music kept Forest from crying, so we sang several rounds of “Baby Beluga,” “Old MacDonald” and other kiddy and folk songs. Mom, Dad and *Abuela* (that’s me) exhausted our song repertoire but Forest still cried out for more music. When Theresa turned the radio to a mellow jazz station, Forest took note.

“That’s jazz,” I informed him, speaking close to his face. He stared at my lips and tongue as I said it again—“jazz.”

“Jazz-zzz” he said ever so proudly.

We spoke “jazz” several times after that, Forest giggling each time he said it. Then I decided to try an experiment—to teach my grandbaby to say “yes” before he learned to say “no.”

“Do you love your Mommy?” I asked. No response.

“Yes,” I answered myself.

“Do you love your Daddy?” Again, silence.

I said “yes.” And again, “yes.”

Watching the movements of my mouth and the sounds coming out of it, Forest began to giggle.

“Do you love your Mommy?” I asked him again.

“Yes-sss,” he responded.

“Do you love your Daddy?”

“Yes-sss,” he repeated with a chuckle. “Yes-sss. Yes-sss. Yes-sss!” His love affair with language began with a sizzle.

On the plane home to San Francisco, I thought about my role as Forest’s *abuela*. Of course, I would nurture, protect and educate this precious child as my own. I would be one of his gardeners, planting seeds of love—for language, for music, for all living things. I anticipated reading *Winnie the Pooh* and *The Cat in the Hat* and my favorite story, *The Red Balloon*, to him to continue kindling his developing imagination and love for language. I would share my love of dance with him as my father had done with me; we would wiggle our hips and shake our shoulders around the kitchen to Cuban *Son* and salsa. I would introduce him to the lush, saxophone sounds of John Coltrane and the blood-rising notes of Chucho Valdez, pianist extraordinaire from Cuba. After hearing Chucho’s rendition of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, I would feel certain that a love of music would pulsate within him as it does in his father and in me. And if he loved his Mommy and Daddy and dancing horses and the ocean and books and jazz, I would feel certain that he would embrace all of life with a resounding “Yes!”

By Laila Kramer

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## An Untapped Audience: Looking Beyond Retirees

**Carissa Moffat Miller and Holly Beard**

### Abstract

*This study examined the interest levels and preferences for lifelong learning courses among individuals residing in southwestern Idaho age 50 and older for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Boise State University. Even though a number of institutes began advertising less to retirees and more to adults age 50 and older over the past few decades, they largely continue to offer courses with retirees in mind. The findings indicated that as societal norms regarding aging and retirement and the definition of lifelong learning for adults evolve, so too must the delineation of the audience served by lifelong learning institutes.*

### Introduction

Many lifelong learning communities began as Learning in Retirement Institutes (Duke University, 2008) or served specific retired populations (Lifelong, 2008). As the social norms regarding retirement have evolved, so too have the lifelong learning institutes that offer educational opportunities for adults. Many lifelong learning institutes now focus advertising on younger audiences (50 and older), rather than typical retirees aged 65 and older. Yet the way courses are offered still reflects the mindset of adult education for retirees. Courses are typically offered during the middle of the day, with few evening courses (Boise State University, 2008; George Mason University, 2008; Vanderbilt University, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to examine interest levels and preferences for lifelong learning courses at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Boise State University (BSU) among individuals age 50 and older residing in southwestern Idaho.

### Background

Adult education and lifelong learning have evolved and taken many forms in the past two centuries. Lifelong learning began as exclusive clubs for men with the purpose of increasing Biblical literacy and grew into lyceums, mechanics institutes,

As the social norms regarding retirement have evolved, so too have the lifelong learning institutes that offer educational opportunities for adults.

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and public lectures with the goal to provide practical, useful, and applicable information for everyday life and jobs (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). Adult education in the United States then began to expand in order to influence numerous groups. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, places like the Highlander Folk School used adult education to teach African Americans to read so they could vote and also started citizenship schools (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2008). Other organizations and movements dedicated to expanding the rights of older adults, such as AARP in 1958 (AARP, 2008) and the Gray Panther Movement in the 1970s (Gray Panthers, 2008), helped bring to light the possibilities of lifelong learning for retirees.

Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLIs), long-term educational programs for retirees offered by local organizations, were the first to establish formal educational programs for retirees. The first LLI, the Institute for Retired Professionals, was created in 1962 by the New School for Social Research in New York City (Elderhostel Inc., 2008). The idea of seniors living on a college campus and taking courses during the summer, later called Elderhostel, was born at five college campuses across New Hampshire in the summer of 1975 (Culbertson, 1998). In 1988, 24 LLIs joined with Elderhostel Inc. to create a network of lifelong learning organizations that offered enhanced classes and increased educational travel opportunities (Elderhostel Inc., 2008). Numerous higher education institutions have housed educational opportunities for populations outside of the typical college age student under a variety of names and have focused on offering courses primarily to retired audiences. Most recently, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, sponsored by grants from The Bernard Osher Foundation, have focused on creating learning communities for adults age 50 and older on college campuses across the United States (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, 2008).

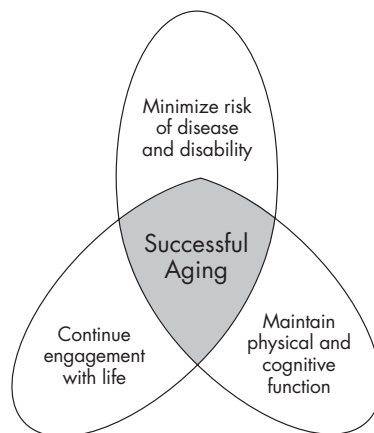
The age of participants in lifelong learning institutes for older adults has been gradually decreasing over the years, and many now court younger, non-retired members. Elderhostel dropped the age of enrollment from 60 to 55 and began allowing participants to bring friends or family members aged 21 or older with them to classes in the mid-1990s (Culbertson, 1998), and many of the Osher Institutes offer courses for adults as young as 50. Some of this change can be attributed to a wave of popular media articles about early retirement, but the fact is that most individuals continue to work until around age 65.

In the mid-20th century there was a trend toward earlier retirement, but labor force participation rates by individuals age 55 to 65 have remained steady at around 62% since the 1980s (Purcell, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). A number of factors may explain this steadying of labor force participation rates including private sector pension plans, requirements for defined pension plans, and health insurance requirements. The private sector pension plan expansion that began in the 1950s stabilized in 1980 (Purcell, 2005). The fact remains that most individuals today retire closer to age 65 because of eligibility for higher Social Security benefits (Social Security Administration, 2007), requirements for defined benefit pension plans (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008), or to ensure they have health insurance because they have not yet qualified for Medicare (Mulvey & Ross, 2005)

The benefits of lifelong learning can be extended not only to retirees, but could also improve the lives of older adults who have not yet retired. Early partici-

pation, which includes engaging the mind and establishing social networks that will be present after retirement, are key activities for cultivating successful aging. The Successful Aging Model developed by Rowe & Kahn (1998) encourages individuals to reduce and manage the risks associated with disease and disability, discover alternative ways to use their cognitive ability and find ways to maintain current or create new social connections. Each of the components of the model must work in concert for individuals to achieve a higher level of successful aging than could be realized by any one or even the simple sum of the three. Though the model is not without criticism for failing to account for other potential aspects of successful aging (Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, & Koenig, 2002; Holstein & Minkler, 2003; Minkler & Fadem, 2002), it was one of the first models to offer a definition that included more than a single component (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

Figure 1: Successful Aging Model



Lifelong learning can play a substantial role in maintaining physical and cognitive function. Numerous studies in the past decade recount the benefits of mental activity, including leisure type activities, in the reduction of Alzheimer's disease, even when holding typical risk factors such as income, sex, and education constant (Friedland et al., 2001; Fritsch, Smyth, Debanne, Petot, & Friedland, 2005; Snowden, 2003; Wilson et al., 2002). From 1994-2001, Wilson et al. (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of 801 Catholic nuns, priests, and brothers, none of whom had Alzheimer's when the study began. The researchers found that the individuals who reported frequent cognitive activities were 47% less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease than those with infrequent cognitive activity (Wilson et al., 2002, p. 746).

Lifelong learning institutes also play an important role in the "continued engagement with life," or the social interaction aspect of the model. In a survey of 244 adults enrolled in an organization that provided education and volunteer opportunities for seniors, Everard, Lach, Fisher and Baum (2000) found that both high-demand leisure activities (e.g., swimming, woodworking, walking) and social activities (e.g., traveling, entertaining, attending parties, attending church) were associated with greater health. Men and individuals with physical impairments receive the greatest benefits from social ties (Unger, McAvay, Bruce, Berkman, & Seeman, 1999).

Lastly, lifelong learning can also play a role in minimizing disease and disability.

The age of participants in lifelong learning institutes for older adults has been gradually decreasing over the years, and many now court younger, non-retired members.

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Mirowsky and Ross (1998) found that access to education leads to a healthier lifestyle which in turn leads to better health. Formal education goes beyond providing the opportunity for income. It also enhances “a sense of personal control and a lifestyle that protects and fosters health. Education makes individuals more effective agents in their own lives” (Mirowsky & Ross, 1998, p. 441). Personal control is particularly important for encouraging individuals to play a role in cultivating a healthy lifestyle. Likewise, access to adult education or continued education later in life begets more opportunities to take charge of one’s life and mitigate illnesses or other issues faced as individuals age. Mirowsky and Ross (1998) assert that policymakers would be well-served to consider increased access to education, not just medical care, as a way to improve health in the United States.

In summary, a review of the history of lifelong learning institutes reveals that offerings have changed and adapted over time, and adaptation may help programs serve a wider spectrum of individuals interested in lifelong learning. In addition, a large portion of the target population for lifelong learning courses is comprised of adults age 50-65, the majority of whom have stayed in the workforce. The Successful Aging Model provides a framework for lifelong learning institutes’ role in enhancing the aging experience for both retirees and those who have not yet retired, through teaching participants about healthier habits, increasing mental activity, and enhancing the social world. The following analysis looks more closely at the data from the interest inventory to determine how interested non-retirees can be better served.

## Methodology

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### Sampling Plan

The BSU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Community Survey was sent to a random sample of 3,000 adults 50 years and older in nine southwestern Idaho counties. The sample was drawn based on the proportion of the population 50 and older within each county based on 2000 United States Census data. The sample included 50% men and 50% women.

### Survey Instrument

The survey items and format were adapted from existing tools and created based on the needs and interests of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at BSU. The survey was designed to collect basic demographic and socio-economic information, past lifelong learning experiences, preferences for future activities, and participation in volunteer activities.

### Analysis

Individuals were included in this analysis if they indicated they would be interested in some type of lifelong learning course in the future (n=365). Participants who did not indicate an interest were excluded from the analysis. Descriptive and bivariate analyses are presented. Analyses were conducted using SPSS version 15.

## Results

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Of the 3,000 surveys mailed, 472 or 15.8% were returned with the survey form completed in full or in part. Of the 472 responses, 57 of the surveys were completed in the Web version. Among the respondents, 365 (77%) indicated an interest in participating in some type of lifelong learning course in the future.

## Demographics

Respondents who indicated an interest in participating in lifelong learning courses from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at BSU were an average of 63 years old and ranged in age from 50 to 88. The greatest percentage of interest was among those younger than age 65. Among respondents 65 and older, 68% expressed an interest as compared with 84% among people younger than 65. More women (58%) than men (41%) and more individuals who are working part or full time (51%) than retired (42%) expressed an interest in lifelong learning courses.

## Reasons to Continue Lifelong Learning

Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions which complete the sentence "I want to learn..." The reasons for why the individuals want to engage in lifelong learning ranged from improving job skills, enjoying hobbies better, giving back to the community, keeping up with world events, and being able to talk with children or grandchildren. Overall, there were no significant differences found between work status and the reasons for taking lifelong learning courses. However, a significant difference was found between work status and improving job skills (chi square = 80.026 (2),  $p < .001$ ) and keeping up with what is going on in the world and work status (chi square = 7.583 (2),  $p = .023$ ). Working participants were more likely (63.4%) than non-working (13.9%) participants to strongly or somewhat agree that they were taking courses to improve their job skills. Yet, working participants were slightly less likely (79%) than non-working participants (90%) to indicate they would take lifelong learning courses so they can keep up with what is going on in the world.

Table 1. Comparison of reasons for lifelong learning by work status

	Working (n=187)	Not Working (n= 153 )	X <sup>2</sup>	p
<i>I want to learn...</i>				
Improve job skills	63.4%	13.9%	80.026	.001
Enjoy hobbies/recreation	83.7%	79.3%	1.145	ns
Manage everyday life better	65.4%	62.9%	.360	ns
Simple joy of learning something new	90.4%	93.4%	1.527	ns
Give back to community	62.3%	65.1%	1.624	ns
Understand myself better	55.5%	44.8%	5.196	ns
Get along with others better	53.9%	47.2%	2.821	ns
Help other people	69.8%	65.8%	.644	ns
Keep up with what's going on in the world	79.2%	90.3%	7.583	.023
Talk about events with my children or grandchildren	58.9%	61.1%	.314	ns
Own spiritual or personal growth	81.2%	86.2%	2.628	ns

The Successful Aging Model provides a framework for lifelong learning institutes' role in enhancing the aging experience for both retirees and those that have not yet retired through teaching participants about healthier habits, increasing mental activity and enhancing the social world.

