

# The *Review*

Volume 6

Fall 2011

The Annual Journal of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

Explorations by and  
about older learners



## In this issue:

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

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# *The **LLI** Review*

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## Welcome

Welcome to Volume 6 of *The LLI Review*. We have what we consider to be a well-balanced selection of manuscripts in this volume representing the breadth of genres which has become our tradition with this annual publication of the National Resource Center for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes (OLLI). In the following pages you will find descriptions of especially interesting courses being offered in Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, memoirs, short fiction, essays about important topics such as lifelong learning and action research, original research, poetry, and book reviews.

In each of the first five volumes of *The LLI Review* (2006–2010) we have published two life stories describing the life, career, and passion for learning of OLLI members from across the United States. In Volume 6 we are publishing one more life story, but this practice will end after this volume. Robert Atkinson, who has been my faculty colleague and friend for more than 20 years and who has managed this section of the journal, is retiring. Bob will still be working with the Life Story Center at the University of Southern Maine and welcomes your participation by way of the center's web site: [www.usm.maine.edu/olli/national/lifestorycenter](http://www.usm.maine.edu/olli/national/lifestorycenter). We are formulating plans to honor and celebrate older learners in a different way in future editions of *The LLI Review*. I wish to thank Bob for his career-long dedication to life stories through his teaching, scholarship, and work in this journal.

One of the reasons I worked with Jack Hansen in writing "Solving Problems Through Action Research" was to encourage readers of this journal, who tend to mostly be active members of Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, including faculty and other leaders, to consider undertaking small, program-specific empirical studies. Action research is an excellent way to answer key questions and solve vexing problems in OLLIs, and it does not take a doctoral degree or intense technical training to undertake such projects. This journal would also welcome and consider publishing written reports based on findings from local action research projects. I'd be happy to discuss any such studies you may be considering or which are already underway at your institute.

Please share your print version of Volume 6 with a friend or colleague. I also want to remind you that this entire edition is available online at [www.osher.net](http://www.osher.net) as are all of the five previously published volumes. If you have comments about *The LLI Review* or are considering an idea for contributing a manuscript, I welcome an email ([mbrady@usm.maine.edu](mailto:mbrady@usm.maine.edu)) or phone call (207-780-5312).

Thank you and be well.

**E. Michael Brady, PhD**

*Professor and Editor*

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# Lifelong Learning Institutes: The Next Challenge

**Rick Lamb**

## Abstract

*Based on a review of some of the major contemporary themes in the study of adult cognitive development, this article suggests a more comprehensive understanding of the human potential for lifelong learning and the obstacles to its achievement. This includes recognition that many younger adults fail to achieve their full learning potential. In this context it is suggested that lifelong learning programs might consider ways to help develop and test models for promoting lifelong learning for all adults, while still honoring their commitment to seniors.*

I believe the establishment of hundreds of lifelong learning programs across the country, providing a wide range of liberal and creative arts courses for more than 200,000 older adults, is an incredible achievement. However, I also believe there is an opportunity for these programs to achieve even more by promoting the lifelong learning potential of all adults. The urgency, feasibility, and challenges of such an initiative are the subjects of this essay.

The concept of lifelong learning is not well understood. In the United States the term is widely assumed to refer to the participation by older adults in non-credit classes in the arts and sciences but without the academic strictures associated with higher education. Often these programs are hosted by traditional institutions but operate as more flexible, quasi-independent units. There are no entrance requirements, grades, tests, etc., and fees are very modest. Participants are usually referred to as members, not students. The faculty is almost always unpaid volunteers and brings a broad range of academic and professional experience.

However, assuming participants in these programs are automatically lifelong learners is a mistake. Lifelong learning is not determined by where you learn, but how. It can be best defined as “a cognitive process by which [adults] continue to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes over their

However, assuming participants in these programs are automatically lifelong learners is a mistake. Lifelong learning is not determined by where you learn, but how.

## Lifelong Learning Institutes: The Next Challenge

lifetimes.” (Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1978). As will be addressed in this article, continued development of “knowledge, skills, attitudes” is a lifetime commitment, not a one-semester course. It requires a habit of mind that provides for an openness to new ideas and willingness to rethink old ones, flexibility in dealing with complex problems, and recognition that there are few simple or foolproof answers to complex problems. It also requires acknowledgment of how one’s own assumptions and life experience can influence and sometime distort judgment. It is a unique but critical process of learning, relearning, and unlearning as conditions change and insight grows.

The problem is that this kind of thinking and learning seems to be in short supply just when we need it most. Up until recently (as time is judged from an evolutionary perspective) our capacity to adjust behavior to meet and overcome environmental challenges was the key to our survival and ultimately led to our present planetary dominance. But now what had been an advantage is also a threat. Our brilliant technology has given us the power to exhaust our resources, poison our atmosphere, and if we really get irritated, eliminate all life on earth. As our society gets more complex so does its problems, especially those that require balancing short-term desires with long-term risks, or when all possible solutions are in themselves imperfect and contradictory. On an individual level, the impact of technology in the last 200 years has almost doubled life expectancy, but successful aging remains a challenge for many, and competition between generations for limited resources is presenting us with increasingly painful choices.

Human history does not reflect well on our past problem-solving initiatives, but now the problem has become even more critical because we no longer have a margin for error: push a button and, oops—we’ve had it. Our brains do not have time to wait for the slow evolutionary process of natural selection to catch up with our learning needs. The only alternative is to do a better job of working with the brains we have; we need to learn how to make better decisions both individually and collectively. This is where I believe lifelong learning programs can help to show how this might be done. This essay explores the opportunities and the challenges such an expanded mission might present. It is not my purpose to convince or convert anyone to my way of thinking about what I see as the untapped potential of lifelong learning programs, but rather to encourage, or perhaps provoke, a dialogue about the risks and opportunities such an initiative might entail. What follows is a discussion of three related questions, which when taken together present a complex and urgent problem, one that should be worthy of attention by lifelong learners everywhere:

1. What is the nature of the unique cognitive process that supports lifelong learning and how can it be assessed?

2. Why is the human potential for lifelong learning apparently limited for so many, and what are the implications of this limitation for individuals and their society?
3. What is a possible role for lifelong learning programs in bringing the limitations in human cognitive development to greater public awareness while also finding ways to help address the issue?

I hope consideration of these questions will help to point the way for human society to improve the quality of our thinking, learning, and problem-solving before we run out of time.

### The Progression of Adult Cognitive Development to Lifelong Learning

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It has long been recognized that the human brain, like other organs, develops over time, resulting in change in structure and function. Beginning with Piaget, initial research focused on the cognitive development of children and how they moved through a staged sequence of increasing learning capacity. This research followed child cognitive development through age 16, although it was recognized by researchers, and hoped by parents, that intellectual development did not stop there.

Beginning in the 1980s there was increased interest in going beyond Piaget's research in studying adult cognitive development. The initial focus was on how the thinking of college students developed over the course of their undergraduate and graduate study. This research was initiated by the perception that students' assumptions about knowledge and the ways they explained their own judgment about controversial issues progressed in stages over the course of their undergraduate and graduate study. More studies, including both longitudinal and cross-sectional ones, followed. Perhaps the most widely recognized of these, the "Reflective Judgment Model," was initiated by Patricia King and Karen Kitchener in 1981 and evolved into a 17-year longitudinal study involving a diverse group of more than 1,000 individuals, including a significant portion of adults lacking exposure to higher education. Summarizing their findings in 2004, these scholars wrote: "We have made three major observations: (a) There are striking differences in people's assumptions about knowledge; (b) These differences in assumptions are related to the way people make and justify their own judgments about ill-structured problems; and (c) There is a developmental sequence about the pattern of responses and judgments about such problems" (King & Kitchener, 2002, p. 5).

The authors reported that their research demonstrated the existence of a potential seven-stage developmental sequence reflecting increasingly more flexible and sophisticated reasoning. However, they also found that most adults did not achieve their full potential in this regard. They summarized their findings within three classes of thinking:

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1) *Pre-reflective thinking* is characterized by the assumption that knowledge is certain and therefore there is only one answer to a question. This is the kind of thinking often described as black and white, with no shades of gray and no room for compromise.

2) *Quasi-reflective thinking* reflects recognition that knowledge is contextual and that some degree of uncertainty is often unavoidable. However, at this level, individuals tend to be unwilling to commit to a position or take responsibility for evaluating evidence. Many issues are seen as too complicated to figure out.

3) *Reflective thinking* is when the individual takes responsibility for gathering evidence and coming to a decision. The authors describe reflective thinkers as “consistently comfortable in using evidence and reason to support their judgments, and accepting that new data and new perspectives may emerge as knowledge is constructed and reconstructed. As a result, they remain open to reevaluating conclusions and knowledge claims” (King and Kitchener, 2002, p. 6).

For me, the maintenance of reflective thinking or reflective judgment throughout the lifespan precisely describes the process of lifelong learning referred to in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare definition. Other researchers in this field (often referred to as personal epistemology), while employing somewhat different terminology, stage differentiations, and methodology, confirmed King and Kitchener’s findings that a majority of adults studied did not develop higher levels of judgment about complex issues or demonstrate a willingness to rethink or modify existing beliefs and assumptions when considering complex or controversial problems. It is important to note that these outcomes cannot be explained by the negative effects of aging. This was not seen as the result of an age-related decline in cognitive functions such as short-term memory. Instead it was recognized as a failure of progression to higher levels of cognitive development. There was also agreement that while those with college degrees tended to be relegated somewhat to the higher levels of development, the majority of this “educated” group also fell short of the highest levels of cognition. Regardless of education or other presumably positive factors, most individuals studied demonstrated marked disinterest or active resistance to considering new information when it challenged existing beliefs.

### The Variable Dynamics of Adult Resistance to Learning

A common term for the avoidance of learning is “resistance.” This characterization is particularly popular with teachers when they feel students are giving them a hard time. But all resistance is not the same. Some level of adult resistance to learning is normal and even appropriate. We would consider it naïve for someone to accept without question every new idea or fad that came along. Instead, adults tend to take a “wait-and-see”

approach to what is being offered. In addition, “going back to school” can feel too much like regression to childhood, and as the noted adult educator Malcolm Knowles once commented, adults “don’t like being treated like children” (Knowles, 1995, p. 123). Experienced teachers of adults are well aware of this and go to great lengths to demonstrate their respect for their students’ knowledge and experience as well as to identify and legitimize their learning goals.

However, there is a more profound kind of learning avoidance that is far less responsive to intervention, one that actively undermines learning potential as described by King and Kitchener and others. This particularly difficult kind of negative reaction to learning has been described by the educational philosopher Jack Mezirow (1990) as a “disorienting dilemma” because whatever the response, it only makes things worse. To quote Stephen Brookfield: “...it is as if a perverse psychological law sometimes seems to apply in which the strength of commitment to beliefs and values is inversely correlated with the amount of evidence encountered that contradicts the truth of these. The human capacity for denial knows no limits” (Brookfield, 1987, p.150).

This is the kind of resistance that is fueled by the anxiety generated when an adult’s existing knowledge and beliefs are challenged, especially knowledge that is closely associated with the individual’s sense of identity and competence. This reaction can be so severe that it blocks even the consideration of alternatives. Instead it triggers the classic fight or flight reaction. In reflective judgment terms this translates into angry rejection (pre-reflective thinking) or timid uncertainty (quasi-reflective thinking). For the individual the result tends toward a decline in resiliency, the ability to adjust to change, or recover from trauma and loss. This has particularly negative consequences for the older adult. For society as a whole this suggests an even more ominous scenario. Ironically, this inhibition to rational problem-solving or rethinking old assumptions seems to take hold in one’s 50s, which is also the age when many adults maximize their authority and influence. These are the people who have their fingers on the buttons of power.

It is important to emphasize that this tendency to favor certainty over doubt has its basis in humans’ evolutionary history, as well as being a product of life’s experiences. It is closely associated with the well-known flight or fight reflex that favors quick decisions and quick action over reflective judgment. We continue to react to even unlikely primitive threats in ways that can override more reflective judgment. The dynamic of natural selection tends to favor being safe rather than sorry, being sure rather than in doubt. We seem to live in a society where decisiveness is often preferred over cautious consideration. However, while this quick reactivity is useful when one is confronted with a coiled snake on the path, it is less helpful when the issue is the preservation of the rain forest in which the snake lives.

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We have inherited a tendency to feel secure in our beliefs and distrustful or worse when they are challenged. History is replete with examples of how reluctant humans are to unlearn beliefs even when they defy experience. Well into the 18th century, women successfully used herbs to treat the sick but were seen as witches. Men who bled patients for the same purpose were rewarded as physicians even though their patients died. To this day some people seem to have a hard time admitting they are lost, a classic definition of disorientation. Such situations are not easy to overcome. Unlearning (admitting even to yourself that you were wrong) is almost always more challenging than learning.

This raises the question: Why hasn't the marvelously elegant evolutionary process of natural selection extinguished this dysfunctional genetic trait, or at least significantly reduced its prevalence? Shouldn't there be a dominant gene for lifelong learning? A reasonable hypothesis for this phenomenon emerges from studies of evolutionary biology, neurology, psychology, and adult learning. Taken together, they suggest a more profound and deeply rooted cause for extreme manifestations of resistance to learning, i.e., a largely unconscious defense against severe anxiety reactions caused when facing the unknown. Apparently there can be nothing worse than a "disorienting dilemma." It is a feeling so destabilizing that rational thought or action is impossible, an anxiety so overwhelming that it has caused pilots to crash because they would not believe the accuracy of their instruments. It is no wonder that humans will do almost anything to avoid it, including simply denying unwelcome reality.

This tendency to react with distress, denial, anger, and above all, anxiety, to challenges of what we think is already known is in our genes. It is a product of the developmental history of the human brain. In the course of evolution and the process of natural selection, humans have developed two distinct biological mechanisms for responding to the environment: the more primitive reflexive flight or fight instinct, and the more sophisticated and selective judgment process of the prefrontal cortex. The instinctive response is still operational, protecting us in some cases and leading to disaster in others.

### Promoting Lifelong Learning Through Reflective Judgment

If you are still with me at this point you might be thinking: "Well this is interesting, but aren't lifelong learning programs doing all they can to promote higher levels of thinking like reflective judgment? How can we ask volunteer faculty to change the way they teach, or program members to take more challenging courses?" These are both legitimate concerns. It would be irresponsible for programs to ignore the potential risks when considering change. However, one of the advantages of most lifelong learning programs is that they can operate within far more flexible bound-

aries than the usual strictures of more bureaucratic academic systems. This should allow them to introduce small-scale experiments at minimal risk. I will offer a few possible examples towards the end of this essay. However, I do believe it would be a mistake to underestimate the possible interest some faculty and other LLI participants might have in doing something a little different in the pursuit of learning. This requires a commitment to acknowledge and challenge one's own assumptions and tolerate the distress involved in rethinking long-held assumptions and exploring alternative views. This requires something more than tolerance, rather the willingness to "walk in the moccasins" of others.

The most powerful vehicle for this process is usually considered to be "reflective dialogue," a group process whereby individuals are encouraged and supported in sharing their own reactions to class subject matter and assignments while seeking to understand the perceptions of others. While I know this may not be a popular process with all members of LLIs' class discussions, if conducted with adequate support and encouragement, it is the most recommended approach to teaching adults. However, conducting such an activity requires a considerable amount of skill and experience. Clearly this constitutes a dilemma for programs that make heavy use of subject-matter experts with limited teaching experience. I am unaware of the extent to which lifelong learning programs provide training to their volunteer faculty, but if they were so included, promoting group process should be a high priority. This does not mean that other teaching methods cannot be effective in promoting reflective judgment, but combining them with group discussion could exponentially increase their impact. Simply providing room and time for a follow-up discussion of a stimulating lecture should not be a big deal. It does not require that the primary lecturer even be there.

However, the challenge for faculty goes beyond making room for discussion. The ultimate skill required of faculty is to promote the examination of students' own assumptions and beliefs and thus to think more deeply. In the history of ideas, there are many examples where such a process actually strengthened rather than rejected those assumptions and beliefs.

There is one more dilemma facing lifelong learning programs contemplating an expanded mission. Despite their growth and the overwhelming positive feedback from participants, these programs have been largely ignored by the larger adult education community. "So," you might ask, "what's the point of modeling a new approach to adult education when nobody is watching?" I believe that one explanation is both cause and effect, namely the very limited academic research devoted to the topic. This is particularly striking considering that so many lifelong learning programs are associated with universities, including some of the major research institutions in the country. This paucity of research also leaves the programs short of critical information that would help them fine-tune their

The ultimate skill required of faculty is to promote the examination of students' own assumptions and beliefs and thus to think more deeply.

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programs. Finally, in my listing of lower risk initiatives for the promotion of reflective judgment and lifelong learning for all is a far more active commitment and encouragement of research into the phenomenon of lifelong learning, especially in terms of understanding both the barriers to, and the promoters of, lifelong learning, and the psychosocial consequences of success or failure in achieving this level of cognitive development. Earlier I mentioned my disappointment that lifelong learning initiatives have not gotten more recognition from the many academic and scientific fields involved in adult cognition. Even the field of adult learning has provided minimal attention, beyond the acknowledgement that such programs exist. Only the field of educational gerontology has provided a more in-depth consideration of these programs, but even here there is scant mention of any large-scale empirical studies that would provide a foundation for further research.

Whatever the causes of this level of disinterest in learning from what one could assume constitutes a large population of lifelong learners, we are left without a standard to assess other variables. The end result is that many important questions cannot be answered with any degree of certainty, beginning with the attributes lifelong learners have in common. My own suggestion that achievement of the higher stages of cognitive development as postulated by King and Kitchener might define the lifelong learner remains untested. Nor can research draw from the potential huge pool of information that could be assembled by collecting data related to the psychosocial history and/or other significant variables that would help to define the participants in present lifelong learning programs and provide a basis for comparison with other groups of adults. This kind of information alone could provide a baseline for more focused research on such critical topics as the relationship between lifelong learning and successful aging, or understanding the impact of cross-cultural attitudes about learning and education. For example, I would very much like to see a follow-up on a small-scale qualitative study conducted at the University of Southern Maine in 2009 which hinted at a relationship between the capacity for lifelong learning and one of the most important of all human attributes, “resiliency,” that is the capacity to successfully recover from the negative impact of changing life situations or trauma so as to regain or even exceed previous levels of functioning (Lamb, Brady, and Lohman, 2009).

I conclude with suggestions about how to cautiously explore some of the ideas discussed in this paper. What follows are a few ideas that could be put into practice relatively safely and tentatively in the spirit of research and experimentation. My focus will be primarily on institutional initiatives designed to explore the possibility for providing an attractive but incrementally more challenging curriculum and program options. Of course, the actual intervention of individual faculty in their own classrooms ultimately has the greatest potential. For those interested in pursuing methods for

challenging the epistemology of students, I suggest they explore the extensive literature on transformative learning, beginning especially with the work of Jack Mezirow, Stephen Brookfield, and Patricia Cranton. Between these three important scholars one should be able to form a pretty good sense of both the complexity and controversy that characterizes the field, while at the same time recognizing a rather simple and straightforward underlying principle that for learners to explore and understand complex and personally important issues, they must become aware of how much their own sense of self is tied up with their opinions and willingness to consider alternative views. I would add that teachers of adults have the same problem and, if willing to undertake this challenge of serious critical reflection, they might encourage others to follow.

For your consideration here are some possible steps lifelong learning programs might consider in exploring the possibilities for expanding their mission to include active promotion of lifelong learning for all:

- Bring together a small group of administrators, faculty, and other interested members to discuss the issues raised in this article, especially including the role of reflective judgment in lifelong learning and ways to promote it. Identify potential faculty leaders in taking a next step.
- Have interested faculty dialogue with their colleagues to assess interest in pursuing the matter further and perhaps lead the formation of a small faculty group to consider how to proceed. Among other things, this might include circulating a few journal articles related to the issues being considered.
- Convene a faculty meeting for the specific purpose of introducing the concepts of reflective judgment to the faculty as a whole. Emphasize the voluntary nature of this undertaking. The enrollment of even two or three faculty in such an initiative would be an important achievement.
- Explore the possibility of developing a study group composed of existing and prospective faculty that would go deeper into the complexities and the practical considerations involved in the development of courses that integrate a reflective judgment orientation.
- Develop one or two trial courses with the specific agenda of developing and modeling reflective judgment in the context of a controversial (but, at least at the beginning, not too controversial) topic.
- Consider opening a course with a reflective judgment orientation to younger adults (maybe 35+). This could be an exceptionally powerful undertaking on a number of fronts. Imagine, for example, the impact on a group of young achievers discovering the wisdom and sophistication of seniors 30 or more years older than they are. They might get the message that there is something more to learn. This is not quite as radical a departure as one might think. Some

Imagine, for example, the impact on a group of young achievers discovering the wisdom and sophistication of seniors 30 or more years older than they are.

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lifelong learning institutes already offer “mixed participant” courses to foster specific learning objectives. There have also been initiatives to recruit pre-retirement adults by offering evening courses they could attend.

Those of you who are in any way open to exploring the issues and opportunities discussed here will know far better than I how practical or prudent any of these suggestions might be. Hopefully, even if the kind of ideas suggested above were to be dismissed, some might want to consider other ways to promote interest in lifelong learning for all. It is, of course, pretty late for any of us to start doing this, but that has not stopped thousands of our fellow students from continuing to learn. It is a daunting task, but we do have one significant advantage, i.e., the ability to call upon the wisdom and reflective judgment of tens of thousands of lifelong learners. Who better to show us how it is done?

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**Rick Lamb** did not discover the academic field of Adult Learning until he retired as Director of Training and Consultation for the Behavioral Health Division of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. He holds a Certificate of Advanced Study in Adult Learning from the University of Southern Maine and has taught in both the University’s graduate department and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. He is the co-author of several research articles and an Associate Editor of *The LLI Review*. He invites readers interested in entering into a “reflective dialogue” about this article and related issues to contact him at [fflamb7@gmail.com](mailto:fflamb7@gmail.com).

# My Last Violent Act: Iwo Jima

**Byron Citron**

## Abstract

*This memoir, written by a 93-year-old World War II veteran, reflects on this soldier's experience on the Island of Iwo Jima in 1945 and an incident that occurred when he returned home.*

I tightened my belt and went to see *Flags of Our Fathers*, a masterful film directed and produced by Clint Eastwood. It portrays World War II in the Pacific: Marines and Army at Iwo Jima. It is 60-plus years since I was there and 60-plus years since I allowed myself the pain of remembrance. It was a wrenching decision to face a huge movie screen alone with several hundred “munchers” of popcorn and “suckers” of passive drinks. The movie was so real—it was the first time I had thought about it again.

Seeing the film was cathartic. Finally I could talk about it. For all of the heroism, the movie didn't pretend to be more than it was. I didn't talk to anyone about the movie, except Jim (daily dog walking partner). I don't think he wants to see it.

It was even harder to keep my promise to write of my experiences as a watcher and participant. First of all, the screen captures what I saw as a PFC Infantryman (US Army). Iwo is a tear-shaped rock island. The small tip of the tear, Mt. Suribachi, rises to overlook every cranny of the island. The First Marine Division had the task of removing the Japanese whose line-of-sight gunfire covered every square foot of the Marines' landing. The Japanese resistance was unwavering. The photos of dead and dying are terribly real.