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Table 1 illustrates the percent of potential participants that agree with each statement by their work status and the statistical comparisons. More important, the findings indicate that there are fewer differences between working and non-working potential participants in the reasons they choose to engage in lifelong learning. For example, 91% of working and 93% of non-working individuals engage in lifelong learning just for the “simple joy of learning something new.” Working individuals (84%) are just as likely as non-working individuals (80%) to see lifelong learning as a way to better enjoy their hobbies or recreational activities.

### Scheduling Lifelong Learning Courses

Differences were found in the preferred season and time of day among working and non-working individuals. Table 2 reports the preferences for season and time of day by working and non-working status. The largest difference was seen in time of day preference, with about 60% of non-working individuals preferring morning or afternoon classes, while over 70% of working individuals preferred classes held from 5-7 p.m. or after 7 p.m. Seasonal differences were also seen, with working individuals indicating a preference for summer courses while non-working individuals having the lowest preference for summer courses.

Table 2. Course Season and Time of Day Preference by Work Status

	Working		Not Working	
	N	%	N	%
<i>Time of Day</i>				
Morning (8a.m.-noon)	56	40.6	82	59.4
Afternoon (1- 4p.m.)	49	38.7	81	62.3
Early Evening (5-7p.m.)	108	74.0	38	26.0
Late Evening (After 7p.m.)	59	70.2	25	29.8
<i>Season</i>				
Fall (Sept, Oct, Nov)	83	48.3	89	51.7
Winter (Dec, Jan, Feb)	108	53.5	94	46.5
Spring (Mar, April, May)	85	52.8	76	47.2
Summer (June, July, Aug)	52	70.3	22	29.7

### Discussion

The findings indicated that as societal norms regarding aging and retirement and the definition of lifelong learning for adults evolve, so too must the delineation of the audience served by lifelong learning institutes. Individuals who are still working have an interest in lifelong learning and are a potentially untapped population for membership growth.

The most important finding in our study was that the reasons given for engaging in lifelong learning showed very little difference between current workers and those not currently working. Even though the popular media has inundated the market with articles about how to retire early and has propagated the idea that more

people are retiring early, the fact is that most individuals continue to work until around age 65. However, just because this population continues to work does not mean that they are not interested in lifelong learning courses. What it does mean is that in order for this group to participate, courses must be offered at times convenient for individuals who work during the day.

If lifelong learning institutes intend to serve age-based populations (e.g., those 50 and older) rather than work-status based (e.g., retired), then there are a number of opportunities to court an even larger market. The benefits of engaging a younger cohort in learning will also be reaped in future years if a membership base of 50-65-year-old working adults is established now. Our results indicate that interest in learning already exists in this group, and lifelong learning institutes could engage new audiences of participants by expanding programming during the summer or offering duplicate classes in the early evening and evening hours.

This shift in thinking about program delivery could be likened to the changes brought about by AARP or the Gray Panther Movement when the idea that lifelong learning could extend to older adults was first suggested. Lifelong learning has continued to grow to serve more of the population and this adjustment could be part of that growth. In addition, the benefits from lifelong learning that tie to the Successful Aging Model provide even more impetus to expand the course offerings even earlier in life.

As with any study, it is important to consider the generalizability of the study sample to a broader population. This study was conducted with a random sample of individuals age 50 and older living in southwestern Idaho and may not be generalizable to the population in areas beyond southwestern Idaho. The individuals in this survey who were interested in lifelong learning were typically white, were more likely to have financial resources, and had some level of higher education (associate's, vocational, or bachelor's degree). Nonetheless, these findings offer insight into ways to increase membership without having to make significant changes to the current program structure. Offering duplicate courses during the evening or in the summer could increase LLI membership and reach a heretofore untapped audience.

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The benefits of engaging a younger cohort in learning will also be reaped in future years if a membership base of 50-65 year-old working adults is established now.



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## More Than I Bargained For: A 67-Year-Old Returns to College

**Ron Merkin**

### Abstract

*One of the last things this retiree expected when he enrolled in a university as a senior auditor was a flirtatious invitation to romance from a beguilingly attractive undergraduate classmate young enough to be his granddaughter. Her persistence is tempting; his concerns about the inappropriateness of his impulse to reciprocate discomforting. What end can a conflict like this come to?*

A friend of mine told me he was taking classes as a participant in the senior educational auditing program at our local state university. “Any Oregon resident who’s over 65 can do it free of charge,” he said. “But most professors won’t accept written assignments from us. They have to read and grade too many papers from their young, matriculated students to be bothered with stuff from leisure-activity old folks who are not working toward degrees.”

To me that sounded like an advantage. At 67 I didn’t want to re-experience the pressure I’d felt more than 40 years ago while struggling to complete required papers on time in order to earn my undergraduate and graduate degrees. Preferring only to enjoy myself studying subjects I was interested in, but before retirement hadn’t had the time to pursue, I enrolled in “Introduction to Acting.” Enough of the math and sciences I’d had to take years ago but showed no talent for. Enough of “Statistics for Psychology” which I’d found so boring. At this stage of life it was time to have fun: lights, camera action for me!

But to be on the safe side I thought I’d clarify my intentions with Professor Hendricks after she reminded our class one day early in the term that our papers critiquing a play were due the next time we met. After we were dismissed I told her, “Just so there won’t be a misunderstanding I thought I’d let you know I’m not planning to do any of the written work.”

“In your case you can do as much or as little as you want,” she answered, then as I was halfway out the room called after me, “but the last senior auditor I had did *all* my written assignments.”

A surprise, nevertheless, I pretended not to hear her.

For the first acting exercise we had to do I chose something juicy. We were instructed to sit at the front of the room for three to five minutes and tell the other 17 of us about some personally revealing, emotionally charged incident in our lives. “You can write and memorize a script beforehand or you can talk extemporaneously,” Professor Hendricks explained. “Whichever you do, don’t block the feelings your stories may arouse in you. The first thing acting students must learn is how to be open and vulnerable before large numbers of people. Invite your audience to see what most of us would rather keep hidden.”

“OK,” I began when my turn came. “When I was nine I had my first sexual experience. This is embarrassing.” I looked downward. My brow felt furrowed, my mouth crunched. Despite my determination to avoid written work I’d drafted a text, then forgetting some of it because of last minute nerves, I lapsed into a mixture of the lines I’d memorized at home and ad-libbing.

“It wasn’t exactly...um, *sex*,” I continued, “I mean I used to meet Alice, my next door neighbor, for ‘make out’ sessions. We were the same age. Sensing that we were doing something illicit, we’d kiss in her basement where no one could see us. She’d sit on my lap. I don’t know if we were both abnormally precocious. I’ve never asked other people if they remember experimenting this way at so early an age.

“One warm afternoon in spring we forgot to be cautious and pursued our pastime outside, in Alice’s back yard. Coming up for air I noticed a teacher from our school standing a few feet in front of me staring open mouthed at us. She lived in our neighborhood. In nice weather she’d often walk to work and used a path at the back of Alice’s parents’ property as a short cut on her way home.

“To this day I have the feeling that Mrs. Lipton would have ignored and quietly moved around us if my eyes hadn’t locked into hers. Because of her profession I think she felt obligated to react.

“‘Children!’ she exclaimed, and maybe not knowing what to say next managed, ‘Did you learn this from watching television?’

“Alice started crying. ‘Oh, don’t get upset,’ Mrs. Lipton said. She walked to us and took Alice by the hand. Leaving me stranded she led her to her family’s kitchen door, knocked, and opened it. They went inside. I ran home.

“‘What’s the matter?’ I would literally have to run into my mother on my way into our house.

“‘Mrs. Lipton caught us!’ I blurted.

“‘Who’s us? And doing what?’

“‘Nothing!’ I yelled, and raced past her, upstairs to my room.”

Suddenly I interrupted my presentation. Looking around me, “you know,” I told my classmates, “it just occurred to me that I chose this anecdote because I wanted to seem ‘hip’, like... young, savvy, sophisticated, even sexy, so that I’d feel accepted as the only senior among all you people in your early twenties. I don’t know how you perceive me, but maybe it’s more in keeping with the purpose of this exercise for me actually to abandon the text I prepared and talk instead about my feelings of being the one older person in this class. I’m supposed to be exposing some inner conflict, not presenting a persona to hide behind....

“This is the first course I’ve audited. I haven’t spoken about it, but amidst a sea of what seems to me like adolescent faces, I’ve felt really self conscious about my, how to say it, sagging chin and wrinkled eyes!” Going on quickly, “The fact that at

At 67 I didn’t want to re-experience the pressure I’d felt more than forty years ago while struggling to complete required papers on time in order to earn my undergraduate and graduate degrees.

## More Than I Bargained For: A 67 Year-Old Returns To College

least Professor Hendricks is closer to my age makes me feel a little more comfortable. But the older I get, the more my social contacts are restricted to people my own age. This class is an adjustment for me. It's taking a little courage for me even to talk about it.

"I know this exercise is not supposed to be a dialogue, but it might help me to know how you're reacting to my participation. You can tell me when I'm finished, if you like. Also (as an afterthought), let me know if some of you were so curious to find out how things between Alice and me worked out that you were left in a state of unbearable tension when I changed subjects."

Everybody laughed. Maybe humor mixed with honesty was working better in terms of my fitting in than what I thought of as my risqué script. "I think I'm nearly out of time," I went on. "Oh, one last thing. I won't remind you who, but someone said during a class discussion a week or so ago that probably the reason I saw things differently than she and 'some other people here' did was the gap in our generations. I thought she pointed that out unnecessarily—the topic and my opinion about it were entirely unrelated to age. I don't know why she seemed to want me to 'stand out' in the crowd, but she made me a little angry. As long as I *have* switched subjects I thought I'd get that off my chest."

The class applauded. They hadn't done that after the monologues that preceded mine. It didn't occur to me until a week or so later to wonder if their reaction may have been generated more by embarrassment or discomfort than admiration for my honesty.

As I was leaving that day a student approached me. "Have you been married?" she asked. She didn't say "are you..."; maybe she'd noticed I wasn't wearing a wedding ring.

"Yes," I answered. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just curious," she answered. She looked at me thoughtfully, then turned and proceeded toward the door.

Before class started next time I noticed this student was wearing a tight, low cut, V-necked blouse that left little of her voluptuous figure or ample cleavage to one's imagination. I grudgingly acknowledge that normalcy in our society dictates fashion trends which change with time. Today's just often happen to emphasize women's attributes. I also remember that as a young man I liked the mini or even mini-mini skirt phenomenon that took hold in the sixties. Maybe advancing age means advancing prudishness, but plunging styles like this woman's make me uncomfortable. At the same time I couldn't take my eyes off it.

Without looking directly at me, Virginia (as I later learned) seemed to be watching out of the corner of her eye to see if I'd noticed her. Our class sat in a circle. No rows of regimented seating modified the additionally eye-popping impression her frontal assault created of long lustrous jet black hair cascading languidly in a thick wave from a left part down to grace her scantily attired right shoulder.

"Today I'll be pairing people off." Professor Hendricks distracted my gazing. "Once you know who your partners are, find some place in the room to start preparing our next exercise. If it's too crowded in here you can go out in the hallway.

"You'll be working on a scene for two characters that usually lasts between six and seven minutes. The script is the same for everyone. It's non-committal, routine.

But the way you play your lines should reveal to your audience what your characters' relationships are to each other and what conflicts they are indirectly expressing. That's not obvious from the text. After you finish your performances—which will be due during the next two classes—we'll all guess if you were playing lovers, married couples, siblings, friends, etc. The more accurate identifications you get the more you've succeeded in being believable."

She passed out the script: "Good morning. Do you know what time it is? So what did you do last night? Nothing?" and "What are your plans for this afternoon?" would be asked by one actor and answered by his or her partner with, "Good morning. Don't you have a watch? I didn't do anything last night." And "I have no plans for this afternoon."

Countless times during my life I've been thrown into situations which I'd prefer to avoid. It's as if God or fate forces me to work through some queasiness I'd just as soon leave unresolved. If this hadn't occurred so often in my past I wouldn't have believed possible the fact not only that I was paired with Virginia (Professor Hendricks "intuited" the tension between us would work well in a scene, she said), but the pair rehearsing closest to the spot we'd decided on said they couldn't concentrate and asked if maybe we could step out into the hallway because we were nearer the door than they were.

We were the only ones out there. Virginia decided we should play uncle and niece.

"Why?"

"It might be a more comfortable situation," she said hesitantly.

"That's sort of an indirect relationship," I responded. "It might be difficult to convey with such sparse dialogue."

"Who else could we be?" she asked. We'd taken our chairs with us. Leaning forward toward me in hers, she exhibited an even deeper view of her cleavage than I'd noticed inside.

I sat back as far as I could. "Grandfather!" I offered.

"Isn't that too obvious?" she asked. "People might think we're cheating, playing roles they can easily peg."

"Do you have another idea?"