I knew absolutely nothing about Iwo Jima, nor did anyone else in our battalion, before we got to the island and saw several hundred Navy ships circling the island to protect the Marines and Army from the Japanese Navy. That was an unbelievable sight. We arrived just prior to the Marines wading ashore. The goal was to put in a temporary airfield just in case an emergency landing was needed for the final invasion of the Japanese main

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islands. Later that summer, from our base on Iwo, we saw the Enola Gay bomber headed for Hiroshima.

The Marine assault began February 16, 1945. Seven or eight days later my company landed under light enemy fire. First things first! “Wade ashore!” “Keep your rifle dry!” “Dig a foxhole!” On a rock island, with limited places to collect sand or soil, it is not surprising that this 26-year-old finished in record time. The quantity of caves, caused by thousands of years of pounding by surf, was considerable.

The caves were the cover for enemy machine guns, frequently with cannon, ammunition and soldiers intent on dying for the Emperor. The Marines had the first task—kill and/or capture the Japanese soldier. The 147th Infantry Battalion had the final job of “closing” each and every open or active cave and sealing them. The Japanese would not surrender. We crawled to the top of each cave, avoiding the enemy spotters in other caves; placed satchel charges of dynamite; crawled back to shelter; detonated the charges, closing the opening. The bodies inside were retrieved much later. I recount these grisly details to partially explain to myself my purposeful forgetfulness. Yes, this is what I did, and it should not be forgotten. I was in Iwo Jima about eight months on patrol, bombing and “closing” the caves where Japanese hid.

During my last three months the Army decided that an Information Center was needed to provide information about home and about Japan. We had radio that was able to pick up stations via the Navy. At last we were becoming more like persons and less like “troops.” Sgt. Citron was put in charge of the Information Center.

When I returned home, it was to the house on Winter Street where my wife, Sara, and my two sisters-in-law, Sylvia and Gertrude, anxiously awaited my arrival. Gertrude was bedridden with child. The wartime housing shortage was solved for us by the kindness of grandfather Ben Solomon. He had previously bought a house as rental property, asked his friends and tenants to vacate, and settled our three families. Harry Altman was awaiting induction, Phillip Schild volunteered for the Air Corps, and I was an early inductee in the infantry.

Needless to say, we were all thankful for a house and yard. Only Lisa, age three, was dissatisfied with confinement to a large, fenced rear yard. Lisa could and did slip out of the yard, no matter what, to wander in the yards of the others.

That first week, returning home to Winter Street was a pleasant dream. All things were now possible. One day, soon after getting back, I got off the streetcar and was walking along in my own dream world, amazed how calm it all was after what I had been through. The houses on the street had stone retaining walls built to hold back the gentle slope of grass and shrubs. I saw a neighbor’s son, about five or six, playing in his front yard. He suddenly turned around with a .22 rifle in his hand, aiming at me shouting “POP”

“POP!” I lost it! I grabbed the rifle—it wasn’t loaded—yelled at the kid and broke the stock over the stone wall. I stormed into our house, grabbed my wife and my daughter and hugged them tightly.

That was my last violent act. Somehow after that I felt better.

**Byron Citron**, born in August 1918, is a student at OLLI, Concord, California, located on the new campus of San Francisco State University, East Bay Extension. A third-generation Californian, Byron attended University of California and later became an arbitrator for employees’ rights.

I recount these grisly details to partially explain to myself my purposeful forgetfulness.

## My Grandmother's Piano

**Diane E. Dreher**

### Abstract

*This story shows how rediscovering a childhood love of music brought greater joy and harmony to the author's life. According to recent research, getting back in touch with our childhood memories can help us rediscover our gifts, making us happier and healthier by filling our lives with greater meaning and vitality.*

Our life's journeys are shaped by choice and circumstance. Events that seem inconsequential can cast long shadows. When we take one road and not another, we often leave parts of ourselves behind.

When I was a child, my grandparents managed the Crown Hotel in Pasadena, California, a residential hotel dating back to the 1930s. During family visits, while the grownups sat talking in their ground-floor apartment, my little brother and I would walk out to the lobby, past the switchboard with its mysterious lights and cables and the sweet scent of my grandfather's pipe tobacco. We'd explore the secrets of the old hotel, wandering through the halls or playing on the carpeted stairs as the chimes of the grandfather clock in the lobby took us back to another time. But most of all I was drawn to my grandmother's piano. Hidden away in her storage closet, covered with a gold Spanish mantilla, the Steinway baby grand waited like Sleeping Beauty for a loving touch to bring it back to life.

When I was five, my father was on a remote Air Force assignment in Goose Bay, Labrador, on the east coast of Canada, so I lived with my mother and brother in Pasadena, where my grandmother was a loving presence in my life. I'd sit for hours on a tall stool in her kitchen, shelling peas, pinching dumplings, and watching her cook. Five foot two in her sling pumps, with shining brown eyes and brown curls, she cooked Southern—biscuits and gravy, ham hocks and green beans, chicken and dumplings, and unforgettable fruit pies. With her joyous spirit and radiant smile, she brought a daily beauty to our lives. My grandmother loved music and Shakespeare and she loved everyone—her family, the hotel guests, the

couple in the shop next door. As her first grandchild, I felt absolutely loved and cherished.

One day, my grandmother found me in the storage closet, reaching up to touch the piano keys. She kneeled down beside me, and her eyes met mine. “Do you want to play the piano, sweetheart?” she asked. When I said “yes,” she smiled, promised to give me her piano and get me lessons, then swept me up in a warm, fragrant hug.

But no. My father was an Air Force colonel, we moved all the time, and my mother didn’t want the piano in her house. So I took ballet lessons in the hotel ballroom, practicing pliés beside the mirrored walls. Moving to the music from an old Victrola, my class was preparing for our first recital. As the smallest ballerinas, we would be flower buds, awakening to *Morning Mood* from Grieg’s *Peer Gynt Suite*. But that year the flowers opened without me. My family packed up and moved to Washington, D.C., for my father’s new assignment. There were no more ballet lessons.

After that we moved to Hamilton Air Force Base in California, Clark Field in the Philippines, and when I was twelve, to Richards-Gebauer Air Force Base in Grandview, Missouri, where my new friend Bonnie Bennett lived down the street. Even though her father was in the Air Force, Bonnie played the piano. She showed me some chords, and we played *Heart and Soul* on the blonde spinet in her living room.

Then one day—I could hardly believe it—my father came home in a blue Air Force truck with two young enlisted men and my very own piano in the back. It was an old upright, its finish chipped and worn, and some of the ivory on the keys was gone. My mother said to put it in the basement. So my dad and the airmen took out all the wooden steps, lowered the piano down with ropes, and pushed it against the wall by the rattan furniture stored from our years in the Philippines. Before they could leave, they had to nail down all the wooden steps again.

My brother and I took lessons from Bonnie’s piano teacher, Mrs. Jones, a patient lady with wire-rimmed glasses and white hair piled high on her head. My brother never practiced, but every day after school, I’d run down the basement stairs to play scales, chords, and songs from the red first grade piano book. A basement is really a terrible place for a piano—the dampness makes it go out of tune—but it became my sanctuary and that old piano was my best friend. Mrs. Jones gave me sheet music—a simplified version of *Liebestraum* and McDowell’s *To a Wild Rose*, and I’d practice for hours, feeling the music flow through my body, loving the sounds from my battered old piano. I was a shy, skinny kid with pigtails, but with my piano, I felt part of something larger than myself, beautiful, inspirational, and strong. The notes echoed through my head and filled my 12-year-old dreams as I searched for my own voice somewhere in the music.

I was practicing for my first recital when my father was transferred again, first for short-term duty at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, then to

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command the 789th Radar Squadron outside of Omaha. I had to pack up, say goodbye to Bonnie—and the piano, my dear piano, was to be left behind. “There’s a piano on the radar site. You can practice there,” my mother told me.

So, after three months in Florida, we moved into our quarters on the radar site, miles out in Nebraska farm country. There were no children my age, and only six houses on the base. Each day, my brother and I would be driven to school in Omaha in a blue Air Force staff car.

That first afternoon, I unpacked my sheet music and walked around the radar site looking for the piano—past the white radar domes and base exchange with its magazines, cigarettes, and candy bars. When I stood in the doorway of the NCO club, I suddenly felt very small. For there was the piano beside the bar, where big men in uniform were talking, smoking, and drinking beer—no place for a girl like me to practice the piano. I turned and slowly walked back to our quarters. That year I retreated to my room with piles of books from the school library. There were no more piano lessons.

Decades later, while writing my book, *Your Personal Renaissance*, I learned how our childhood holds keys to finding greater joy and meaning in life. Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Galileo, St. Teresa of Avila, and other men and women of their time began discovering their gifts in childhood. Reaching out with a child’s curiosity to discover what they were good at, what they loved to do, then keeping faith with their gifts helped these Renaissance men and women live more creatively, developing a sense of calling that brought joy to their lives and new light to the world (Dreher, 2008).

Research has revealed that we all begin discovering our gifts in childhood and that using these gifts helps us live more authentically, becoming healthier, happier, and more resourceful (Seligman, 2002; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Connecting with our gifts helps us navigate through the confusion when we lose our jobs, end a relationship, or retire, moving on to the next season in our personal or professional lives (Dreher, 2006; Dreher & Plante, 2007). We can discover our gifts by taking a signature strengths survey developed by psychologist Martin Seligman and his colleagues (the VIA-IS on [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org)) or getting back in touch with what we loved to do in childhood.

I tried this exercise for myself, thinking of all the places I’d lived as a child, the times I’d moved, the friends I’d left behind. Looking back through the long tunnel of time, I found this lost part of myself that loved to play the piano.

Then came all the inner voices with their bad advice: It was too late—I was a busy college professor—too old—my mother said I’d get arthritis in my hands like she did and wouldn’t be able to play. Buying a piano seemed foolish and extravagant—and what if my mother was right? What if I couldn’t play it at all? But as one small voice grew stronger, an irresistible force drew me on.

So I negotiated with the negative voices. What if I rented a piano to try it out? But even that seemed extravagant. Finally, I took a leap of faith and drove to a nearby music store, where I bought an adult beginning piano book, and wedged a rented Roland keyboard into the back seat of my car. Driving home, I felt like a child on Christmas morning. This would be fun, I told myself, fun I hadn't had for a long time. And unlike all the time I spent being serious and doing things for others—students, family, colleagues, and community—playing the piano would be just for me.

Each day after school I'd practice on the keyboard—learning scales, chords, and simple songs. I found that I could at least physically play the piano, but self-study was taking me only so far. The next step was getting piano lessons. I called the music store, but their piano teacher had only one open 3:00 p.m. slot on Thursdays—right in the middle of my afternoon class. Then I discovered that when we follow our hearts we unleash a powerful momentum. The next Sunday I saw an ad for piano lessons in the church bulletin. When I called, this piano teacher, Veronica, was happy to work with my teaching schedule, and we began monthly lessons on Friday afternoons.

My lessons were just what I needed: instructive, supportive, and soulful. I loved playing Veronica's Chickering grand piano with its ivory keys and rich resounding voice. Then I'd go home and practice on my keyboard. It had sounded good at first, but had no foot pedals, no nuance in its plastic keys, no soul. It was like playing a computer.

Looking for a piano, I spent months searching the web and visiting piano stores. I'd had no idea there were so many different kinds of pianos out there—spinets, consoles, clavinozas, grands; Baldwins, Chickering's, Kawaiis, Kimballs, Knabes, Young Changs, Yamahas, and more. And, like people, each piano has its own voice, some deep and melodic, others thin or metallic. After trying scores of pianos I felt overwhelmed, realizing I didn't know enough about pianos to know what to look for. Veronica referred me to Randy, her piano technician, who would call from time to time, describing used pianos for sale, but they were always too expensive, too far away, or too big to fit into our living room. As the months went by, I practiced on my keyboard and the pianos in the Music Department at school. Gradually my impatience dissolved, becoming faith in a larger process. I told Veronica that somehow I knew my piano was out there, hidden away in some forgotten storeroom.