"Intergenerational lovers?" She smiled suggestively. I didn't say anything. "I can do this convincingly," she hastened. "I've had recurring dreams for around three years now that I'm having an affair with a man who's either divorced or widowed and is two generations older than me."

We settled on the uncle-niece scenario. Then she said she wanted to play her role seductively.

"Let's not even suggest anything incestuous," I said.

"You could be my uncle by marriage," she clarified. She successfully countered another reservation I expressed. Thinking that her persistence must mean this was important to her, I gave in.

The scene we agreed on would have her over-nighting in her aunt and uncle's house. The morning after her arrival she'd slink into the kitchen in a revealing bathrobe while I sat having breakfast. The aunt would be out shopping. We'd do our lines in a way that implied Virginia had come home late the evening before. My questions "What did you do last night?" "Do you know what time it is?" etc.

The class applauded. They hadn't done that after the monologues that preceded mine. It didn't occur to me until a week or so later to wonder if their reaction may have been generated more by embarrassment or discomfort than admiration for my honesty.

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would be motivated by suspicion that she was gallivanting with some young man of whom I was jealous. I lusted after her. That's what I somehow had to communicate to our audience. We rehearsed it for a half hour or so.

At the beginning of the next class Professor Hendricks asked who wanted to perform first. Virginia's hand shot up. We'd barely finished our presentation a few minutes later when a student enthusiastically volunteered: "They were brother and sister!" Professor Hendricks hadn't had time to ask for reactions. "The difference in their age accounts partially for their abnormal attraction to each other," he continued. "The brother's most aware of it. It makes him very uncomfortable."

"Roommates," someone else hazarded. "Their situation sharing an apartment together automatically imposes a platonic relationship on them. The female character especially wants this to become romantic. She pressures him too much. It's obvious he can't handle it."

The three or four guesses that followed were as far off as these. Feeling embarrassed for Virginia I tried looking at her in a way meant to convey: should we tell them our roles were something someone incorrectly mentioned? *I* wouldn't be graded, after all.

"So who *were* you?" asked Professor Hendricks.

"Aunt and nephew," answered Virginia.

"You mean uncle and niece," I corrected her.

"Oh, sorry." Seeming flustered, she squirmed in her seat.

Before leaving at the end of that day's class she walked over to me. "I need to say this," she said. "I feel like a fool."

"So do I," I admitted. I didn't tell her that in my case it was because I'd found her seductiveness tempting. The phrase "What would my grandkids think?" seemed cliché. Nevertheless it had passed through my mind.

When I'd registered for this course a couple of months earlier the secretary in the Senior Educational office had handed me a list of suggestions headed by the sentence "To make your auditing experience maximally pleasant." Among other recommendations was a "reminder that it's proper etiquette to thank professors at the end of the semester for including you in their courses."

"I enjoyed being here and appreciate your accepting me as a member of the class," I told Mrs. Hendricks on my way out the last day.

"Well, thank you for joining us," she said. Then literally as I was halfway across the room walking toward the door she called after me: "Your role was so realistic as a reluctant older person resisting the impulses a seductive starlet stimulated in him that I've forgiven you for not doing my papers."

What should my next course be was the only thing that went through my mind. Was my "acting" exposing too obviously to people conflicts I had trouble admitting to myself? Might languages work better? What about Statistics for Psychology?

Before his retirement in 2003, **Ron Merkin, M.S.W.**, worked during different periods of his life as a psychiatric social worker, actor, entertainer, and feature journalist. He only embarked on a serious effort to write fiction in the spring of 2007 when, at the age of 65, he enrolled as a senior auditor in a creative writing course at Portland (OR) State University. This story came out of that class. Another he wrote is pending publication.



## Old Poems

### Hugh Mitchell

I paw leopard-like  
over the bones of old poems  
heaped up and hung,  
reworked and dropped out of one life  
into the bone yard of discards.

Then there is a sudden flash of light  
or whisper of distant thunder  
singing on the wings of spring  
and an old poem is dug up again, dog-like  
out of the waste pile of hope.

"May be this way.  
May be that word will work."

Only the mess is balled up again  
and thrown cellar-ward  
amid a rage of ragged despair.

Then with a sigh I go to the cellar.

**Hugh Mitchell's** poems have been published in *Comstock Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Indiana Review*, *The Ball State Forum*, and *Poetpourri*, as well as in newspapers and anthologies. He won a New York State contest named "Disarming Images" and read his winning poem, "Report According to Shimoyama, Survivor" on a program with Gary Snyder. His chapbooks include *Animal Guides* (1994) and *Light in the Grove* (2000).

## The Dancing Heart: Vital Elders Moving in Community

**Maria Genné**

### Abstract

*The Dancing Heart: Vital Elders Moving in Community engages the creative, cognitive, physical, and social needs of frail elders in Minneapolis/St. Paul and outlying communities in the metropolitan area. Created and led by Kairos Dance Theatre's Artistic Director Maria Genné, along with Kairos artist/educators, the award-winning Dancing Heart offers weekly interactive dance and storytelling-based workshops for older adults, family members and caregivers through partnerships with adult day programs, long term care facilities and community organizations. The Dancing Heart invites older adults to help co-create a new vision of dance—one that is inclusive of all ages, all bodies, and many different ways of moving.*

**T**he key message of a discussion about *The Dancing Heart: Vital Elders Moving in Community*<sup>TM</sup> is that there is a body of research that is accumulating that shows that dance can positively affect the health and quality of life of older adults.

*The Dancing Heart: Vital Elders Moving in Community* engages the creative, cognitive, physical, and social needs of frail elders in Minneapolis/St. Paul and outlying communities in the metropolitan area. Created and led by Kairos Dance Theatre's Artistic Director Maria Genné, along with Kairos artist/educators, *The Dancing Heart* offers weekly, interactive dance and storytelling-based workshops for older adults, family members, and caregivers through partnerships with adult day programs, long term care facilities, and community organizations.

Kairos Dance Theatre's *The Dancing Heart: Vital Elders Moving in Community Memory Loss Program* was recently recognized by two national organizations. The Archstone Foundation and the Gerontological Health Section of the American Public Health Association presented its 2007 Award for Excellence in Program Innovation to Kairos' *The Dancing Heart* at its meeting in Washington, D.C. in November, 2007. The American Society on Aging, in collaboration with MetLife Foundation, announced that they will award one of their 2008 MindAlert Awards to *The Dancing Heart* at their joint conference with the National Council on Aging, "Aging in America," in Washington, D.C., in March 2008.

*The Dancing Heart* invites older adults to help co-create a new vision of dance—one that is inclusive of all ages, all bodies, and many different ways of moving. Over the past six years more than 100 older adults from five different sites, have participated in the program, exploring the “language of dance” through movement improvisation, the interweaving of dance and story, and the collaborative development of choreography that draws on their memories and life experiences. Our intergenerational touring performances to nursing homes, assisted living and senior centers include dancers and musicians 7 to 88 years of age. Those performances in the past year have reached more than 3,500 audience members.

Each week at each site we offer a 90-minute *Dancing Heart Playshop* as well as a 45-60 minute follow-up evaluation at the end of each session.

### **The Dancing Heart Objectives:**

- Improving elders’ flexibility, energy, balance, memory recall, and desire to interact
- Transforming elders’ beliefs about their physical abilities
- Offering a new vision of elders emphasizing their vitality and ability
- Helping older adults redefine their artistic gifts

### **Evaluation—Expected outcomes for Dancing Heart participants include:**

- Improved physical health, including increased energy, stamina, flexibility, range of motion, and balance
- Increased confidence in physical ability
- Increased sense of positive, meaningful connection to peers, younger generations, and the community at large
- Integrated skill development and increased sense of mastery in dance, improvisation, storytelling, and performance
- For participants with dementia, increased cognition, enjoyment, ability to focus, and willingness to initiate interaction; decreased anxiety

### **Research in Arts and Aging**

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We are research-based. Research has shown that dance engages people cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally. Two research studies underlie our work. The 20-year Einstein College study, “Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia in the Elderly,” found that dancing is literally at the top of the list of leisure activities that appear to play a part in delaying the onset of Alzheimer’s disease (Verghese et al., 2003). “The Creativity and Aging Study,” a three-year investigation of older adults (average age = 80 years), is another important source (Cohen et al., 2006). The aim of this study was to measure the impact of professionally conducted community-based cultural programs on the physical and mental health and social activities of individuals aged 65 and older. The researchers studied groups of elders in Washington D.C., New York City, and San Francisco who worked weekly with a professional artist and reported the following results:

- Fewer falls
- Decrease in doctor visits and use of medication
- Decrease in loneliness and depression
- Increased involvement in community activities

*The Dancing Heart* offers weekly, interactive dance and storytelling-based workshops for older adults, family members and caregivers through partnerships with adult day programs, long term care facilities, and community organizations.

*The Dancing Heart:  
Vital Elders Moving in  
Community*

*The Dancing Heart—Vital Elders Moving in Community Memory Loss Program*

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In 2006 we received funding from The Society for Arts in Healthcare/Johnson and Johnson for a pilot program for a 10-month project at the Wilder Adult Day Memory Loss Program in St. Paul. With a grant from the Jay and Rose Phillips Foundation and additional funds raised by the Wilder Foundation we have been able to create and continue this unique and innovative program, now in its second year, which serves older adults who are diagnosed with mid- to late-stage Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

**Evidence-Based**

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Before we began the pilot project, Wilder staff administered Mini Mental State Exams (MMSE) and the Sit Stand Fall Assessment to participants. When we began the program participants had very little interaction with fellow clients. There was an exercise program, group newspaper discussion, and other traditional programs, including quite a few musical entertainers. Within two weeks, a family member called wondering what was happening on Wednesdays because their mother was initiating communication for the first time in a very long time. Another participant, who had shied away from any interaction with us as well as interaction with other clients, began to join our dancing group. Now she is an active participant and assists with less ambulatory clients and interacts regularly with others. One elder had never participated in an activity for more than 10 minutes; she is now taking part in our 90-minute playshops, leaving only if we are telling stories at the end of the session instead of dancing. The elders began anticipating dance day and remembering what day it was. One elder sang his interactions, another joined our circle and began laughing and dancing once we played the Andean music that was familiar from her childhood. Participants are showing growth as artists and performers. They are learning new skills of the language of dance as well as remembering and refining old ones. Staff began to notice lessening of anxiety in clients on the Dancing Heart day. Staff's expectations of the participants have changed. They began to see that week after week people were engaged and interacting in ways that did not seem possible because of clients' diagnoses. After eight months, Wilder staff again administered the MMSE and Sit Stand Assessment; 43% of the participants in the Dancing Heart Memory Loss Program showed improvement in both the cognitive test and the fall assessments. Both Kairos and Wilder staff are amazed and excited about the growth in the clients that we have both perceived and measured. Patricia Schrader, OTR, University of Minnesota, and her students are currently working on a qualitative study of the Wilder Dancing Heart group. Results are expected in January 2008.

**Win/Win**

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An environment of safety and acceptance is crucial to the success of an arts program for older adults. Each person's gifts are valued and contribute to the ongoing creativity of the group. We believe that as artists we can complement the ongoing therapeutic programs at each site. Artists are comfortable working with what

quite often looks like chaos. They are inspired by ideas that often appear in spontaneous and surprising ways. The underlying belief of *The Dancing Heart* is that each person has a unique gift that is waiting to be tapped and given expression. It is our job as artists to facilitate each person's artistic growth, no matter their age, background, or ability.

### November 2007

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We now fast forward from March 2006 to November 2007 at the Wilder Dancing Heart Memory Loss Program. Over time we have been encouraging elders to move from their chairs. We are doing more partnering and circle dances. Volunteers and extra staff make this easier. The staff has a very positive attitude toward our program. In the beginning they were skeptical that our program could make much difference. Now visitors and potential clients are invited on Wednesdays so they can observe our weekly playshop in action. The new director has told the staff to watch us as we work with clients and learn from us. In October the Dancing Heart group gave a 45-minute performance for families during family night. The participants were focused, articulate, and worked together as an experienced ensemble group. Additional staff members joined us in rehearsals and put time and energy in learning lines, practicing music, and making costumes. Afterward, staff noted that families interacted and sat with other families for dinner. For the first time in the 10-year history of family night, staff cleaned up a full hour later than usual because families stayed to talk with and enjoy each other. This participatory arts program has helped to strengthen positive relationships between elder dancers and their families, between other elder dancers, and between elder dancers and staff.

A few weeks later, The Dancing Heart Memory Loss Program participants traveled for the first time to the other Wilder Adult Day site in St. Paul. Their interactive performance was a hit with clients and staff in the second facility. *Dancing Heart* performers had the opportunity to feel a sense of mastery and, as a *Dancing Heart* elder gentleman said, "We put a smile on their faces."

### Moving Forward in 2008

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Currently we are looking for more research partners to study the participants of *The Dancing Heart*. We are looking for long-term partnerships so that we can continue to develop our strategic plan to pursue "Best Practice" status in the coming three to four years. We believe that we are already close to becoming a promising practice. We will need to conduct rigorous research to establish the best practice model. We will constantly be working to refine the model, improve documentation, and continue to use data to test and strengthen the model with various participants (including nursing home residents, assisted living, adult day health, Parkinson's, and those with dementia). As part of our strategic plan to develop a "Model" arts and aging program we are also pursuing the development of a training program so that we can disseminate *The Dancing Heart* model locally and nationally.