One day in September, Randy called about a piano for sale up in Burlingame, low priced because it had sun damage and hadn't been played in years. The next day after class I drove up to the showroom filled with gleaming new pianos with their gold accents and sky-high prices. The salesman took me to a warehouse several blocks away. There, all alone, was a baby grand piano, its finish dull and faded, its ivory keys chipped. But as I sat down on the bench and touched the keys, my eyes filled with tears. It had a beautiful voice, a harp-

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momentum.

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like sound that echoed back to another world, when Franklin Roosevelt was president. In that dark warehouse, hidden away like Sleeping Beauty, was this lost soul from another time, a 1938 Steinway S.

After months of refinishing, my piano now sits in the corner of our living room. Gone are the years of neglect and abuse, the cracked finish, scratches, and water stains from the flower pots that had been placed on the lid. With its glowing walnut finish, the piano is like Cinderella, magically transformed, a transformation that includes me as well. For whenever I learn a new chord or work out part of a new song, I feel a childlike joy of discovery, like unlocking the door to another world. Through repeated practice, melodies emerge from the notes on the page, like the forms Michelangelo saw rising from blocks of marble as he chipped away with his hammer and chisel to reveal the beauty hidden within.

Neuroscientists tell us that music releases stored up memories (Janata, 2009). When I play my piano, touching the keys connects me with an earlier part of me—reaching back through the long tunnel of time to when my old piano was my best friend, rediscovering the love that I felt when my grandmother smiled and gave me her piano.

For all of us, memories hold buried treasures, lost in time but not forgotten. What gifts did you pack away when you moved from childhood to adulthood? Did you love music, art, dance, writing stories, playing with animals, exploring the natural world? Getting back in touch with your gifts can fill you with energy, joy, and inspiration, creating new patterns of harmony to grace this vital season of your life.

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**Diane Dreher** teaches Renaissance literature and creative writing, as well as OLLI courses, at Santa Clara University. She lives in Northern California with her husband, Bob; two cats; a dog; a horse; and her piano. Her books include *The Tao of Inner Peace*, *The Tao of Personal Leadership*, *The Tao of Womanhood*, *Inner Gardening*, and *Your Personal Renaissance: 12 Steps to Finding Your Life's True Calling*. Diane can be reached at [www.dianedreher.com](http://www.dianedreher.com).

## Finding My Way to the New Normal

**Michael E. Reid**

### Abstract

*This essay describes the personal journey of a “long-term unemployed” older (50+) professional, who struggled with the reality of his growing irrelevance in a rapidly changing world until he thought “outside the box” and secured a job for which, prior to the recent economic recession, he would have considered himself grossly overqualified.*

One night, almost two years unemployed, I dreamt I was trying to jump back on a carousel that continued to go faster and faster with every turn. The colorful menagerie spun farther and farther out of my reach. The music rose to an unimaginable pitch.

With every attempt I was thrown off, tossed back down to a barren earth. I grew weary and felt less able to get up and try to jump on. In the end I gave up, and the carousel spun off into the distance and out of sight.

I was unemployed for 18 months. Although I was unrelenting in my search for employment, I was painfully unsuccessful, and I am sure a lot of it had to do with being over 50. After my ordination to the priesthood and all that I had done before and since, I was still out of work. While I had no difficulty finding opportunities to volunteer my services, I wasn't able to find paid employment anywhere. The church wasn't even hiring. While I was working, I longed for a time when I no longer needed to. And there I was, finally free, living into my prayer, and longing for it all to be different.

I was totally aware of how being unemployed allowed me to do many important things while looking for my next job. Healing from cancer was perhaps the greatest gift. The discovery of friendships, and the re-discovery of myself had all come as unexpected surprises.

If I had been working it would have been difficult for me to attend support groups and lectures in the late afternoon, volunteer for hospice or sit vigil by the bedside of a dying patient. My OLLI writing circle, spontaneous jaunts to Big Sur, and mid-day walks on the beach had all been priceless.

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I even got back to the gym regularly and found tremendous joy in taking Zumba (at 9 o'clock on Wednesday mornings). Imagine that! And I did some traveling—all the things the experts say you should do in order to keep connected, informed, and sane during a period of extended unemployment, particularly if you are an “older worker.”

It is not as if my partner, Bill, minded my not working. Although our savings were ultimately depleted, our relationship didn't suffer because of it. He didn't bemoan my not contributing financially to the household, or even suggest that I wasn't trying hard enough to find a job. He actually enjoyed the many perks that came with having an overqualified house husband. The dogs even seemed to enjoy my being home.

As a consequence, I was able to shape an unprecedented life experience that, had I been working, would not have been possible. It was a conundrum while living in this sort of dreamscape to also complain about being unemployed. But I felt totally disoriented in a place of lost position and illusive value—a place where all that I was mattered less with each passing day.

I discovered that the inability to find meaningful employment is about the loss of power and identity. It is about surrendering your already tenuous place in a world where change proliferates exponentially—change done to you from the outside in. It's about facing the possibility of mediocrity and your lack of relevance, becoming redundant and feeling useless.

As if being unemployed wasn't bad enough, I think that I was also “fragged.” Apparently, “fragged” is a word now being used to describe the condition of feeling overwhelmed and fragmented. In a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, technology pundits Michael Malone and Tom Hayes suggested that the unrelenting pace of change in today's world has left us all feeling rather overwhelmed, fragmented, “fragged.”

Unlike its use in military vernacular, the term here actually comes from computer jargon that describes the point at which information on your hard drive becomes broken up into a myriad of places and is overwhelmed with too much stuff. Like our hard drives, Malone and Hayes contend that we too have had enough.

Thirty-second commercial spots, broadband Internet, emails, text messages, cable TV, Facebook, tweets, iPods, talk radio, YouTube, smart phones...the list goes on.

I for one was tired of being both fragged and unemployed. I was not financially ready for retirement. Many friends had gone so far as to suggest that I just do anything. But how could I? I spent my whole life consciously getting to where I had just arrived. I had run out of ways to reinvent myself and was very much afraid of becoming “incapable” or “invisible—words that were being used to describe the millions of unemployed people like me.

But slowly I began to seriously consider other ways to cope. Besides cutting back and hanging in, many experts on the “new normal” advised that we should all think creatively—outside of the box, look with new eyes

for opportunities, find the open window and another way in. After all, when things fall apart, it is time to make things new.

So, I finally thought “outside of the box” and asked the rector of the church I had been serving without pay, to consider me for the position of church secretary. After over 30 years, Helen was retiring, and the church would very much need to replace her.

It was reassuring when, after service one Sunday, a parishioner asked if I knew that the church secretary was retiring and suggested I consider applying for her job. Apparently, I wasn’t the only one thinking “outside of the box.”

So, I made the pitch to my rector, and he actually thought it was a rather good idea. It would take the role of church secretary to a whole new level and provide a new priest like me with an inside view of the workings of a parish as well as a paid job.

It made me laugh when I looked up the word “clerk” in Wikipedia and learned that in medieval times, it was the clergy who were educated and qualified for that sort of employment. Consequently, we have the words “clerk” and “clerical” to this very day.

Thank you, Wiki. Now I don’t feel quite so bad. With two master’s degrees and a doctorate, this cleric went back to his medieval roots and now serves as the Associate Rector for Administration—my “new normal.”

Born in 1953 of Jamaican immigrants and raised in his native Brooklyn, New York, **Michael Reid** is an ordained Episcopal priest living in Pacific Grove, California, with his spouse, Bill, and their two Norwich Terriers—Andrew and Emma.

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## My Friend Is Going Away

**Claire Hasselbeck**

My friend is going away,  
returning in bursts of laughter  
when we remember  
to remember.  
Static from her brain intrudes,  
to play a darkening game  
of hide and seek.

I hide too  
from sadness,  
search for familiar connections,  
work hard to keep the sparks between  
us bright and glowing,  
all the while knowing  
my friend is going away.

Raised and educated in Buffalo, New York, **Claire Hasselbeck** worked as a hearing specialist in upstate New York, Northern Virginia, and, while serving in the Peace Corps, Brazil. Answering the call of the potter's wheel, Claire spent the next phase of her life working with clay. However, writing poems has been a constant and important form of expression since her teen years. Her work has appeared in various journals and in *The Washington Post*. She published a chapbook of her poems, *At the Turquoise Table*, in 2010. Claire now resides in Arlington, Virginia, and has been a member of the OLLI Poetry Workshop at George Mason University since 2003.

## Aubade, 1862

**For Thomas Jonathan Jackson**

**Michael McNamara**

The still-dark mountains now  
Drawn up in ranks  
For stand-to at the dawn:  
These roughshod soldiers at reveille  
Just visible after night's long,  
Dark camouflage.  
The light now in those marches  
Along their peaks,  
Moving as implacably  
As a downhill attack  
On a sleeping garrison.

There is no defense, sir,  
Against such beauty  
Here in the Shenandoah.

**Michael McNamara**, a published and award-winning poet, retired as an Army Infantry colonel after 30 years to assist the governments of Turkey, then Bosnia, and subsequently Afghanistan, to upgrade their defense capabilities. He taught college-level English in the UK, the Netherlands, and Northern Virginia. He's now at OLLI at George Mason University where he chiefly lectures on Elizabethan drama, international poetry, and is co-chair of the Poetry Workshop.

## Inclusivity: Journey of Enrichment

**Charlie Delp and Aracelis Rogers**

### Abstract

*The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of South Florida, like most lifelong learning institutes, grew up as an institution comprised of educated, healthy, active, white older adults who, though they did not seek out an exclusive organization, nevertheless found themselves members of a homogeneous, Caucasian group. This paucity of diversity in membership may have given an unfortunate impression, certainly unintended, of a policy of exclusiveness. So three years ago the OLLI at USF made it a priority to recruit members more representative of their broader, more diverse community, and thus become more inclusive. It has taken committee action and champions working within OLLI and the community to shift the organization towards sustained and meaningful membership diversity. Fresh approaches to recruitment and attitudinal changes were required to show even a small but detectable change. The journey and the shift from exclusivity to inclusivity have been challenging, exciting, and enriching.*

Like many lifelong learning institutes, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of South Florida (OLLI-USF) has for years been sustained through a membership of mostly older, white learners of European heritage. A peek into our classes, socials, and committee meetings reveals the homogeneous composition of our membership. Some might say there is nothing innately wrong with that picture, yet many members and leaders felt we were depriving ourselves of the benefits that come from different cultural perspectives. Now, after three years of efforts to create greater diversity, we've tasted what it is like to interact with those who share our thirst for lifelong learning, but from a different slant or belief system. As leaders who believe this will enrich and strengthen our OLLI, that taste has an inviting tang that stimulates our palate for more. We see the inclusion of a more representative membership from our local community as an opportunity to sustain and grow an already strong program. The journey has just begun. We have a long way to go and will undoubtedly learn a lot about ourselves in the process.

Our Learning in Retirement organization (a forerunner to our current OLLI) grew from a committed group of retired folks who enthusiastically invited their friends to join them in the adventure of learning. There were just two or three hundred “look-alikes” when a black physician, Fred Reddy, volunteered to teach classes in history. Dr. Reddy’s *Harlem Renaissance* and *Disease and World History* were well-subscribed and brought a few of “his people” into the classes, but his following dropped away when he became sick and couldn’t teach. It was a serious setback.

On the other hand, the computer classes of a companion program, SeniorNet (the other forerunner to OLLI-USF), seemed to attract a more diverse mix of students. It should be noted that our university in Tampa, Florida, is surrounded by Hispanic, Asian, and Black communities; numerous religions are represented nearby. In contrast, the Learning in Retirement membership was oddly homogeneous.