The underlying belief of *The Dancing Heart* is that each person has a unique gift that is waiting to be tapped and given expression. It is our job as artists to facilitate each person's artistic growth, no matter their age, background or ability.

*The Dancing Heart:*  
Vital Elders Moving in  
Community

The Dancing Heart Develops a Training Workshop—Dancing Our  
Stories: Dance and Storytelling with Older Adults

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In November of 2006 we received a three-year grant from the Helen Bader Foundation specifically recognizing our successes at the Wilder Memory Loss Adult Day Program as well as other *Dancing Heart* sites by granting us funds to develop a three-day workshop for artists, social workers, professional and family caregivers, and others who want to work with older adults. Our first workshop took place in June 2007. We are pleased with the outcome of the first workshop and the curriculum that was developed. During 2008 we will be expanding our concept of the workshop to include other elements of ongoing training in the two to three year certification process that we will require partners to complete in order to receive The Dancing Heart Best Practice Model. In year two of the Bader grant we will be contracting with the Center for Age and Community at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, under the direction of Dr. Anne Basting, to evaluate our training so we can develop it further.

Best Practice Model

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Our goals in the next three years are to develop a comprehensive evidence-based, high quality dance and storytelling program that is innovative and replicable to serve the needs of the changing elder population—increasing vital engagement and improving their overall quality of life. The Dancing Heart Best Practice Model will include experienced master teachers and expertise in a variety of artistic fields—dance, storytelling, theater and music. It will include know-how learned from developing leading-edge artistic and educational collaborative efforts in the field of creative aging, and it will utilize statistical analyses and reliable assessment measures.

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**Maria DuBois Genné**, M.Ed., dancer, choreographer, and educator, is the founder and artistic director of Kairos Dance Theatre, an intergenerational dance company whose performers range in age from 4 to 88 years. Genné has been developing and teaching creative dance and dramatic programs for many years. This fall she will lead a new initiative to bring *The Dancing Heart* into five Minnesota long-term care facilities. She is also a dance consultant for the National Center for Creative Aging.

## Health Promotion for Older Adults with Early-Stage Dementia: Tending to the Mind, Body, and Spirit

**Nancy E. Richeson and E. Michael Brady**

### Abstract

*This article describes the experience of offering Health Promotion for the Mind, Body, and Spirit for people with early-stage dementia at the OLLI at the University of Southern Maine. The need for community-based programs and services that provide non-stigmatized, normalized environments where people can participate in learning opportunities is highlighted. People with early-stage dementia still want to learn, grow, and find meaning and purpose in their lives despite their circumstances. The authors encourage lifelong learning institutes in the United States and elsewhere to consider including older adults with early-stage dementia in their learning communities.*

### Introduction

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Southern Maine (USM) asks older adults on their Web site: “Are you 50 or older, with a curious mind and a keen interest in learning—just for the love of it? If so, you are invited to join with more than 900 like-minded Portland-area older learners who are members.” The Web site continues to encourage older adults to participate by stating that “there are no entrance requirements, grades, or tests. It is your love of learning that counts.” (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine). This is a welcoming message to many older persons in the southern Maine area.

However, people with early-stage dementia who still want to learn, grow, and find meaning and purpose in their lives despite their current circumstances may not always feel welcome in a lifelong learning institute (LLI). Will the intellectual challenges offered in LLIs be overwhelming to a person with mild or moderate memory loss? Will other program members accept someone who has early stage dementia? While LLIs across the nation work hard to accommodate older persons in ways that are important, e.g., self-governance, responding to transportation needs, scheduling day-time classes, creating financial scholarships, are they equally welcoming to individuals who have memory impairment and other symptoms of dementia?

While LLIs across the nation work hard to accommodate older persons in ways that are important, e.g., self-governance, responding to transportation needs, scheduling day-time classes, creating financial scholarships, are they equally welcoming to individuals who have memory impairment and other symptoms of dementia?



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Approximately 5.1 million people have Alzheimer's disease (AD) in the United States. Demographers estimate that by the year 2030 this number will rise to 7.7 million and nearly double to more than 13 million by the year 2050 (Herbert et al., 2003). Most researchers are unable to estimate the prevalence of early-stage dementia due to a lack of clarity of terms, definitions, and diagnostic criteria that determines what is early stage AD. However, what is known is that the greatest risk for AD is age—one in 8 individuals over 65 and nearly half of those over 85 are affected. There is no cure for AD and people with this disease can live from eight to 20 years after diagnosis (Alzheimer's Association, 2008). In addition to the emotional toll caregivers experience, the costs associated with AD and other dementias are \$148 billion annually. Clearly dementia is a national health care crisis. When faced with these data the authors, both of whom are full-time faculty members at the University of Southern Maine with strong connections to OLLI, asked ourselves how our university's older adult learning community might respond to this special challenge.

We began with a local environmental scan that revealed there were limited programs and services for people with early-stage dementia in our community. The one program being regularly offered was a psychotherapy group with time-limited treatment. Reading the literature suggested that one key reason there are so few programs for persons with AD in Maine and elsewhere is that historically it was believed people with dementia were mostly unaware of their condition, so what's the use of treatment? Those few programs that were designed were targeted at caregivers (Alzheimer's Association, 2007). Unfortunately, as a result of this approach many persons diagnosed with dementia have limited opportunities to continue to engage in their communities. There is substantial need to help older adults with dementia maintain abilities for as long as possible in a normalized, non-stigmatized environment, places where maintaining dignity and ensuring a high quality of life are emphasized. (Penrod et al., 2007). Therefore, we believed that OLLI at USM would be a good place to begin to test the idea of providing community-based adult education opportunities for older adults with dementia, thus attempting to meet the needs of this growing population.

Our review of the literature revealed only one study that examined the effects of adult education for older adults with early-stage dementia. This was a course entitled Health Promotion for the Mind, Body, and Spirit (Fitzsimmons and Buettner, 2003a). Fitzsimmons and Buettner focused on interventions for promotion and maintenance of optimal health among persons with early stage dementia. Topics in the curriculum included physical and cognitive fitness, nutrition, recreation, communication, understanding the disease process, depression, coping, relationships, and driving. Research on the effectiveness of this course revealed that learners achieved multiple positive health outcomes including an improvement in mood, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Of special note was that these older learners developed valuable skills to take back control in their lives (Fitzsimmons and Buettner, 2003a; 2003b).

The goal of this article is to describe the experience of offering Health Promotion for the Mind, Body, and Spirit at the OLLI at the University of Southern Maine. Research based on this 13-week course offered during the fall semester of 2006 has been published in a recent edition of *Educational Gerontology* (Richeson et al., 2007).

## Early-Stage Dementia: The Basics

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Dementia is a broad term for loss of memory and other mental abilities severe enough to interfere with one's daily life. Physical changes in the brain cause these problems. There are over 70 different types of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease accounting for 50 to 70 percent of the cases (Alzheimer's Association, 2008). Other common types of dementia include, but are not limited to, vascular, Lewy bodies, frontotemporal, Parkinson's, and mixed. Dementia is not a normal part of aging.

People with early-stage dementia often experience a series of losses. These may include short-term memory loss, mood changes (depression), poor judgment and orientation, lower levels of endurance, difficulties with balance, and problems with selected physical tasks such as negotiating stairs. Communication, for example being able to select the correct word during a conversation, may also be a problem. Social implications may result from these physical and mental deficits. These often include passivity, limited emotional expression, and social isolation. At times older adults with early-stage dementia might get lost, upset, and frustrated for no apparent reason (Buettner & Fitzimmons, 2003b). Despite these challenges, with an appropriate educational intervention people with early-stage dementia can continue to learn, grow, and have meaningful and purposeful lives.

## The Course

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The first step the authors needed to undertake was to obtain permission from OLLI to run such a course. This was new territory and beyond the normal parameters of traditional LLI curriculum offerings. After meeting with the program director and curriculum leaders it was decided that, for at least this initial offering, the course would be sponsored by the OLLI Research Collaborative and would not be advertised in the regular program catalog. (The fact that the plan all along was to conduct research as part of the course easily cemented this affiliation.) An important implication of this decision, however, was that recruitment of students would take place independent of OLLI. Therefore, we contacted the local Alzheimer's Association, the Maine Medical Center Geriatric Assessment Center, and wrote news releases for several local newspapers in order to publicize Health Promotion for the Mind, Body and Spirit.

In these various communications the criteria for eligibility were explicitly stated: (a) adults who are 60 years and older, (b) diagnosis of mild cognitive disorder or early-stage dementia, (c) willingness to participate in a 13-week course, (d) willingness to participate in a research study as part of the course, (e) transportation to campus.

The University of Southern Maine's Institutional Review Board approved the project and all participants read and signed an informed consent form. The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine provided the books and the College of Nursing and Health Professions provided supplies, which included one-inch three-ring binders with a transparent sleeve on the cover, tabbed dividers, pens, paper, nameplates, bottled water, and a healthy snack. While regular OLLI courses charge a modest fee there was no charge to participants in this course. Although a number of spouses and caregivers drove their loved ones to campus, they were asked not to be in the room during the class itself.

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Body, and Spirit

The course took place at USM in a room that was quiet and furnished with a long table and chairs. The room was handicap accessible and close to bathrooms. Class was held on Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., with a 15-minute break occurring at the half point. This schedule synchronized with regular OLLI courses which made it possible for spouses and caregivers to drop off their family member to our class and attend an OLLI course themselves. (However, at 13 weeks our course was five weeks longer than most of the regular OLLI offerings.) The authors, both of whom have doctoral degrees and many years of experience in adult education and gerontology, served as course facilitators and researchers. (One also had experience in dementia care.) A graduate student nurse served as the research assistant and an undergraduate social work student participated in the course as part of a service-learning project. Almost any healthcare professional could teach this course, but it is highly recommended that one facilitator have experience in dementia care.

Twenty-seven participants were screened over the phone and 14—6 females and 8 males—met the entrance criteria. All 14 people who met the entrance criteria were enrolled in the course. The recommended class size, according to Fitzsimmons & Buettner (2003a) is 10 to 15 participants. Ages of our group ranged from 67 to 89 years of age ( $M = 78.8$ ,  $SD = 5.9$ ). The major reasons for not meeting the entrance criteria were not having a diagnosis of dementia and the inability to secure transportation. Two of the 14 participants dropped out prior to completion of the course. One participant left after week 10 (he moved to an assisted living facility) and one participant left after week 11 (he felt being in a class with other people with memory loss was too depressing). When enrolling participants, one should plan for attrition. The participants took part in three phases of the research: (a) baseline data the first day of class; (b) 12 weeks of intervention (the course itself); (c) post-testing and participating in a focus group on the last day of class. In addition to research data collected from members of the course, seven spouses/caregivers were interviewed by telephone within one week of the conclusion of Health Promotion for the Mind, Body, and Spirit. (Richeson, et al. 2007)

The course followed the Fitzsimmons and Buettner (2003b) textbook, which was designed to provide education on dementia and encourage health behaviors in the hope of preventing problems as the disease progresses. The following table outlines the basic content of the course.

Table 1.

Week	Content
1	Registration, Pre-testing, Introductions
2	Healthy Behaviors
3	Dementia and Delirium
4	Cognitive Activities
5	Communications
6	Relationships, Depression, and Coping
7	Physical Activity, Exercise, and Falls Prevention
8	Home and Travel Safety
9	Recreation and Leisure
10	Life Experiences and Lifelong Learning
11	Medications and Talking to Your Health Care Provider
12	Nutrition and Oral Health
13	Post-testing, Future Planning (Speaker, Maine Alzheimer's Association), Graduation

As recommended by Fitzsimmons and Buettner (2003b) the first class session consisted of completing registration, pre-testing, distributing nameplates, providing the participants with a three-ring binder, and distributing module one. Each subsequent week the participants were given a module that was to be placed in their three-ring binder, which would serve as the focal point for the discussion. The participants were encouraged to share the information with their families and caregivers during the week. In addition, the class members were reminded that they were not expected to remember anything and that the notebook would serve as their memory. At times the facilitators brought in course materials such as poetry and music to stimulate the discussion. While participants were not asked to share materials many felt inspired to contribute magazine and newspaper articles, poetry, pictures, and memorabilia.

Teaching techniques included the use of implicit learning, emotional priming, error-free learning, use of prompts, environmental cues, and external memory devices. The primary teaching methods were discussion and interactive learning. Throughout the course it was paramount to create and sustain a safe and caring learning environment where older adults with dementia felt comfortable enough to listen and share current life circumstances. Each session began with a brief check-in from each participant and an overview of that day's module. Then we'd focus attention on a featured learning activity (as outlined in the course book) and discussion. At the end of each class we would summarize the day's discussion and introduce the next week's theme. Each learner was encouraged to ask questions, make comments, and socialize with each other.

### Research Findings (in brief) and Conclusions

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The research results produced positive outcomes including a significant increase in self-efficacy and a slight increase in mean scores for cognition. There was also a decrease in mean scores for depression (Richeson, et al. 2007). Additionally, qualitative data generated through the final class focus group suggested that students experienced "growth through confidence" by way of this course. They also commented on the importance of the social support provided through this educational opportunity (Richeson, et al. 2007). Family caregivers who were interviewed by telephone also commented on the increased confidence level of their loved ones and also how their family member brought information from this course home which encouraged and supported the hard work of caregiving. In addition, caregivers increased both their awareness of community resources and information about estate and other important planning matters.

Age is the greatest risk factor for dementia. As the population of older adults in the United States continues to grow more and more people will be living and coping with dementia. The nation is faced with a crisis and communities need to find ways to respond with compassion to meet the needs of this growing group of seniors.

Lifelong learning institutes across the country are in a good position to diversify their program offerings and begin to include this group of individuals into the mix. The participants in this inaugural section of Health Promotion for the Mind, Body, and Spirit included original members of USM's OLLI, former OLLI faculty, and elders living in the community who had not heretofore participated in a life-

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Health Promotion for  
Older Adults with  
Early-Stage Dementia:  
Tending to the Mind,  
Body, and Spirit

long learning institute. All were well-educated and lifelong learners. An added benefit for members of the OLLI community was the ability of caregivers to drop off their loved one at this class and attend another one, thus providing needed respite.

The authors believe that communities need to work to decrease the stigma associated with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. The inclusion of this course within OLLI provided a non-stigmatized, normalized environment where people could participate in learning opportunities that meet their needs. Many of our students joined the other OLLI members for lunch in the cafeteria or met before or after class for walks or coffee. Some carpoled, forming relationships with others in similar circumstances, thus expanding their social networks beyond the classroom.

Thought should be given to providing ongoing programs for continuity. Unfortunately an attempt to offer a second class, Life 101: Coping with Early-Stage Dementia, was scheduled to begin in March of 2007 but was cancelled due to low enrollments. This was in part due to the four-month hiatus between offerings (December to March), participants traveling during the winter, and delays in advertising. Once the publicity did reach the community many potential students called to ask about the Life 101 course, but it had already been cancelled.

A special challenge is recruiting faculty for such a course. As we already noted someone with a background in health care would be ideal to facilitate Health Promotion for the Mind, Body, and Spirit. Many LLI's have substantial numbers of retired nurses, physicians, and other health care professionals in their membership who would fit this course very well. We suggest if possible to have two facilitators with perhaps one of these individuals having a health care background. Unlike many of the liberal arts courses that are offered in LLIs the faculty for this course do not need deep content knowledge in a subject area. Caring and thoughtful peers who are patient, listen well, and do not require "a stage on which to be a sage" would make a fine facilitator in this context.

In the end the authors both felt that co-facilitating this course became one of the most meaningful educational experiences of their careers. The participants, all with diagnosis of early-stage dementia, significantly increased their self-efficacy in addition to a slight increase in cognition and mood. Growing through confidence became the overarching theme from this project. Realizing that just because older adults are diagnosed with dementia does not mean their life is over became an overarching theme of hope expressed throughout the course and was the basis for its success. As one woman commented, "Just because I have dementia does not mean I do not want to learn." Older adults with dementia can and do still learn. Making modest adaptations to the classroom environment, providing well-designed educational materials, and attending to sound adult education teaching methods will support and enhance this ability to learn within the context of lifelong learning institutes.

The authors invite other LLIs across the United States, and the world, to consider expanding their programs to include courses for persons with early-stage dementia. Our education colleagues Fitzsimmons and Buettner began this work, we have continued it, and we hope others will join us to undertake this important challenge. Millions of our fellow citizens suffer, mostly silently, with dementia. It is time for LLIs to reach out and help these people, as the USM OLLI Web site suggests, learn "for the love of learning."

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## Bordeaux Simple

**John A. Vanek**

On a hillside, on a blanket,  
on our third glass of red,  
as I listen to her hair  
whisper on bare shoulders, she  
leans into mocha dusk and asks:  
What first attracts you  
to a woman?

And there is no escape. Curves  
sashay through my mind as night  
binds me like a straitjacket.  
I want to say the answer  
is more like Burgundy than Bordeaux,  
complicated though it's not.  
I think I might tell her the "eyes"  
but can't see hers in the darkness  
and have not yet learned their color.

She carefully breaks the bread  
and my silence, my body  
stuttering, as I flick away  
crumbs like doubts. Then a truth  
I never knew existed  
tumbles from my lips:  
The smile, I say.  
Not the window to the soul, but  
the gateway.

And in that moment, life  
is Bordeaux simple,  
as Burgundy lips part,  
the door swings open  
bright and white,  
and she welcomes me in.



## The Tough Trek Home

**John A. Vanek**

From my dark basement corner, I half expect  
Dante to descend the stairs  
as I read the braille  
of battered lives.  
Far from the fluorescent lights and hum  
of discontent, brutish truth  
shuffles by in scuffed shoes,  
as folding chairs fill with folded lives,  
cold and hard, heads bowed in prayer  
or resignation.

Peter combs yellowed fingers  
through remembered hair, his belly  
the size of beer kegs  
he's chugged for years.  
Maria, drunk again on frosted jiggers  
of self-pity, is our resident arsonist  
in training, lighting bonfires  
of prayer candles and cigarettes.

Feral need howls outside the window  
like a coyote.  
*Such a short stroll from Eden to Babylon;*  
*such a tough trek home, I think,*  
my bifocals swaying on a crocheted chain  
as I do the twelve step shuffle  
to the microphone:  
*Hi, my name is...*  
*my friends call me Granny.*

**John Vanek** is a physician and poet with works published in literary journals, university press anthologies (most recently, *Red, White and Blues: Poets on the Promise of America*, from University of Iowa Press), as well as such diverse publications as *Journal of the American Medical Association* (featured poem) and *Biker Ally—The Motorcycle Magazine Geared for Women*. He has read his work at the George Bush Presidential Library and at the Akron Art Museum.

## Spirituality: The Beauty Secret of Aging

**Carol Sherburne**

### Abstract

*This essay looks at the ways in which spirituality can have a positive impact on people facing the challenges of midlife and the reality of end-of-life. The spiritual path is an individual search for the sacred that enhances meaning in life. Incorporating recent research and the work of noted writers in the field, the author considers spirituality as a bridge that facilitates the important task of finding the ultimate meaning in life, how health issues are positively influenced by spirituality, and how personal spirituality can help individuals and their caregivers face difficult end-of-life decisions while embracing the gift of each day.*

*“You can take no credit for beauty at sixteen. But if you are beautiful at sixty, it will be your soul’s own doing.”*

—Marie Stoops

**A**ging and death—we all share this common fate. How do we manage to get out of bed each morning? How do we function knowing that each tick of the clock brings us one second closer to death? For some, the answer is denial. Others use humor or busyness to keep the truth at bay. Creams and pills, spas and gyms enable millions to convince themselves that they are escaping the inevitable. Yet, depression and sadness plague many as they enter their later years. Is there a way to cope positively with aging? Is there a way to develop beautiful qualities and enhance physical and mental health as the years go by? Is there a way to find infinite joy within a finite existence?

I recently turned 56 years old, standing either solidly in mid-life or moving toward old age, depending on whom you ask. Bianchi (1990) writes, “Thus the middle-aged person is forced, both consciously and unconsciously, to respond to an acute realization of personal death... We begin to measure our lifetime from the distance to the end rather than from birth” (p.12). Remember when we used to say, “I am 11 and 1/2 years old”? It never occurred to me to say, “I am 55 and 1/2.” Perspective changes. At this point in my life, amidst many challenges, I sense a shift

in what is most important to me, how I define myself, and what I want to do with the rest of my life.

We recently celebrated the birth of our second grandson. Our daughters live two and three hours away from us and I try hard to keep myself available to them. I never know when one may call and say, "Mom, can you come? I need some help." I want to be free to jump into the car and dash off, however, I have other responsibilities, too.

My father turned 81 in June. Mom has been gone since 1991. Dad has multiple health problems from kidney failure to diabetes to dementia. However, he does well, still managing to live alone with minimum outside help. I live a mile from him and I am the eldest. Therefore, I am his first phone call in the night when he is not feeling quite right. I am the one he calls at 10:00 p.m. when he's in town and he has locked himself out of his car. I am the one who puts up his daily meds, keeps track of the multiple levels of his special diets, and makes sure he gets to doctors' appointments and to dialysis.

With Dad on one side and daughters on the other, I often feel squeezed between the needs of both generations. I sometimes feel torn apart by my desire to be supportive to both of them.

Meanwhile, I have a husband who rightfully wants and deserves some of my time and attention. I have a demanding job working full time as a middle school teacher. I am taking graduate classes at the University of Southern Maine in order to enhance my employment skills and retirement options. Where am I going with all this? I realize that my experience is shared by many people who are of similar age. I share these pressures of my life because I'm not sure I would have the strength to face them every day without being able to find comfort in spirituality.

Centering. Focusing. Breathing. Praying. "Spirituality, faith, and religious ritual seem to help exhausted families find meaning and purpose in adversity, an anchor for identity and a foundation for coping with change, loss, uncertainty, and the limits of control" (Gwyther, 2006, p. 1180). For me, the answer to surviving life's pressure cooker has been embracing spirituality. For the past 30 years of my life, my connection with God has given me a firm foundation, a deep peace, and a reason to hope. Spirituality is, according to Brennen & Heider (as quoted in Sadler & Biggs, 2006, p. 271), "a multidimensional and abstract construct, which often defies observation." Our society wants us to think that aging is a disease, that the old are useless and futureless. Not so. I propose that spirituality may influence the way a person successfully faces the challenges of midlife and the reality of ultimate death. Yes, as we age there is change, but the change does not need to be ugly and demoralizing. The application of spirituality can help us see that with that change a wonderful future lies before us, a future with both temporal and eternal dimensions.

Often people are wary of the word "spirituality," mistakenly thinking that someone is about to witness to them, evangelize them, or invite them to a tent meeting. This problem comes from a lack of understanding of the distinction between "spirituality" and "religion." According to Dalby (2006), "'Religion' has tended to refer to the external, institutionalized, formal, and doctrinal aspects of a religious life, whilst 'spirituality' has been used to refer to the personal, subjective experience" (p. 5). While these two terms may be intertwined for many people who find their spiritual life within the context of organized religion, this is not univer-

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sally true. Koenig (as cited in Dalby, 2006, p. 5) uses the term “religiosity” to talk about the “contents of one’s faith” centered “on a person’s relationship with God.” This term describes such behaviors as church attendance, prayer, one’s beliefs and attitudes that are associated with organized religious behavior. He defines “spirituality” as “a broader term than religiosity” and one that “may or may not include a relationship with God or a higher power.” Hill and Pargament (as quoted in Dalby, 2006) suggest that, “Spirituality can be understood as a search for the sacred, a process through which people seek to discover, hold on to, and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives” (p. 5). Henderson (2006) defines spirituality as “that essence which can bring meaning, courage, and hope to every human being’s existence no matter how old or sick or confused” (p. 1182). Sadler and Biggs (2006) say “spirituality may be broadly defined as the personal search for meaning and purpose in life. This may or may not be specifically related to a religious framework” (p. 270). So, spirituality is about reaching toward that which is divine, that which transcends human life and material things. It is about a lifelong search for meaning in relation to that which each person considers sacred. Spirituality is not necessarily tied to church and organized religion at all.

Researchers Wink and Dillon (as quoted by Dalby, 2006) found, “a significant increase in spirituality from late middle to older adulthood” (p. 8). So, can involvement with religion or the practice of spirituality make the aging process smoother and easier to bear? Can it add sparkle and luster to accumulating years? These are certainly questions that interest experts. More than 300 studies have been conducted that have considered the relationship between religion and progressive health. Other investigations have broadened the scope to consider spirituality and successful aging. While the data do not agree on every point, indications are that religion and spirituality do have positive effects on aging. Research supports this outcome.

Later life has long been considered a distinct stage of developmental change. Erikson (as quoted in Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007) calls this stage “ego integrity versus despair” (p. 306). At this point, a person’s sources of meaning and relationship to the world undergo change. Spiritual matters gain importance. Dalby (2006) discusses research done by Erikson and his wife in 1989. They re-examined this final stage of life and decided that the stage was deeper and more complex than he had previously theorized. They found that life review occurs from a changing perspective and that individuals must find a way to cope with the paradox of trying to “continue a vital involvement with life whilst facing and coming to terms with the necessary disinvolvement of old age” (p. 5). Spirituality provides the bridge between these seemingly contradictory purposes as one seeks and embraces a changing reality.

MacKinley (as cited in Dalby, 2006) conducted research that parallels Erikson’s work. She interviewed elders in Australia, both Christians and those without any religious affiliation. She found that the most important tasks of aging were “finding ultimate meaning in life and affecting a response to ultimate meaning” (p. 9). For most people, ultimate meaning involved a couple of components “such as relationships with people or with God. Responses to ultimate meaning included attending church, prayer, meditation and appreciation of music or art” (p. 9). She found that elders have a strong “need to transcend the limitations brought by old age through their relationship with whatever brings meaning in

their lives” (p. 9). Spirituality leads toward rising above the moment and catching a glimpse of the eternal.