It is widely understood that lifelong learning institutes in the United States attract generally well-educated, healthy and active older adults who tend to be mostly Caucasian. Developing diversity has been a recurring concern within our OLLI for some time. For years, the topic would surface at leadership meetings and some voiced concern about a membership that does not reflect the area’s ethnic and racial makeup. Occasionally it would even be articulated as a formal goal of the organization, only to be superseded by other goals. Like Maslow’s hierarchy, basic needs (such as the Institute’s survival) came first.

Support from the Osher Foundation allowed us to consider efforts beyond mere survival. After three years of solid effort, we are finally beginning to see positive results from our efforts to draw in the two largest minority groups in our area: Hispanic/Latinos and African-Americans.

In 2007 our Board of Advisors set three major goals, one of which was to “Develop a diverse and multicultural understanding; and to increase participation levels of persons of diverse/multicultural background.” This goal reflected a desire and commitment to study and better understand the related issues. An ad hoc committee was formed, later to become a permanent committee, tasked with understanding what “diversity” and “multicultural” would mean to us. Further, what do we, OLLI, have to offer those diverse communities surrounding our university? The committee was charged to investigate how other groups had achieved success in this arena.

The committee’s first step was to develop new outreach tactics targeting specific groups in the local community. Our traditional recruitment methods of providing speakers, literature, and advertisements to African-American churches and professional groups, for instance, had not resulted in any perceptible change in the composition of our membership.

The new committee found many members who were eager to study and work on the issue. By including Hispanic and Black members on the committee, we soon discovered that the word “diversity” itself had

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Inclusivity:  
Journey of Enrichment

some negative racist implications and was probably best avoided whenever possible. We also learned that some potential and new members of color had felt shunned from the organization, and they helped us to understand in real terms how this had happened. Thus began a growing awareness among our members of how exclusivity can be perceived when one happens to be the outsider. Clearly we needed more sensitivity to the feelings of our minority guests and new members. Our name was changed to the “Inclusivity Committee” to reflect the work of making new members feel welcome and valued.

To our good fortune, the University of South Florida is home to scholars who are authorities on these very issues. We consulted the university’s Office of Multicultural Affairs. Our first contact there was Dr. H. Roy Kaplan, an Associate Professor in the Africana Studies Department and the Executive Director of the Tampa Bay Chapter of the National Conference for Community and Justice for 15 years. Roy has received numerous awards for civil rights, ethics, and humanitarian work for his extraordinary efforts in providing students with alternatives to racial, cultural, and personal injustice. Having authored numerous publications in this area, Dr. Kaplan appeared on numerous radio and TV shows and also served as an advisor on President Clinton’s Commission on Race Relations, “One America.”

Dr. Kaplan led us in small group studies focusing on White Privilege and larger workshops on inclusivity. We discussed the concept that diversity is more than black and white—it’s race, gender, body shape, religion, culture, disability, and more. Under his guidance we examined questions such as, “What makes me different?” One challenge from those meetings was the difficulty we as individuals have in describing times when we were made to feel different, left out, or even threatened. Awareness of those experiences gave the committee more empathy for those who feel shunned.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs at USF promotes cultural diversity in everyday life through activities such as the “Bulls-Eye View Cultural Diversity Awareness Series” for the student body and our OLLI. Two thought-provoking plays, *Faces of America* and *American Voices*, were based on real-life stories and recollections of “true” Americans overlooked in the history books.

The OLLI committee transformed the Inclusivity Working Group into the Inclusivity Team with nearly 100 on the mailing list. Team members were solicited with questions such as, “Is OLLI-USF ready for the mission of becoming inclusive? Why?” and “What needs to be done to accomplish our mission, and what will you do to help?”

Lest we paint too rosy a picture of this journey, we admit that a few on the team expressed impatience with the “self study” and suggested we get on with contacting and attracting new members of color. Later the Board directed that the team be reduced to a dozen of the most active members to function less as an advisory committee and more like a working committee.

Our continuing activities are paying off with hard work and a lot of enthusiasm from many “champions” from within OLLI and out in the community. Champions are those who earnestly believe in a vision of multiculturalism and use influence and personal networks toward this aim. The committee’s co-chairs are among those champions. As former board members and chairs of other standing committees, we found ourselves in positions to promote the vision of inclusiveness. A co-author’s dogged efforts to raise member awareness of this issue have made him a gadfly of sorts at times, irritating those who perceived his efforts as insulting, demeaning, or worse, distracting from the real business of running a 1,200 member and growing institute.

One of our campus champions opened doors for us with the local African-American community and a network of experienced diversity activists. Soon the secretary of the local NAACP was persuaded to attend an OLLI Open House. She wasted no time in signing up for an OLLI life story writing class and started sharing her ideas on outreach to the Black community through effective publicity and personal invitations. Not surprisingly, she joined the Inclusivity Committee and has been one of our most effective recruiters of Black lecturers, faculty, and members. She is an inspiring champion of the inclusivity mission.

The Hispanic community in Tampa was breached through networks accessed by another champion, a project manager in the Provost’s Office at the university. This champion addressed a meeting on how to interact with Tampa’s Hispanic community of Ybor City, home to descendents of Spanish cigar factory workers. She enthusiastically shared ideas and contacts to ensure that the committee’s approach would be effective.

OLLI-USF staff has supported the inclusivity mission and have established new relationships, including satellite programs and venues at other institutions. We now work closely with the Pan American University Women and the Hispanic community at their beautiful historic building, Centro Asturiano de Tampa, venue of two of our most successful marketing and outreach events, weekly lectures, and classes. These new champions promote our programs through their affiliated clubs so that learners of Hispanic heritage are discovering OLLI.

Through the months of planning, contacts, and promotions we have continued to keep all of the other OLLI committees and leadership informed and involved. Our leadership is now thinking in terms of how we can appeal to a more diverse membership. Periodically we have revised or at least reworded our Committee Mission. For example, it was: “To develop an inclusive attitude and atmosphere among OLLI members and increase the representation of persons of diverse/multicultural backgrounds.” With a recent OLLI reorganization, the Inclusivity Committee became a part of the Recruitment Committee and yet another mission statement: “To retain current OLLI members and continue to grow the membership at sustain-

Our name was changed to the “Inclusivity Committee” to reflect the work of making new members feel welcome and valued.

Inclusivity:  
Journey of Enrichment

able levels while increasing cultural and ethnic diversity.” This mission will be accomplished by a variety of activities, including:

- Promoting courses, programs, special events and day trips to attract a diverse audience.
- Facilitating publicity and communications.
- Creating targeted group projects.
- Utilizing a speakers’ bureau.
- Developing methods for monitoring progress.

Our curriculum committee is offering more classes that are attractive to a broader background of learners. Classes on Black and Hispanic history are popular, especially when taught by a person of that background. Starting in the fall of 2008 a class titled “The Inclusive Life” explored various aspects of exposure to people who think and act differently. International students from USF presented themselves and their culture to us. This was followed by similar classes almost every term called “Exploring World Cultures” where USF students from countries throughout the world came to share their beliefs and lifestyles that appear to make us different, while, in so many ways, we are of one. More recently we have recruited Hispanic and Black lecturers and class faculty from new contacts that the committee has made.

Our inclusive attitude guides us to recognize that the diverse individuals, groups, and organizations with whom we are working can provide us expertise and talents—even champions. But we need to avoid the perception of “a bunch of white folks trying to teach us something” and work with the attitude that engenders “our community has something to offer, and we can use your talents and knowledge.” Just as our best recruiting comes from our members, the most effective way to draw in new audiences is to find member(s) of those diverse communities willing to take on the role of champion, and who have the local networks to perform effectively in this role. We recognize that beyond mere outreach to minority communities, OLLI’s programming must reflect the needs and interests of these audiences. Champions can be of assistance here also in locating faculty of color for programs of all types. We have seen it happen, and we see the value of sustained networking.

The change is noticeable. There are more faces of color and more opportunities to interact with students of diverse backgrounds. Although it would be helpful to measure our progress, we have not yet established effective methods of doing this. Some of our members are averse to questionnaires (many refuse to answer the racial/ethnic background questions), and we haven’t determined the best way to ask the cultural/ethnic question. The color criteria can give a visual clue, and our meetings and classes are more apt to have some students of color since our effort began. Our leadership is aware that inclusivity is growing—slowly, surely, and with benefits. We would like to monitor progress, and we will find reliable ways to do so.

Meanwhile, it's exciting to feel the enrichment of diversity as we become more inclusive.

Where will this journey take us? We expect a growing mix in most classes, social events, and committees. We don't expect that to happen with increasing speed or ease. The effort must be an ongoing priority and perhaps be given a budget allocation. Within a few years we expect to see the more traditional pattern of friends bringing in friends to be a more effective and sustaining means of maintaining and growing a diverse membership. We have taken the first steps on our exciting enrichment journey.

**Charlie Delp** was raised in the South, earned a PhD from the University of California at Davis, and had a 32-year career with the DuPont Company in plant pathology research. Then he consulted internationally, served as a fellow on the US House Hunger Committee, and as a Peace Corps volunteer in Samoa. Since 2001 Charlie has volunteered with OLLI at the University of South Florida as faculty, committee chair, and on the Board of Advisors.

**Aracelis (Ara) Rogers**, PhD in Adult Education, has specialized in older adult education since 1994. She has served as Director of the OLLI at the University of South Florida, Tampa, since 2001. Ara also serves as adjunct faculty in the graduate program in Adult Education at USF. She is active in a variety of volunteer organizations in Tampa.

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## Interlude

**Bill Boudreau**

### Abstract

*Having survived the fast-moving, high-tech evolution/revolution from the late 1960s to 2000, a time when personal aspirations rarely blossomed, brought the author to an “interlude,” a phase in his life when he launched deeply rooted desires for self-expression.*

I left the commercial workforce—conventionally labeled “retiring”—in 2000 at age 62 and stepped into a time I had not anticipated would ever occur—a time to explore my aspirations. Since then, I’ve learned and brought my curiosities to fruition at a level, a state of satisfaction, higher than any in my entire professional, corporate career life.

No, I haven’t won a Nobel Prize, or a Pulitzer, or been acclaimed nationally or worldwide. Nor have I been noticed for achievements beyond what I feel in my heart and immediate surroundings—if recognized at all. These are not my expectations, although it would be gratifying if they did occur.

However, finding myself with a mind free to wander, a flame ignited and launched me on the path toward self-actualization—a goal not reached, not even close, during all my working years. Not that the desire to venture into the creative universe did not ferment deep within or was dormant while committed to corporate discipline and realizing the dreams of others. Over the years, prior to leaving the commercial world, in the crevices of my brain I could hear a distant voice saying, “Come rescue me, let me out.”

Today, these attainments do not generate money, and I do not expect that they will in the future. That’s not important to me at this time. I do them because I love the creative process and the challenge of discovering new venues, new settings, new landscapes, and new horizons. It’s what makes me want to get going in the mornings. Even in my sleep, I think of what I’m going to do the next day, how I’m going to do it, how to solve a particular problem, or how I’m going to improve a process. Often a spark becomes a flame in the middle of the night.

As a child growing up in a remote, small fishing village on the southwest coast of Nova Scotia, I had limited exposure and access to American and Canadian mainstream cultures. Even back then, I felt the need for self-expression beyond parochial borders. Immigrating to the United States and becoming a citizen was a significant and fruitful decision. It enabled me to reach a financial state where I do not have to depend on what I do now to sustain a comfortable life.

During this interlude I fill my time writing fiction, creative nonfiction, as well as ballads and love songs in French and English. With guitar accompaniment, I sing vintage melodies to senior groups and at retirement homes, nursing homes, and festivals. Besides playing guitar and singing, I compose music using computer synthesizers and Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI). A legacy from my working days, I still delve into computer systems and software technology. My wife is not without my support in her eBay business: I edit photos and solve system issues. To expand my horizon of knowledge, I attend Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) courses.

In 2000, I plunged into writing and quickly learned that I didn't have the skill to complete an acceptable manuscript, compounding my insecurity about English as a second language. This led me to take creative writing courses. During the past decade, I have completed courses at a local college and various universities and engaged in many sessions under the guidance and scrutiny of teacher Carolyn D. Wall, author of the novel *Sweeping Up Glass*. I participate in writing clubs and workshops. One found me at the University of Wisconsin attending a week-long conference, "Revising the Novel: Building Scene with Subtext and Symbol," facilitated by Laurel Yourke, PhD in English Literature, and author of *Take Your Characters to Dinner*. In June 2010, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at a weekend seminar, "Write, Publish, Thrive in the Digital Age," I listened to presenters, many of them prominent in the book industry. Donald Lamm, for one, is well known in the publishing world where he spent his career as an editor and publisher and is now a literary agent.

In 2006, Booklocker, located in Bangor, Maine, published my first book, *Olsegon: Wolfwood Forest & Massacre Island*, a two-mystery novel set in Nova Scotia. Since then, I have polished two more manuscripts and published them on Amazon.com's CreateSpace. One is *Disharmony in Paradise*, a novella in which a middle-aged man persuades his wife to go on a three-mast sail ship island-hopping cruise in the Caribbean, hoping to mend his troubled marriage. The other book, *Moments in Time*, is a collection of 14 short stories dealing with children's, teenagers', and adults' conflicts and resolutions—some good and some bad.

Presently, I'm working on four manuscripts, each at a different stage of review. The one closest to completion is about a young Iraq war veteran who struggles to find his way amid battlefield memories and nightmares. (One of my grandsons served in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars). The next

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## Interlude

manuscript is a creative-nonfiction book about my life up to the time I came to the United States. The third is a collection of short fiction, and the last is a journal of thoughts that emerged while in the workforce.

Self-publishing my work provides me with the opportunity to develop the entire book—creating the stories, writing, reviewing, editing, and rewriting the text, deciding the size, designing the cover graphic—and see my work posted and available on Amazon.com at practically no cost.

I suppose I should explain why I chose self-publishing. I look at it this way: I'm over 70 and, having learned about how the book industry works, I realize that chances are by the time I can get an agent to accept my work, make the changes he or she recommends, and find a publisher, I could very well be dead.

A few years ago, I discovered OLLI. I don't know how it happened, but OLLI exposed me to fields of knowledge that I was never offered in my technical education. I always wanted to explore non-scientific/engineering subjects and learn about literary arts, philosophy, and other topics. Having heard of great philosophers and writers, OLLI opened doors to a threshold through which I gazed at thoughts that were unfamiliar to me.

OLLI courses at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, introduced me to Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes. I now realize the influence ancient great thinkers have had on modern societies. In addition, I was fortunate to attend classes on great writers of the day, for example Noble Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Although excellent writing, it was a challenge to digest the writer's magic realism and story line. A more current writer, Jhumpa Lahiri, and her novel *Unaccustomed Earth* taught me the intricacies and emotional tension of culture overlap, with which I am familiar to a lesser degree. In the fall of 2010, I heard professors expound on Buddhist philosophy and Islamic religion, and enjoyed reading the enlightening novella *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse.

During another semester I attended OLLI classes at Oklahoma University, Norman, where I learned Greek mythology and how it has rippled into the western culture and myths. At the same time, in another class, I tried to make sense of the novel *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov. The Russian author pulled me into a time and a strange society about which I had very little knowledge.

Although I dabbled in guitar playing, writing songs, and learning old ballads prior to leaving the workforce, it did not carry significant meaning until I entered my interlude for the obvious reason that I had more time, and my mind was not cluttered with capitalist issues.

In the 1980s, while I was working on an MBA, one of my daughters had left an acoustic guitar in the room where I studied. To interrupt long hours of brain-bashing, I picked up the guitar and strummed, starting with simple chords and ballads I already knew. I think that eventually the guitar and songs got more attention than my bookwork! The more I did it,

the more I was drawn into the realm of songs and guitar playing—nothing fancy. It became an escape. Eventually I made the step to perform in front of people.

In time I accumulated roughly 100 songs, including some of my own creation. Vintage ballads, such as *Red River Valley*, always strike a chord among seniors. Delivering an occasional French song seemed to flavor my performances. Places I've entertained are Bradford Nursing Home in Edmond, Oklahoma; Spanish Cove in Yukon, Oklahoma; Canterbury Nursing Home and Assisted Living in Town Village, Oklahoma City. In addition, for more than a decade I've performed at Oklahoma City's early spring Festival of the Arts and have performed at Rose State College's annual "Global Oklahoma" festival of cultures.

Over the years, I've put together a small recording studio in my hobby room where I record songs and compose synthesized music. In the summer of 2010, I home recorded and released on Amazon.com a CD of my own French and English songs. The title, *Wedgeport Inspired*, represents verses and melodies of my heritage. Wedgeport, Nova Scotia, is the place I still call "back home." I hope to complete another CD of computerized arrangements in the not-too-distant future.

I use computers to realize all my projects. Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint) provides a platform for working on my manuscripts; creating business cards, bookmarks, and publicity posters; and keeping track of finances. Adobe Photoshop is my prime tool for constructing book and CD covers.

Another skill I yearn to acquire is using my 10 fingers to type, instead of two. My wife tells me that I'm too old to learn that dexterity of the fingers—we'll see! Back in the 1950s, when typing was offered in high school, it was the misconception by the boys that only sissies took typing. I didn't think I belonged in that category. If only we could see the future!

With all my projects active in parallel, writing is getting the most attention at this time. I love the reviewing/editing/rewriting process, and I've come to believe that there is no such thing as a "final draft."

You never know, though, someday, before I die, I may hit the right note or the right book theme and leave behind a lasting masterpiece.

**Bill Boudreau** is French Acadian and grew up in the small fishing village of Wedgeport on Nova Scotia's southwest coast. He's retired from a long career in software/computer systems and management, and has authored three self-published books—*Olsegon*, *Disharmony in Paradise*, and *Moments in Time*. Bill's story "First Confession" was published in the October 2007 issue of *Seasoned Reader*. Bill and Dorothy, his wife of 53 years, live in Oklahoma City. Bill's web site is [www.billboudreau.net](http://www.billboudreau.net).

A few years ago, I discovered OLLI. I don't know how it happened, but OLLI exposed me to fields of knowledge that I was never offered in my technical education.

## Leaving a Legacy: 40 Boxes and a Course

**Emily C. Richardson**

### Abstract

*The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Widener University has offered a course titled “Leaving a Legacy” for the past three years. The history of the course design, including topics discussed and work completed by the student, is shared through the lens of the instructor. The decision by the faculty member to have the students write a story about one ancestor for the fall 2010 semester resulted in focused research throughout the semester and a product that can be shared with their relatives. The instructor’s product came from opening 40 boxes of genealogy research left to her by her mother.*

### Introduction

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I begin my genealogy class each semester by telling the story to my students about how my own genealogy research started. It is the story of visiting cemeteries throughout the Midwestern United States as part of every summer vacation that I can remember. My mom always gave the kids (my brother, sister and myself) the same task and reward, “Find the tombstone with this person’s name, and you can choose the place for dinner tonight.” For many years I thought that this was the same experience every child had during vacation.

It wasn’t until my mid-20s that I realized these experiences were at the heart of genealogy research. I then began to learn more about genealogy, as my husband and I researched my husband’s ancestors with my mother’s help. The research took us from Montana, the birthplace of my husband, back to Texas, Missouri, Tennessee, and North Carolina in the 1770s. Throughout the process my mother made sure I studied the stories of the relatives, not to just find the documents that established their lineage, but to research the history and background of the era to better understand why people moved or bought and sold land. It was also during this time that I watched her write and publish several articles about our Fox relatives.

Upon her death in 2006, I received 40 boxes and four filing cabinets of

genealogy materials. Pictures, files, documents, and stories—all left for me to learn more about my ancestors.

## The Genealogy Course

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When we started the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Widener University, there was strong interest on the part of the curriculum committee in developing a genealogy course. As the dean of University College, the non-traditional education unit of Widener University responsible for OLLI, I understood the academic importance of finding not just the right courses, but also the right faculty member to teach the course. We searched for over a year for a certified genealogist to teach the course, but had no success. In 2007, two years after opening OLLI, as a result of member urging I agreed to take on the course. This decision was a brave one since my experience in genealogy was based solely on what I had been taught from my mother, having not participated in any formal training. This agreement came with the understanding that we would continue to look for another instructor. Little did I realize that this course would result in my opening the 40 boxes, connecting with my heritage, and discovering my passion for genealogy.

The course has also helped numerous OLLI members discover the stories behind their ancestors. A group of a dozen members has stayed enrolled in my genealogy course during the past three years, and this past fall I made the decision that we needed to actually produce something tangible that we could share with each other and our own relatives. We each agreed that during the semester we would research and write about just one of our relatives. I realized that this would be difficult for many of them, since none of them had direct experience with writing this type of research. But I felt we needed a focus for our genealogy research, and the final product would help the students to concentrate their research for the semester.

During the first class the students were asked to choose a subject, an ancestor, for their writing. I asked them to think about their relatives, who they were interested in knowing more about, and who might have a story worth telling. The students had their own stories about who they were choosing. One student shared a photograph that sparked her interest in her great-grandparents. Her essay, entitled “Ebenezer” begins with the following prologue:

About 1995 my parents showed me two photographs that they had received from my dad’s cousin, Elizabeth Munro. They were not dated, but it was obvious from their dress that the era was the 1860s. I was told they were my two sets of great-great-grandparents, one couple being Hugh and Martha McElroy. A few years later, while looking at them again, I stared into their eyes and said,

Little did I realize that this course would result in my opening the 40 boxes, connecting with my heritage, and discovering my passion for genealogy.

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“I want to know more about you.” That’s how my interest in genealogy started (Smith, 2010, p.1).

I realized that I also needed to write so I could share samples of research and writing with the class. I chose as my subject Caleb Lee, one of my husband’s ancestors who was born in Maryland in 1788 but died in Cass County, Illinois, in 1847. Cass County was in the process of collecting stories for a historical publication, so this gave me added incentive to complete the history.

I also realized that I had several published county histories from the early 1900s in my mother’s book collection, and I brought those to class to show students how their genealogy research could serve others in the future. One such book on the history of Juniata County, Pennsylvania, (Jordan, 1913) offered the following history on one of my direct relatives:

On one occasion, four of the settlers had met at Roller’s (Jacob Roller, Jr.) house for the purpose of going on a hunt for deer. Early in the morning, when just ready to start, Roller heard the breaking of a twig near his cabin. He peered out into the deep gloom of the misty morning, and discovered three Indians crouching near an oak tree. It was very evident that the Indians had not been close enough to the house to ascertain the number within and the inmates were in a state of doubt as to the number of savages. Profound silence was observed and it was resolved to shoot from the window as soon as the light was sufficiently strong to render their aim certain. The Indians were evidently waiting for Roller to come out of his house. At length, when they thought the proper time had come, the settlers gathered at the windows and thrust out their rifles as silently as possible. The quick eyes of the savages saw, even by the hazy light, that there were too many muzzles to belong to one man, and they took to the woods with all the speed they could command, leaving behind them a quantity of venison and dried corn, and a British rifle (Jordan, 1913, p. 225).

The story ends with Jacob dying by the hands of the Indians over 90 years ago, and it is now considered to be part of my family’s history.

The past three years of the class have included lessons on military records, immigration and naturalization research, census records, vital records, web research, DNA discoveries, and land and probate records, to name just a few. Since this group of students had all taken at least one other genealogy class, the focus of this class was on research about a relative of each student. During eight of the 10 weeks of the course, the lesson plan consisted of a short review of a specific topic, and then the students had the opportunity to do research in the computer lab using the library’s member-

ship to Ancestry.com. Or, they could also choose to work on adding their materials to Family Tree Maker, an online genealogy program.