Swedish researcher Lars Tornstam (2003) proposed a theory he calls “gerotranscendence.” While not specifically addressing spirituality or the elderly, this theory has aspects that are applicable to both. He suggests that aging and/or chronic illness involve a shift of attention that moves one’s thoughts toward a more transcendent view of life. The person with a gerotranscendent perspective “becomes less self-occupied and at the same time more selective in his/her choice of social and other activities. There is an increased feeling of affinity with past generations and a decreased interest in superfluous social interaction. Positive solitude becomes more important” (p. 3). How and with whom one chooses to spend whatever time they have left in life is certainly a spiritual issue. What feeds the spirit will be embraced and what does not will be abandoned.

Dalby (2006), in his discussion of Tornstam, elaborates on this concept of “positive solitude.” Citing the research of Cumming & Henry, Dalby says that Tornstam’s concept resembles their theory of disengagement that describes the elderly as withdrawing from society and their earlier societal roles. The difference Tornstam notes is that this withdrawal is accompanied by a reorientation of thought and attitude. Rather than just keeping busy for the sake of busyness, individuals welcome quiet times of solitude as opportunities to reflect on life. They experience “a sense of connection to earlier generations” (p. 6) and an acceptance of “the mysterious dimension of life” (p. 6). Social relationships that once seemed so important are re-evaluated in terms of their depth of meaning and vital importance. Altruism and ego-integrity increase and there is a sense of rejoicing in all aspects of life. Freedom from disturbance is embraced as an occasion to consider life from a new perspective of age-infused wisdom.

There are also health-related issues that have been found to be positively influenced by spirituality. Spirituality affects health behaviors and lifestyle choices, supports independence even in the face of chronic disease and makes people better able to cope with pain and increasing disability. “Spiritual factors play a major role at all ages in dealing with life change and helping persons cope with pain, anxiety and disability of medical illness” (Koenig & Cohen, 2006, p. 1157). Those who provide healthcare to the aging should actively assess the “spiritual and existential needs that older people might have as part of a holistic care strategy” (Sadler & Biggs, 2006, p. 275).

While researchers admit that they cannot totally understand the underlying causes for such results, they report that spirituality does have positive physical effects. Seeman et al. (2003, quoted by Sadler & Biggs, 2006) report positive changes associated with spirituality relating to “lowering of stress hormones on the immune, cardiovascular and neuroendocrine systems, most notably as a result of meditation practices” (p. 271).

Spirituality may offer the aging and their caregivers peace, comfort and clarity as they face a trying time of life. Spirituality offers “an interpretation of suffering, hope of reconciliation, a renewed sense of beauty or awe and opportunities for reciprocity” (Gwyther, 2006, p. 1180). It can help people find joy in helping others despite their infirmities. It can make people more comfortable about having conversations about important end-of-life decisions.

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## Spirituality: The Beauty Secret of Aging

Should a person's spirituality lead toward church attendance and more traditional religious practices, there are benefits there, too. Research shows that those attending services at least once a week retain higher cognitive functioning (Hill, 2006). This is attributed to the social engagement of church and to a sense of "coherence, meaning and hope" (p. 1176). Staying involved in various aspects of organized religion, according to Dr. Hill, may slow brain atrophy, cognitive decline, and the progress of Alzheimer's disease.

Clearly, spirituality, whether expressed through a religious, social, or secular context, has a positive effect on the physical and emotional realities of aging. The fact that life has an inevitable end is easier to accept with the application of the balm of spirituality. This is not to say that through spiritual pursuits we escape from the realities of aging. To the contrary, spirituality compels us to face the truth head-on. Bianchi (1990) writes, "The chief point to underline here, however, is that we must seriously enter into the experience of the sands slipping away in the hourglass of our lives... Time is short: so many projects to start or to finish, so many longings to fulfill, faults to set straight" (p. 16).

When I was a child, my mother used to dose us each spring with a tonic called Father John's Medicine. I hated that tablespoon of brown liquid twice a day, but there was no avoiding it. My sister loved the stuff! She was the first to line up and she licked the spoon enthusiastically every time. Aging is like having to take Father John's Medicine. Complain about it or take it cheerfully. Either way it is going to have to be swallowed. For many people having a deep spirituality makes it go down more smoothly.

*"If you can't change your fate, change your attitude."*

—Amy Tan

Many others have shared their spiritual thoughts in the midst of the experience of aging and dying. They might be called spiritual beauty secrets. We might apply them to our lives to enhance, energize and illuminate our days.

Florida Scott Maxwell, in her book *The Measure of My Days*, wrote, "We believe it daily, but is it not possible that by living our lives we create something fit to add to the store from which we came? Our whole duty may be to clarify and increase what we are, to make our consciousness a finer quality. The effect of one's entire life would be needed if we are to return laden to our source" (p. 40). The beauty secret here is to make the most of what we have been given. That may mean studying great art, literature, science, or natural wonders. It may mean reaching out to others as a teacher, mentor, or friend. It might be helping our fellow man whenever and wherever we have the opportunity to do so. It might mean spending time in contemplation and prayer for the needs and the needy of this world. As our spirit accumulates the positive effects of these thoughts and deeds, we deepen our spiritual walk through this world.

Sadie Delaney, in *The Delaney Sisters' Book of Everyday Wisdom*, commented that, "That's a big problem with some older folks—they have such low expectations of themselves. When they get to a certain age, they just give up. That's a shame! If there's anything I've learned in all these years, it's that life is too good to waste a day. It's up to you to make it sweet" (p.123). After living for 106 years, Sadie certainly

had a unique vantage point from which to survey the world. She says we are beautified by living each day to the fullest, by not taking anything for granted, by trying to find a purpose in life and reaching out to share our days with others. Appreciating sunrises and sunsets and finding thankful moments in every day adds loveliness to life. Counting the many blessings with which we are showered daily makes us attractive people to whom others are drawn.

Finally, I want to share some words from Mitch Albom's book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Morrie Schwartz had a lot to say about living as he was dying. At one point during his series of dialogues with his former student, he commented, "I don't even know what 'spiritual development' really means. But I do know we're deficient in some way. We are too involved in materialistic things and they don't satisfy us. The loving relationships we have, the universe around us, we take these things for granted" (Albom, 1997, p. 84).

Morrie tells Mitch the story of a Buddhist who every day pictures a little bird on his shoulder. The man asks the bird, "Is today the day? Am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be? Am I ready to die?" Morrie says, "I'm going to say it again. Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live" (p. 82).

What do we miss by being so feverishly intent on pursuing the things the world tells us are most important? We deny ourselves the time to develop our spiritual natures because we bury them beneath the weight of schedules and responsibilities. We miss the breezes blowing and the flowers blooming, we disregard the passing of the seasons and the migrations of the birds. We don't stop to feel Christmas snow brushing our cheeks and to let the brook caress our feet as it meanders past. These are daily, natural gifts that can become spiritual ones if not ignored. How much more beautiful would life be, would we be, if we appreciated these things more each day?

As I meet myself here on the shores of middle age/old age, I want to embrace the wisdom of these spiritual mentors. I want to apply the advice they have given to the rest of my life. I am unwilling to settle for reminiscing rather than creating new memories. Spirituality does not alter the reality of my 56 years. It does not change any of the challenges that lie before me. It does reveal the grace present in each new day to carry me through. Spirituality inspires a redefinition of my priorities, a distillation of what is really important. It inspires me to move away from society's measures of self-worth: possessions, accomplishments, accolades, and influence. It leads me toward new self-awareness, new goals, and a new freedom to make choices based on personal criteria. Spirituality leads me to apply the brakes to this fast-forward, me-first/you-last, hell-bent roadster and take a rest beside still waters. Bianchi (1990) says regarding spiritual growth, "It is a kind of alchemical process whereby what seem to be negative or base elements in this phase of life become, in reality, the material for a transformation of spirit" (p. 34).

It seems to me that spirituality, however one chooses to define the word, adds an exquisitely beautiful dimension to life. Spirituality has physical and emotional benefits. It can increase longevity and mental acuteness. It adds purpose and joy to a person's days. I find that the willingness to embrace the finiteness of life liberates me to enjoy every day I am given. It allows me to celebrate who I am and to embrace what I will become. It calls upon me to give back because I have been

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## Spirituality: The Beauty Secret of Aging

given so much. It inspires me to be a light of love and laughter and learning to those around me. I don't aspire to be the blazing candle, burning at both ends. Rather I choose to be the gentle, comforting, flickering flame, the little light to which others are invited to draw close for warmth and illumination until the moment when it is gently snuffed out. There is beauty in velvet darkness, too.

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## Layers of Learning

**Mary Alice Wolf**

### Abstract

*Educators of older adults are often in the seat of learning themselves. This article presents research with teachers of older students (N=42) and, using excerpts from in-depth interviews, explores their reactions to the experience. It analyzes the meanings and connections that occur for instructors: the reciprocity and mutuality, head and heart, the messages that the instructors take from their learners. The primary finding is that the instructors find lessons about aging, growth, and spiritual significance.*

*Life is like playing a violin alone on a stage and learning to play the instrument while you're doing it.*

*Samuel Butler*

Life-span development requires multiple adaptations: that is the nature of all human growth. That is how it is possible to absorb the “slings and arrows” of later life development and rebound with spirit and hope. This chapter looks at moments of adaptation that occur for teachers of older adults. It focuses on the “aha” moments of deconstruction—where we suddenly see events in a new way—and the resulting new awarenesses that permit growth and development. It is based on narrative research from interviews with instructors in programs for older adult learners (N=42) and it explores the classroom experience as a “holding environment” for growth, differentiation, and resilience. It presents data on the teachers’ new learning within the context of educational and developmental theory. (see Points of Reference)

Instructors of older students are also learning. They themselves have new perspectives on the changing processes in their own lives. How surprising is the capacity of new development! The results of this study give lie to the concept that aging is intellectual calcification and highlight how it is still a time of potential growth—for older adults themselves and for those who work with them. The following discussion analyzes the layers of learning, meaning, and connection that occur.

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## Reciprocity and Mutuality

Barry R. has just returned from teaching his course, “One World of Many Religions,” and observes:

What is satisfying is the responsiveness of the people. We seem to be able to communicate on a very trusting basis. I think the older person is more open and responsive in religious matters than we tend to think they are. They have not boxed themselves into a corner on some subjects we think they might; they're not as conservative a bunch as we might tend to label them or to expect them to be. While they hold strong *personal* views (that is, “This is what *I* believe”), they will at the same time take a much more liberal attitude toward allowing people to own their own perspectives.

For Barry, a Protestant minister, teaching older adults gives him a window into his own future, shaping a growing awareness of the nature of spiritual belief and aging. As he notes that older adults are not “boxed into a corner,” I wonder why he needs to ask this. It is a new differentiation, and a powerful one. For who has told him that older adults are too conservative? Perhaps he fears, as many of us do, that we will grow inflexible with age. Surely, for this 56-year-old man, making observations about his teaching in the Learning Center is part of a process of interpreting the world and revising—making object of—his former way of understanding life. He is preparing to grow older (aren't we all!) and finds wonder and awe in the prospect. Of his new “aha” on aging and spiritual development—that one need not be boxed in—he reflects,

It is getting to see what life is really about. Something larger, more giving, than a view of life that is doctrinaire...I see what it means to be truly human.

## Connections: Head and Heart

Denise K., age 50, has been teaching a course for older learners, *Splendors of Egypt*. A well-organized woman, she carries several carrousels of slides, bags of artifacts, maps, papyrus, and materials to each class session. Prepared to lecture, to show slides and a PowerPoint presentation, field questions, and above all, listen, Denise sees her primary function as a conduit for relationship. She does not lecture until she has asked what the individuals in the group know about the topic. When asked to describe “What kind of special dynamics occur in teaching older learners?” she smiled and asked, “What do you mean by dynamic? You mean the dialogue that goes on?”

You see, because I'm not 70 yet, I learn from them because I listen. And you've got to listen; you really have to listen. They are asking questions, subtly asking questions. And they say things that are couched in these other expressive forms. But if you listen hard, you really see what they're driving at. The questions they're asking themselves will come through in the class. They are guiding the content: they are thinking about their own lives.

In the classroom, both the instructor and the older adult learner connect through a mutual process of reciprocity, awakening and exploration. This is a

moment of transition and can be a transformation and opportunity for developmental growth. Developmentalists (i.e., Peck, 1968) observe that ego transcendence is one of the tasks of older adults. The cognitive realm also stretches. Thornton (2003) observed, “Learning as an innate behavioral process, contributes to the plasticity and resiliency necessary for optimal growth of cognitive structures, and enables basic systems to develop ‘additional’ plasticity and resiliency to support ‘additional’ complex learned behavior” (p. 64). Learner and instructor alike address a topic in the course of the classroom experience and, often, the topic will touch on their deepest need-to-know. This is an example for a shift in object relations and an opportunity to engage emotionally and intellectually.