Although I didn't anticipate new findings as a result of the basics, the class that reviewed census records revealed additional information for another student. Jessie was working on the history of her mother-in-law, Jean Lindsay Engan, who was a nurse in Chicago in the early 1900s. She had previously had difficulty finding Jean Lindsay in the 1910 census until she realized that Jean might have been a lodger or boarder while in school. This led to the 1910 census of the Grace Hospital in Cook County, Illinois. There she discovered lodgers (some were nurses in training) as well as inmates (patients). Jessie wrote the following about her mother-in-law, beginning with her immigration:

Jean immigrated to the USA in 1897 when she was 16. She seemed to be alone on the passenger list of the ship that came to New York. She was headed for the Chicago area. Many people came as indentured servants to work for somebody who had paid for their fare to come here. Family lore has it that she worked for at least 7 years for a minister and his family. This is highly likely as her mother's brother, in Ireland, was an Anglican clergyman who would have helped her make a good connection. When she was 27, she entered the Grace Hospital School of Nursing in Chicago. She finished the two-year course in 1910 and became a registered nurse (Engan, 2010, p.2).

Back on campus, trips were added to this semester's course. The class went to the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) in Washington, D.C., as well as the Chester County Historical Society in West Chester, PA, and the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia to look at original documents and hunt for stories. Prior to each trip we spent time on each organization's web site to become familiar with the documents in their collection and to plan our research time. Although the majority of the class attended the trips to the local sites, only six individuals traveled to Washington, D.C.

It was the first visit for most of the researchers to the three Washington, D.C., facilities, and each one opened multiple new avenues of potential research and possibilities for records. In his historical presentation of his grandfather, "The Life of Paul C. Burgdorf," one student stated the following:

A trip to the Library of Congress proves daunting until I located a valuable resource, ProQuest: Historical Newspapers. Knowing some of the details regarding my grandfather's ministry leads me to hope that perhaps somehow, someday, information regarding his ministry will have wiggled its way into the *Baltimore Sun*.

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Typing in his name reveals many citations. Disappointment seeps in as hopeful leads end with statements like, "... and officiating at the wedding was Pastor Paul Burgdorf." Mauled by monotony, somehow I persist. A nugget reveals itself as an article appears with the intriguing title, "Germans Indifferent to Future, Baltimore Clergyman Declares." The article, written September 24th, 1923, matches my mother's memory that her father did a solo journey to Germany in the 1920s. In the column he talks of the great despair that seems to have enveloped Germany following the ravages of World War I and the resulting punitive Treaty of Versailles. The closing lines of the article quotes my grandfather's seemingly prescient gaze as he states, "Among the youth of Germany there is an agitation for a kind of Thermopylae. They say that Germans, having nothing whatever to live for, should make a dramatic end of the business by attacking the French in the Ruhr" (McCahan, 2010, p.2).

I accepted the fact that not all of our OLLI genealogy researchers could take the trip, so I volunteered to spend some of my time in Washington, D.C., doing research for them. One of the students who couldn't travel to Washington, D.C. willingly provided me with details of her great-grandfather in hopes I could uncover additional information. I unfortunately didn't have any additional research success, and in the end she was only able to write her story based on personal knowledge that had been handed down. But, as I explained to the class, any information that is put in writing is critical; otherwise, in the future no one will know the truth.

Jeanne Campbell Murdoch passed away at the age of 39 years old from an accident at home. She was pregnant at the time and no one was home and she hemorrhaged. I am the granddaughter of Peter Murdoch, Alexander and Jeanne's fourth child. My grandfather told the story that they were a strong religious family up until that point. My grandfather said he had no time for religion after the death of his mother. I know for a fact that the other siblings did not share that view (Pastino, 2010, p.1).

During the final two classes of the semester, each student shared their research and what they had discovered about their relatives. When one student shared information about her grandfather, questions from her classmates were plentiful. She told how Michael Knipfing's interest in automobiles was sparked by boarding two Vanderbilt Cup race car drivers, one of whom was Louis Chevrolet, and their cars.

In 1903 he started to sell and service Ford automobiles and by 1906 he was one of the first fully authorized dealers of Ford Motor

Company. The dealership operated until 1972 when it was sold by one of his sons. In 1926 Ford Motor Company began to reorganize. They were producing very few automobiles and trucks. In order to make up for lost sales, Michael started to manufacture his own tractor, which he owned several patents on. One of the first golf type tractors, the “Knipfing Tractor,” had two transmissions, one of which was invented by Michael. Some of the more notable customers of the Knipfing Tractor Company were The Wimbledon Tennis Club in England and the Rajah of India, as well as numerous sales in this country. In 1928, Ford resumed full production of cars and Michael discontinued manufacturing the Knipfing Tractor (Pahides, 2010, p.3).

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### Final Thoughts

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Everyone shared their research, although not everyone had a final written product at the end of the semester. Some students admitted getting stuck and realized that they needed more research before beginning to write. Others felt that although that had all of the pieces, the art of writing was causing them trouble. This revelation has resulted in some of the group agreeing to meet several times during the spring to discuss their progress and share their research.

I realized that writing gave everyone in the class a common goal, and at the beginning of the semester we all felt that we had a lot of work to accomplish. Chris said it the best at the end of her paper: “Thank you Emily for sharing your knowledge and passion for genealogy with our class. It has been exciting and rewarding to actually find information to substantiate these stories. Since finding one answer leads to several more questions, this family history detective gig should keep me busy for many years to come!” (Stedman, 2010, p.4).

I couldn’t agree more with her comments. Teaching genealogy has shown me that I love the search, and helping others find their ancestors has become a new hobby. Teaching has provided me the opportunity to delve into my own ancestral history, and has created the impetus to open the 40 boxes my mother left me. Focusing on one individual and developing a written document about that individual’s life resulted in many of the 12 students having a product that they can share with their relatives.

### One Treasure From 40 Boxes

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For me, opening one of the boxes left by my mother resulted in finding another, a small linen box that revealed over 30 letters written by my mother’s father during World War I while he was stationed in France. The letters were originals, complete with blackened sentences where the censors had made decisions about what stories would come back to the United States.

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In addition to these letters, I discovered eight pages of notes my grandfather had handwritten upon his release from the war about what really happened in France on the Hindenburg Line during 1917, as well as pictures purchased after the war, produced by the United States as part of the American Expeditionary Forces. The letters, pictures, and his notes have been transcribed and shared with my brother and sister, and they are my legacy for future descendants. I leave this article with my prologue to his story.

All of this (letters, photos, and handwritten notes) told a story of a young man sent to war, leaving behind his family, his sisters and his future wife, and entering an unknown land and life. The writing depicts a man who deeply cared about his family, and didn't hesitate to disagree with the actions of others. What amazed me as I read and transcribed these letters was this man was unlike the grandfather I remember. Instead, I think of a man of few words, who rarely talked about himself or his life. I was surprised and thrilled to find a certain elegance in his words. What I was not surprised about was his absolute love and care for his family and his future wife. I hope that you enjoy this small story of a farmer (Richardson, 2010, p. 2).

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**Dr. Emily C. Richardson**, a tenured faculty member, is Dean of University College at Widener University. Emily helped Widener University open its fourth campus, home of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, in Exton, Pennsylvania, in 2004. OLLI at Widener University has over 600 active members, offering 50+ courses during both the fall and spring semesters, one of which is genealogy. Her mother was a professional genealogist, and thus Emily has been involved in researching her family history for years.

## Life Stories, Autobiography, and Personal Narratives

**Robert Atkinson**

There are certain elements of life storytelling that are like soul making, or the forging of our inner lives. What we often discover in the process is the timeless in our lives. Remembering who we are at our depths can be an opportunity to focus on what is most meaningful, most lasting, in our stories and our lives.

Life storytelling can be a method, a way of seeing more clearly what cannot, should not, be forgotten. Telling the story of the life we have lived thoroughly and deeply shows us the powerful presence of archetypes, those common elements of being human that others, throughout time and across all cultures, have also experienced in their lives.

When I sat down with Fred Brancato to help guide him through the telling of his life story, he was completely open to the opportunity—and the experience—and we were both transported to a timeless realm where all that mattered, where all that existed during those moments, was the personal truth passing between us. We quickly became lost in an eternal moment of remembrance, reflection, meaning making, gratitude, transcendence, and sacred storytelling. We became connected through one consciousness.

Fred Brancato has lived a rich and accomplished life—from professional baseball player to seminarian to teacher to author to board member—yet he is most of all a humble lifelong learner, not only willing but needing to still take a more in-depth look into the mysteries of his own life. After barely graduating from high school in the Bronx, and while playing baseball in the South and experiencing first-hand the segregation of the 1950s, he began to read on his own in the fields of philosophy and religion, and this led him toward a life of learning for the love of it.

As he listened to himself let the story of his life unfold, he recognized a number of core life themes that made it even clearer to him that there had been some significant obstacles he had overcome in his life. He even

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began to get a sense of something that was carrying him along, the right people coming along in the right place at the right time doing exactly the right thing for him. Identifying these themes, these threads in his life, tying them together and connecting them in ways he had not thought of before, added a much deeper meaning to his life. This is lifelong learning at its best, and fullest. Fred's personal experience has clearly borne out the OLLI philosophy and mission in a variety of rewarding ways for him.

For many more intriguing life stories to browse through, or for the interactive protocol to help you or anyone you know tell their life story, be sure to take a look at the Life Story Center web site: <http://usm.maine.edu/olli/national/lifestorycenter/>.

**Robert Atkinson** is Professor of Human Development at the University of Southern Maine. In his role as Associate Editor Bob conducted Fred Brancato's life story interview and all the other life stories that have been published in earlier editions of *The LLI Review*.

## Carried By Something I Didn't Quite See

**Fred Brancato**

I was born in the South Bronx on January 4th, 1938. My maternal and paternal grandparents were from Italy. It seems that my maternal grandfather fled to this country to escape the Sicilian Mafia. As the story goes, his family had horses, and one of the members of the Mafia wanted my grandfather's coveted horse. When he refused, an argument ensued and my grandfather reputedly killed the Mafia member...not a good thing. Thus, he fled to Manhattan through Ellis Island. He brought my grandmother to New York after he established himself by opening a tailor shop and then a grocery store on Manhattan's East Side. He eventually had a house built in the north Bronx, which is where I grew up.

My paternal grandmother came from southern Italy, and there is much in her history that's shrouded. She refused to reveal to my father and his brother and sisters who their biological father was, or even what part of Italy she came from. My father loved his stepfather, and at birth I was given his name, Ferdinand. Later, perhaps at the age of seven, I began to be called Freddie by my family rather than Ferdie, and I've always assumed it was because it was more "American." I remember being kidded about my name by the other children in elementary school after we read the story of Ferdinand the Bull. I always identified with the story, and in some ways wished the name had stuck.

I had the good fortune to attend a wonderful public high school in the Bronx, named after DeWitt Clinton, the sixth Governor of New York. It had quite a few alumni who became prominent in the entertainment and sports arenas, including Burt Lancaster, Neil Simon, and Eddie Lopat, a pitcher for the Yankees. As an all-boy school of 6,000 students, it was special because it made room for teenagers of every orientation and background. There were those who went to Harvard, and those like me who barely graduated. I grew up in a family atmosphere that was not at all academically oriented, and no college would accept me because my grades were so poor. When I think back, I marvel at how life unfolds. Today I

As an all-boy school of 6,000 students, it was special because it made room for teenagers of every orientation and background. There were those who went to Harvard, and those like me who barely graduated.

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have a PhD, am continually doing research, and have had a book published with wonderful reviews. But that's getting ahead of the story.

I have wonderful memories of Clinton—so many of its teachers, coaches, moderators, and administrative personnel were generous, kind, and accepting of their students. I learned first-hand what a difference in a young person's life a caring adult can make.