When connecting takes place, learners and instructors play a role in a mutual life transition of understanding of meaning. Student-centered strategies for learning emerge (Weimer, 202). “For example,” Denise says,

I took a vote. It’s an open class. And yet I was very hesitant—even though I had passed out a syllabus and I said, “We can vote on whether you want to do these things or not.” And one thing I was hesitant about was the mummification process. And so I mentioned it to them that we would handle it in a very selective way, a very respectful way, a very spiritual way. And we voted. Everybody voted “Yes, let’s deal with mummification.” And I brought in slides and mummies and we talked about the afterlife. But, you see, first I wanted to know what their mindset was.

The experience of ourselves, what is referred to as mindfulness, brings to consciousness specific goals and action. In so doing, the learning environment allows us to connect, reflect, and change. This is not a passive feature. It evokes a major principle of the lifespan: locus of control is essential in all persons and leads to an empowering sense of well-being (Beatty & Wolf, 1996). And, as we move in social situations, our level of attentiveness is awakened by the most basic of developmental needs. According to Paulo Freire (1970), the most powerful of human capacities comes into play when we experience our worlds as centered within a mutual universe. The instructor, too, becomes open to an experience in which trust and personal sense of self are on the line. As Denise said of her teaching experience, “You take a chance. You risk a lot.” Barry, too, reflected, “We seem to be able to communicate on a very trusting basis.” The crucial element of connection, trust, is the pathway to transformation (Erikson, 1963; Mahler, 1976). In the reciprocal holding environment, relationships spark awarenesses and personal differentiation. Denise discovered,

There were some people who were quite candid. I would sit around with them after class and talk. I think they like that. They like the class setup; they like information; but I think they just want to get to know *you*—I mean, personally. You really have to spend time with them. So we sat around after class and I didn’t realize that some people were 82 and 83.

They were very young mentally, very young physically, very active. And we shared a lot. They just liked talking about their lives and the friends that they’ve lost. The fact is, as you get older, your friends die off. And these were women without husbands. So we found that there was friendship. Three women had known each other since age two. (One was a cousin; the other was just a friend: they had gone to elementary school

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down the street from each other in Brooklyn.) And I *just loved* talking to them. They were fantastic! To know about such friendship! And they're fun to be with. They're absolutely enjoyable. They don't put on a pretense; they have no need to "put on the dog."

A process not unlike counter-transference, occurs in this powerful connection. For Denise, "Everything is special about these individuals. They have great insight into life."

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 Protocols for the Future
 

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A majority of the instructors (88%) reported that they viewed their older students as protocols for their own future. For some, however, the growing awareness of their own aging, Kegan's (1997) "emerging reality," involved learning about spirituality. Kegan writes, "We reconstruct meaning in life and move forward...[We see] the human being as a possibility, with an awareness that these possibilities may not always be realized." This very phenomenon was echoed in different ways throughout the study data.

Personal identity and aging are dual motifs through the 42 interviews, particularly among the late middle-aged instructors at the learning center. Several wondered about the spiritual aspects of late life, whether there was a special sort of wisdom, and how *they* (the instructors) could know. Eleanor, age 52, who taught "Genealogy: A Look at Your Family Tree," remarked:

I'm in awe of them...I think that when people get to a certain age—no, I wouldn't even say "age"—a stage in their life, they're ready to come to a course like this. And I think of that quote from *The Talmud*, "He who teaches learns twice." I learn something from these people. I get so much more from them...something from them every time.

In objectifying their experience during the interviews, several instructors spoke of a new consciousness. Ethan, for example, reflected on what he was learning about himself through talking with the center participants. He said, "At 50 you ask yourself different questions. And we would sit around after class and they would just share with me." The phenomenon of objectifying their development, seeing themselves as outside their own worlds for a little while, and observing "where they were," as Denise put it, was resonated throughout the interviews. Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe this process as awakening subjective reality. Kegan refers to an emerging reality. "Development is about growth," he observes, "It's about change and a consciousness in the ways one integrates an experience" (1992). It is also a form of achieving the transcendence that is the task of integrity (Erikson, 1968; Peck, 1968). And this process mirrored the experience of the older adults who, in the cafeteria, would tell their stories.

For instructors of courses for older adults, the potential for personal development can be enormous. In itself, the experience produces the "ahas" of differentiation, the opportunity for growth and lessons in resiliency. Helen remarked,

I feel like I'm one with them: I'm a sister in spirit. I really do. And, in fact, sometimes I feel older than they do. Because they're so very young and they don't have the petty worries that we have. They've got it sewn up. And I learn from them. Like the memo that you don't answer today, it's

going to be around tomorrow. And with them, they figure, you know, “Is somebody going to put you in jail for the next year or two years?”

Eleanor found that her learners “nourished” her. The most important thing that happened, she stated, was the reciprocal appreciation. “It transcended our differences,” she commented,

I learned a lot from their experiences and I broadened my idea of different cultures. Best of all, though, were the good jokes. I’d say a nice exchange. The best part for me was listening (really, more than instructing), experiencing the world from their framework. They have courage, stamina, wisdom.

### Ontological Leanings

One mysterious and particularly intriguing component of human adaptation is the construct of numinous development. (Note: *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* defines “numinous” as “spiritual...surpassing comprehension of understanding; mysterious; arousing one’s elevated feelings of duty, honor, loyalty.”) It appears to be an active process at work in older learners whose experience can now be integrated and tweaked for new “ahas.” It carries the potential for wisdom, great generativity, and is a quality of recalling a life lived and a transformative sense of meaning. Anthony Powell wrote, in *A Dance to the Music of Time*:

Nothing establishes the timelessness of Time like those episodes of early experience seen, on reexamination at a later period, to have been crowded together with such unbelievable closeness in the course of a few years; yet equally giving the illusion of being so infinitely extended during the months when actually taking place. (p. 23)

Our understanding of the meaning that older learners find in educational activities may be the explorations that they make into their own understanding of life—their own lives and the meaning of their place in the world. This is ontological development: a process of reaching to our greatest potential. Nouwen and Gaffney observed, “When hope grows we slowly see that we are worth not only what we achieve but what we are, that what life might lose in use, it may win in meaning (1976, p. 71). Dave, in reviewing his experience as an instructor, admitted that he had initially had “an uneasy relationship” with his own aging. Now, he found,

I’d like to think this is a part of the whole humanizing process of life itself. Just a sense that, “Hey, we’ve got a common humanity here.... We are sharing—in a joyful way—that underlying sense of a common humanity. They have a richer sense, a deeper sense, than at a younger age. People are less of a threat to each other... Ultimately, this is the way it’s supposed to be: that the whole life process is intended to be an opening up to the world and to the resources of joy and richness, love and compassion. We are called to live out our lives. To me, it is simply a confirmation of this: a growing, richer sense of life. And for my own aging, too.

Another faculty member observed of his course participants, “They are not afraid to talk about death. Many are afraid of a long illness that depersonalizes them. One day we sat around after class and talked about living wills. They are very

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candid.” Dan, too, remarked, “They are closer to meeting their Maker than I. I have a great awe for them because I know that they will depart this life as we know it sooner. Yet they are so very accepting of their pasts.”

### Conclusion

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Hearing the words of instructors of older adults allows the reader to consider the developmental potential for growth, wisdom, and connected learning that occurs in education. The layers of learning and the processes of connection and reciprocity are evident. In light of the fact that we are becoming a nation with some 13% of persons over the age of 65, we might assert that education for older persons may be essential for the civilization. For those who seek it, learning enables the older adult to develop “integrality,” achieve well-being, as well as make genuine contributions to the culture. Furthermore, those who find themselves working in learning environments are lucky enough to experience their own growth, and a powerful unfolding of hope and connection. As one study participant observed, “What you’re really doing and learning is opening up the future: new images, vistas, realities, concepts. There is enrichment and you’re part of it.”

### Points of Reference

*What is meant by “differentiation”?* Differentiation is that awareness that there are multiple truths. That is, we have believed something that seemed true: now we are seeing this truth in a new way. We make object of it and examine it. Constructive developmentalists such as Margaret Mahler, Jean Piaget, and Robert Kegan frame the process of differentiation whereby an individual confronts a new reality and is required to change. We accommodate, assimilate, and adapt. As we move through the life course, our roles, perceptions, and meaning-making undergo changes.

*What is meant by “resiliency”?* Resiliency can be understood as a component of adaptation. The resilient individual is willing to risk change.

*What is a “holding environment”?* It is the place where we are “held” so that we can risk change. It is a comfortable, nonjudgmental place. The classroom often represents a “holding environment” for the learner and instructor alike, a location where both move subtly toward greater connection. This is particularly true of older adults and it is clearly operating as a means of personal development. The classroom, then, can be a zone of transition in which the mode of communication is the content and format of the curriculum.

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## Learning Resources

*Globalisation, Lifelong Learning, and the Learning Society: Sociological Perspectives***By Peter Jarvis***Routledge, 2007**ISBN: 0415355427 (hbk.) 9780415355421 (hbk.) 0415355435 (pbk.) 9780415355438 (pbk.) 0203964403 (ebk.) 9780203964408 (ebk.)**229 pages (with references)***Reviewed by Marvin Hunt**

This new book on globalisation (English spelling) and lifelong learning provides an in-depth analysis of learning in social and global contexts. Well-known author Peter Jarvis, has, with this manuscript, contributed 15 books to the field of lifelong learning. In this latest effort, he explores “how lifelong learning and the learning society have become social phenomena globally” (p. i) by investigating the knowledge economy and the changing nature of research in learning societies. Although his goals for the book comprise a daunting challenge, given the scope, he delivers a succinct accounting of global change and learning in 202 pages.

This book could serve as a degree program, capstone course textbook on lifelong learning, or it could be used at a graduate level to provide a broad understanding of lifelong learning theories and concepts. Jarvis provides theoretical models for ordering the world, the internationalization of culture, and the value of “self” that transcends popular concepts of nature and nurture. He believes that the forces associated with global change impose themselves on the world of learning in a way that requires a new learning model. The new globalized self emerges from this imposing environment as a change agent and a learning/participating person who has created him/herself amidst change.

Authors who write about globalization must grapple with the concept of globalization—when and why did it start? Although Jarvis acknowledges a lengthy history of globalization dating to the Greek empire, he clarifies that, for the book’s purposes, his concepts of globalization are based in postmodernity starting with the 1970s Western world. In this world, capitalization and profit-making dominated, the oil crisis loomed, free trade spread, information technology became pervasive, economic competition and scientific pursuit stimulated change, and the Berlin Wall’s fall helped democratization spread to the Eastern Bloc and beyond.

Jarvis explains globalization’s outcomes in the realms of economy, technology, culture, and ecology. Through these changes, traditional education models yielded to a lifelong learning paradigm. According to Jarvis, the emerging lifelong learning model places more responsibility on the individual to adapt to a changing world. The individual must undertake responsibility for learning and shaping institutions

which, in turn, offer learning opportunities. New and highly varied workforce requirements and self-enrichment dominate national and international lifelong learning activities. Jarvis notes how lifelong learning supports the new learning society, which, at its core, requires humanistic values intrinsic to human processes.

Although Jarvis's book stimulates thinking about the role of lifelong learning in society and for the individual, in a few areas he has fallen short in his desire to explore and explain a complex world. His approach to an ontological premise for learning, individual identity, and the individual's development within the local and global society, pose significant writing challenges. His discussion about primary and secondary learning processes (i.e., playing with and identifying with different roles to develop identity as a learner), as they relate to lifewide learning, is underdeveloped. Topics such as non-Western identity, Muslim societies, and conflicting values within local cultures also deserve more in-depth attention.

Jarvis's brief examination of research plants seeds for more study about lifelong learning inquiry. As we learn lifelong and lifewide, we seek ways to improve in our jobs and professions, and we seek enrichment in our favorite niches. The author notes that this seeking process has fueled the teaching and learning market and has required institutions to respond at different levels and in new ways. The research world has diversified to include action research, interdisciplinary studies, and qualitative methods. The book could have placed more emphasis on funding by foundations, private individuals, and governmental agencies. The author spends little time examining a highly fruitful environment of funding sources such as global governmental bodies, private industry, international organizations and associations, and foundations whose goals are closely and passionately aligned with diverse learning missions.

The final chapters explore recent policy development, mostly in the United Kingdom, and a list of lifelong learning functions (e.g., social systems maintenance, individual advancement, knowledge transmissions, and the reproduction of the cultural system). Jarvis leaves us with thoughts of transcending the current world and learning situation, to "discover the type of society that is implicit in the ideas of the present society" (p. 202). Jarvis has created a practical manuscript that provides a broad perspective for a huge subject—lifelong learning. Although his vision is, self-admittedly, not one of a utopian learning society, it responds to the reality of our past limits while painting, with a broad brush, a progressive picture of the current learning arena.

**Marvin Hunt** is a vice president of Baker University and the dean of Baker's School of Professional and Graduate Studies. He recently moved from the University of Kansas where he served as assistant dean of Continuing Education and director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Marvin serves on the editorial board of *The LLI Review*.

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## *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*

**By Sogyal Rinpoche**

*HarperCollins Publishers, 1992*

*ISBN-0-06-250793-1*

*Paper, 464 pages, \$17.95*

**Reviewed by Elizabeth Ayotte**

**T**he *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche, published 16 years ago, has already earned the stature of “modern classic” in the genres of world spirituality and thanatology. In it Rinpoche, a renowned Buddhist spiritual master, teaches that death is not the end. In the Buddhist tradition, life and death are seen as one whole. This life is not all there is. I recommend this insightful work to anyone who is searching for the meaning of their earthly existence and how to live fully in the present. The author’s authentic storytelling about his own experiences is interwoven with questions he poses for the reader in such a way that it feels as if the two are companions engaged in an intimate conversation. Rinpoche’s writing style effectively builds the trust necessary to go to the heart of our most deeply held personal religious beliefs.

A major idea introduced by the author is what he calls the truth of impermanence. Rinpoche asks us to remember that at every moment we are dying and so is everything else. He teaches that flux is the ground of all things. Then the author guides the reader to understand the difference between the ordinary mind and the nature of mind itself. Rinpoche is certain that what often occupies our ordinary mind is fear, anger, lust, and greed. He speaks of people living in today’s society needing to be distracted at every moment from any contact with death or real life. Rinpoche instructs the reader to bring the mind home through meditation, a state free from all concerns where anger, grasping, and fear are defused. The author stimulated in me an appreciation for this changeless, deathless, unending nature of mind.

Another big idea is the concept of “bardo” which means a transition or a gap between the completion of one situation and the onset of another. Two central characteristics of the bardos are uncertainty and opportunity. When one loses something precious, the mind rests before it finds resolution. It is in this gap that one may be most sensitive to opportunity. Rinpoche explains how to rest in the gap in order to catch a glimpse of the deathless nature of the enlightened mind.

A central goal throughout *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* is aiding the reader to seek and find meaning in death. The author encourages the reader that to establish fearless communication with others is as essential in death as it is in life. When spending time with a dying person, see that individual as being just like you. The dying person wants what you want. When we exchange ourselves in this way, we can release the heart of our compassion. Rinpoche reminds us that the pain or suffering of the dying person is not all that he or she is.

I have outlined those Buddhist teachings found in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* that were the most meaningful to me. The book was not a quick read; full concentration was needed. The length of the volume might be a turn-off to some. Another challenge of this text is to remain open to the sacred wisdom of other cultures. I was struck by how the fundamental pattern of separation, transition, and incorporation in all stories of adult development so closely resembles the transition of the bardo, the gap between the completion of one situation and the onset of another. Sogyal Rinpoche's skillful teaching opened my eyes to what I believe is his simplest yet most powerful message—awakening our unchanging pure awareness which underlies the whole of life and death, we are free to pursue the knowledge that only spiritual truth can bring. There is no better way to face death than to know who we really are.

I believe, as Rinpoche says, that if I continue practicing letting go, my certainty will grow that there is in us “something” that “nothing” destroys, that nothing alters, and that cannot die.

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## Second Lives: A Journey Through Virtual Worlds

by **Tim Guest**

*Hutchinson, 2007.*

ISBN 9780091796570

Paper, 362 pages, \$16.50

### Reviewed by **Anne Cardale**

“I had no idea of the scope of these worlds: the number of people who inhabit them; that Marshall McLuhan’s global village was now a real place, although it was more of a global universe populated by millions. But, in these virtual spaces, free from many of the pressures of the modern world, I could see something was being born.” (p.12) So writes Tim Guest in reference to the growing number of virtual worlds to be found online today.

*Second Lives: A Journey Through Virtual Worlds*, first published in 2007, recorded at the time of writing between 25 and 30 million people worldwide—more than passed through US immigration at Ellis Island throughout the whole of the twentieth century—regularly log on to virtual worlds, to abandon reality in search of a better place.” (p.22)

Guest tells us he grew up with video games, “When I was nine years old, my favourite thing in the world was to go with my father to the video arcades.” (p. 9) In later years, feeling troubled and unhappy after his father left, he escaped reality by immersing himself in the heroic fantasies of computer games.

Guest’s own personal journey is reflected in his online virtual adventures. He manages to gain access to people connected with virtual worlds, either as the developers or as ‘players.’ He builds trust, draws out stories, and then betrays his sources by revealing their secrets in his book.

This is a form of travel writing, unveiling the mysteries of synthetic worlds and creating a riveting read full of strange tales, startling facts, and extraordinary people. Guest describes virtual places that we can visit without having any nasty injections or packing a passport. We can simply download the software before steeping through the ‘electronic looking glass.’ The only thing we need for such a journey is the warning that, though we can’t get physically lost, we must beware of losing ourselves!

A range of games are explored, including ‘World of War Craft,’ ‘EverQuest,’ and ‘Star Wars Galaxies,’ to name just three. He describes fighting up through game levels to become a powerful player observing; “The developers fine-tune the games into a kind of virtual Skinner-box: they deliver enough reward to keep you playing.” (p. 30) He then informs us there are workers in China working in ‘virtual sweat-

shops' on behalf of wealthy players. These workers are paid to win rewards that will help their rich patrons move up in the virtual gaming world!

Guest also explores Second Life™; this 'freeform' game is different from the others with their "playful but constrained virtual spaces." This spin-off from these highly structured games has become a communication platform where people create their own environments and design their own activities. As you read this, people are attending business meetings in Second Life to save on travel costs, and to help the environment. Educational institutions run virtual classes here, and of course people come to be entertained in all manner of ways; from live music to art exhibitions, in-world movies and socialising. Many areas are rated as mature (so you can guess what might also be happening here). Everything seems possible in the virtual world!

Guest introduces us to this world through an avatar (the representation of ourselves in the 3D world) called Wilde Cunningham. Wilde, in fact, is controlled by nine disabled men and women with cerebral palsy and mental retardation. This group (known as the 'posse' in their residential home) are the only people in the book who Guest writes about with care and respect; and their story forms one of the most memorable aspects of Second Lives. The posse's nurse takes them 'in-world' for one hour, twice a week. They alternate the gender of their avatar every two months, and collaborate together to decide what their activities are to be for each session. They can build, walk, fly, and talk and do all the things their wheelchair-bound real lives prevent them from doing in 'the real world.' Everyone in this small group has changed, and become more outgoing according to family members and their nurse. Guest suggests the reason for this is that, "In the real world, the group's lack of language can cripple their interactions; online, with June-Marie as typist and interpreter, they can hold real-time conversations, without all the confusion and anxiety of being misunderstood, or dismissed because of their appearance." (p. 33)

Virtual worlds like Second Life represent a new form of communication. Jeff Jonas, chief scientist for IBM predicts that in the next six to ten years, maybe sooner, possibly half a billion people will be using virtual worlds. Tim Guest provides us with a thought-provoking glimpse into these worlds; yet he generates more questions than answers, and upon completing this book you will find yourself wondering about the future of both real and virtual worlds.

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**Anne Cardale** is the research assistant for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine. She is currently researching the use of virtual classrooms for seniors in the virtual world of Second Life for her Certificate of Advanced Study in adult learning. She has an M.F.A. (Royal College of Art) in photography and an M.S. in adult education.

This is a form of travel writing, unveiling the mysteries of synthetic worlds and creating a riveting read full of strange tales, startling facts, and extraordinary people.



## *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom (2nd Edition)*

by **Stephen Brookfield**

*Jossey Bass, 2006*

*ISBN: 978-0-7879-8066-5*

*Cloth, 320 pp., \$38*

### **Reviewed by Rick Lamb**

**T**he *Skillful Teacher* should be read by anyone who is either presently teaching at a lifelong learning institute or is considering doing so. This even applies to persons with years of teaching experience. Its author, Stephen Brookfield, is a leading theorist, educator, and practitioner in the field of adult learning. While he has many other interests, much of his work focuses on applying the principles and philosophy of adult learning to higher education. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that college teaching and adult learning are considered two separate disciplines, each with its own literature, vocabulary, hierarchy, and theoretical and historical foundations. Brookfield is one of several cross-over scholars who argue that even instruction for undergraduates should be guided by adult learning principles.

You may wonder what possible relevance Brookfield's work could have for those teaching in programs for older adults where the students' average age is often in the seventies. No one questions that older learners should be treated as adults, do they? Perhaps after reading Brookfield, you may change your mind about that, because there is a difference between treating students as adults and teaching them as adults. It needs to be remembered that most of us have grown up experiencing an educational process designed for children, and many of our assumptions about what a teacher does are based on that experience. These assumptions can influence both adult students and their teachers because there is a tendency to teach as we were taught.

You will also notice that I use the term "teacher" to identify the faculty of LLIs. I do this to cut through the confusing and ambiguous terminology adopted by many LLIs which regularly use terms such as "discussion leader," "workshop facilitator," etc. Neither in theory or practice are these terms sufficiently discrete as to offer much clarity about what actually happens in the classroom. Instead Brookfield provides a definition of teaching that can accommodate the many different ways an individual might provide educational services. Brookfield defines teacher broadly: "Teaching is helping someone to learn." This definition should

cover all manner of LLI faculty, no matter how they interpret their role.

Brookfield sees the primary task of teachers of adults as promoting learning that goes beyond the essentially passive activity of soaking up information. He strongly encourages active learning that requires evaluating and constructing knowledge. In his view, adult learning is as much about unlearning old ideas as it is about acquiring new ones. He sees this process being especially important for teachers if they are to move beyond their earlier assumptions. Brookfield believes that teachers gain skill through a constant process of experimentation and self-evaluation, augmented if possible by feedback from students and colleagues.

A particular challenge for many teachers is recognizing and minimizing the negative impact of the power inherent in their role. Brookfield sees the reaction to this power as a major barrier to adult learning. It would be naive to assume that this concern does not carry over for at least some students participating in an LLI. However, the author also warns against the assumption that the teacher is responsible for everything that happens in the classroom. Instead he finds that much is beyond their control. Brookfield is especially clear about the importance of analyzing the role of emotions in learning and the underlying fear and anxiety that can both propel and inhibit adult learning. Overall, he presents a picture of teaching that is far more demanding than might be expected. Apparently he believes it is better to acknowledge the stressors than pretend they are not there.

One of the strengths of this book is that the author integrates theory and practice in the context of his own experiences as a teacher. This gave the book authenticity. By sharing his own reactions and struggles as a teacher of adults, Brookfield provides potential teachers with a sense of what it feels like to teach adults. Brookfield is not the first to compare teaching to whitewater rafting, but he is more candid than most in acknowledging his many spills and occasional near drowning in this pursuit. Many teachers familiar with Brookfield's work are particularly appreciative of his identification of the "imposter syndrome," the feeling that the teacher is only pretending to be competent and knowledgeable and fears being found out and disgraced. One imagines this could be especially common for new and untried LLI faculty.

Among the concrete practice suggestions offered by Brookfield, three areas seem especially relevant to LLI teaching. These are delivering lectures that promote active learning, eliciting candid feedback from students about their learning experiences, and promoting class discussion. This latter factor is particularly important in that many teachers seem to take discussion facilitation for granted although, in fact, it is one of the most demanding skills required of an adult educator.

Most readers will be pleased that Brookfield usually avoids the complexity, insider jargon, footnotes, and obscure references that characterize typical academic prose. Instead, this work is a very personal statement of practice and experience gained over 30 years of teaching and teaching teachers to teach. In *The Skillful Teacher*, as with much of his other writing, I find Brookfield to be politically and socially committed, amazingly self-revealing, and above all, readable. He even demonstrates a sly British sense of humor, one that extends to citing the wisdom of Monty Python.

Although many of the specifics of the traditional college classroom may not apply to the LLI model, the underlying issues remain the same: learning for adults

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is inherently stressful and demanding. As a result the teacher, who often becomes the displaced focus of learner fear and concern, can be a critical factor in either generating or minimizing the student's anxiety.

I am unaware of any references to LLIs in Brookfield's writings, but I think he might be fascinated by a model of adult education in which students take courses in serious subjects for the sheer joy of learning; where there are no tests, no grades, and where the power attributes of a volunteer faculty are minimized. Although I expect he would be concerned with the lack of ethnic, cultural, and economic diversity found in most LLIs, I am also quite sure that he would be fascinated by the opportunities such an environment might provide for skillful teaching.

**Rick Lamb** is an active member of the OLLI at the University of Southern Maine and serves as associate editor of *The LLI Review*.

*The LLI Review***The Annual Journal of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes**2009 Call for Papers

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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 fifty. 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 = 5000 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 (5000 words)
- Book reviews (750 words)
- Articles that describe "best practice" in curriculum design and/or teaching in LLI's. (2500 words)
- "WOW! Programs"—These are detailed descriptions of especially creative or successful courses or programs. What took place? Why was it so successful? (2500 words)
- A personal story (memoir) related to older adult learning (2500 words)
- Brief fiction related to teaching and/or learning in later age (2500 words)
- Poetry (no maximum length, but brief is preferred)

Manuscripts should be prepared in Microsoft Word, double-spaced, and use 12-point font. Four hard copies should be mailed to the editor along with an electronic version of the manuscript e-mailed as an attachment.

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, 2009**

**Submit manuscripts to:** E. Michael Brady, Ph.D.  
Professor and Senior Research Fellow  
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute  
University of Southern Maine  
Bailey Hall 400-B  
Gorham, ME 04038  
mbrady@usm.maine.edu

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

## 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)

## 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.