I remember becoming interested in sports at a young age, and Clinton High School was the right place in many ways. While I played baseball, basketball, and ran track, I had special ability in baseball as a pitcher. I was first approached by a major league scout at the age of 15 after pitching a high school game, and I can still hear his words, "You throw hard, son, and I'm going to be following you until you graduate." When I graduated, I signed a contract to play professional baseball in the Philadelphia Phillies' minor league system.

The experience of playing professional baseball in different parts of the country was life changing for me. While I grew up in New York City, my exposure to other parts of the country was nil. As a kid growing up in the Bronx, I almost felt I that I had left the country when I first travelled to Brooklyn to play a championship baseball game at Ebbets Field, home of the then Brooklyn Dodgers. Two years later, in 1956, I was going to Georgia to play baseball in the segregated south. It was quite a shock to me and other ballplayers from the North to see and hear of the Ku Klux Klan making its rounds at night. I vividly remember being among a handful of ballplayers who were shown the sights around the town of Tifton, Georgia. One of those sights was a tree where the residents proudly told us they hanged a black man for making some kind of remark to a white woman. I and the other ballplayers in the car were stunned. It was many years later that a book was published chronicling all the hangings that took place. It was deeply distressing that the black ballplayers on our team could not stay or eat with the white players in the towns we played in. It was a very disturbing education for me about the awful reality of racism.

It was during this time of playing baseball and traveling a great deal that I started to read something other than the sports page. A whole new world opened up for me as I began reading books on philosophy and theology. The combination of becoming very interested in the writings of the spiritual masters, a major injury to my pitching arm, and the draft board breathing down my neck led me to another world radically different from ball parks and locker rooms.

In 1959 I entered a seminary to study for the Catholic priesthood. The Archdiocese of New York would not accept me because of my poor grades, but a local parish priest in the Bronx convinced the bishop of North Carolina that I was worth a try. Less than one percent of the population in North Carolina was Catholic, and the bishop had to draw upon prospects for the priesthood from around the country. He sent me to a campus semi-

nary at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa—coincidentally one of the towns in which I played baseball—where I completed my first two years of college with considerable tutoring from seminary friends. Among other things, I had to learn Latin without initially knowing what an adjective or an adverb was. Gradually, I progressed from D's and C's to B's and A's.

From Loras College I went to St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, the oldest seminary in the United States, located in a red-light district in the heart of Baltimore. On its grounds, surrounded by a high stone wall with broken glass imbedded along the top to keep neighbors out more than keep us in, were two very significant buildings in addition to the seminary itself. One was a beautiful chapel with the status of a national landmark because of its perfect gothic architecture. I loved singing Gregorian chant there. The other was the home and first school of Mother Seton, founder of the Sisters of Charity. The seminary building itself was wonderfully old, with very wide corridors and high ceilings to name just a few of its characteristics.

It was at St. Mary's that I learned to study philosophy in Latin, although not always clear about what I was reading. Here I was, this once barely literate young man, reading Thomas Aquinas in Latin! Who'd a thought? It was here too that I was given the job of head waiter, with responsibilities for coordinating the flow of meals to the refectory for about 250 seminarians and 40 priests, and managing the kitchen where cloistered nuns from Germany cooked the food. I remember having a crush on a young nun who washed the dishes and with whom I never spoke. There are so many wonderful memories I have from my days there. After completing the study of philosophy, I was sent to St. Mary's other location in the suburbs of Baltimore to study theology and had the benefit of studying under Biblical scholars at a time when there was much ferment taking place in Biblical research.

It was after my first year of theology that I realized the priesthood was not for me. I didn't want a life of celibacy or to work in the institutional church. I left the seminary while continuing to study philosophy and theology on my own. My interest in the mystics and diverse spiritual traditions continued to deepen throughout my life and through a variety of careers.

When I returned to the Bronx fresh out of the seminary, I got a job in social work as a case aide in the South Bronx. After working in that capacity for two years, I moved on to become a Latin teacher for the next 10 years in Cardinal Spellman High School, which was a highly academic and competitive Catholic school. One of my students was Sonia Sotomayor, now a Supreme Court justice. While teaching at Spellman High School, I led an effort to organize the teachers of the 15 high schools that were part of the Catholic Archdiocese of New York to improve salaries and medical benefits. Cardinal Spellman, who was head of the Archdiocese—the same Cardinal Spellman whose name adorned the school where I taught—refused to recognize us for collective bargaining. We had to win legal

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recognition through a vote conducted by the State Labor Relations Board. I remember us picketing the chancery office adjacent to St Patrick's Cathedral. Our signs called on the Archdiocese, and the Cardinal himself, to practice what the papal encyclicals preached about the rights of workers. I had learned about papal encyclicals in the seminary. We ultimately won a great agreement for teachers, nearly doubling their salaries and gaining good health benefits. I'm happy to say that the same union is still very active.

After leaving Spellman High School I taught in an alternative public school for runaway youth, located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I lost that job in 1975 because of major funding cuts when New York City fell into bankruptcy. However, this led to a fortunate two-step transition in my career which affected my life in many ways. I got a plum of a job working for the New York Foundation, which gave approximately two million dollars annually to programs for youth, the elderly, community development, and civil rights, among others. As I screened proposals, visited with applicants and helped the board make decisions about which programs to fund, I learned a great deal about different types of services and met many wonderful people. However, after working there for five years, I no longer found the job fulfilling. Working at a foundation is a great job in many ways, but the connection to actual services and the people who provided them felt tangential to me. I wanted a project of my own.

I then got a job as the executive director of The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, a child welfare association which represented 135 of the voluntary not-for-profit organizations in New York City and State that provided foster care, adoption, and community-based preventive services to over 100,000 children and families. It was a rather big job within the field of child welfare services. Oddly enough, while other applicants for the job had extensive experience in child welfare services and were prominent in the field, I got the job in large part through the advocacy of representatives from the Archdiocese of New York, who were the very same people who sat on the other side of the bargaining table in my union organizing days at Spellman High School. They became behind-the-scenes supporters of my candidacy for the position. Who can figure? It seems the Council, which had the CEOs of large religious federations of service providers on its board from Catholic Charities, the Protestant Federation, and the Jewish Federation, were looking for someone to unify their members and effectively negotiate boilerplate contracts with New York City for children's services, as well as advocate for sound public policies for families.

As the Council's executive director, I helped form and frame its public policy positions and advocated with local, state and federal governments. In the process I formed many close working relationships with people at all levels. Our essential purpose in all that we did was to keep children safe and to secure the kinds of nurturing services that would help them live happy and meaningful lives.

I retired from the Council in 2000 after being there for 20 years and did some modest consulting work in the areas of race relations and organizational development before moving to Maine when my wife accepted the job as CEO of a community-based mental health agency in Portland. This led to my involvement in OLLI at the University of Southern Maine as a teacher, board member, and student. I also taught courses in the University's continuing education program related to Eastern philosophy, world religions, and Tai Chi. I've been practicing Tai Chi for 23 years and teaching it for seven.

My wife and I met through our involvement in a national association of state association executive directors in the field of child welfare. She was the executive director of the Texas association of child caring agencies, while I was her counterpart in New York. It's a very happy second marriage for both of us, and between us we have five children and six grandchildren. I could go on and on about our beautiful marriage and the wonderful way we met, but suffice it to say that my marriage to Leslie is the most meaningful experience in my life.

For more than 50 years now, I've continued to study diverse spiritual traditions. I continue to be delighted and amazed by how common themes emerge from the mystics and sages of diverse spiritual traditions. These common experiences and core themes that go beyond culture and language surface all the time in new and different ways for me.

When I retired, I thought I'd write a book that synthesized and traced these common themes through each tradition, but just like my doctoral dissertation which went over 600 pages, the manuscript kept getting bigger and out of control. It was fragmented and lacked a unifying focus to bring it all together. And then, by happy circumstance, I was asked by OLLI to give a second two-hour lecture on world religions in its very well-attended SAGE lecture series. I didn't want to repeat what I had done the previous year, so I thought, "Well, what's significant for the people who would attend? Oh, maybe I'll apply the common world views of the mystics and saints to the experiences of aging." I decided to explore how the evolutionary process of aging is so connected to a spiritual journey, and how the themes underlying the world's diverse spiritual traditions have great significance for retirement, aging and loss. I used this as the unifying theme for the lecture, which was very well received.

I wrote *Ancient Wisdom and the Measure of Our Days* based on the SAGE lecture at OLLI. It's about the spiritual dimensions of retirement, aging, and loss. It was published last summer and has had wonderful reviews. It's all been good, and I'm very grateful. This is where I am right now. I continue to study, write, teach, practice Tai Chi, and learn to play the piano.

It's good for me to think about life themes, even apart from this interview. What I'm thinking of as we're talking is how in so many ways I was carried by something I didn't quite see in my life at the time. There were certain people at various times who changed my life by their presence and

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who they were as people, their interest in me, and the things they did. I'm sure the ones who are still alive have no idea what impact they had upon me. It's almost as though they were the vehicles of some cosmic hand that shaped my life.

Looking back, I'm thinking of my high school baseball coach and guidance counselor. I'm thinking of my track coach. I'm thinking of our band instructor. And I'm thinking of my high school chemistry teacher who, when he saw I was not interested in chemistry, told me I didn't have to come to class and could go to baseball practice early. When I'd see him in the halls, he'd ask with a warm smile how my pitching arm was doing, and, at the end of the semester, gave me a passing grade. Thinking about what he did, I grin and feel warm inside for some reason. Perhaps it's because at some level I think he really saw me, acknowledged where I was in life, accepted me, and was confident I'd do fine in life. He may or may not have consciously thought these things, but upon reflection I felt he did. If he's still alive he has no idea about the significance of his action. How far a simple, kind gesture can go. I once got a message from a high school student I taught and coached about how much he appreciated the fact that I did not "chew him out" for being picked off second base in a baseball game. He communicated this to me 25 years later. It was something I never thought about.

I think, too, of the local priest, Father Melican, who helped me get into the seminary and was most caring when I left. There was also a priest in the parish at the time who affected me in another, beautiful way. His ability to be totally present and given to what he was doing was quite remarkable. I've not experienced anything quite like it. He was an inspiration on how to live and be. I remember watching him put on his robes and vestments in the sacristy in preparation for Mass from where I was in the church—the sacristy door was open on a hot day. The image has stayed with me because of how fully he was in his actions as he put on the robes, tied the cincture around his waist, and placed the alb. It was like witnessing a sacred act. He died of cancer a year later at the age of 37. I remember the pastor describing him after his death as "the most noble Roman of them all."

These are just a few of the experiences I've had of people who moved me in directions I might not have otherwise taken just by being who they were. There were many such people and experiences that followed throughout my life. In addition to my life being shaped by and influenced by the people I had the chance to know, I'm struck by how my life took certain turns and was shaped by circumstances that presented themselves beyond my imagination. For example, the New York City bankruptcy crisis led to massive funding cuts that cost me my teaching job. This set a radically new direction for me as I fortuitously got a foundation job. Through the people I got to know in foundation work I learned about the opening for the executive director's job of the child welfare association. I was encouraged by them to apply and one of them, whom I got to know well,

was the CEO of Brooklyn Catholic Charities and on the search committee. His advocacy and the advocacy of the people in the Archdiocese whom I challenged as a teacher's union organizer were instrumental in getting me the job. Most important, had I not been given the job, I never would have met my wife who is the love of my life. We both feel we were meant to be together. When I trace the trail that brought us together and reflect upon all the turning points, I feel like a bigger hand was at play.

If I had to say anything, I feel very fortunate and grateful for all I've been given. I felt this way upon my retirement. I feel this way now. Even with my book, so much has influenced it, and so much has been given. The response has been wonderful and unexpected. People have read it more than once and are using it as a spiritual guide for their experiences of aging and loss. Even the editor for the publisher, when she first read it, expressed how much she liked it and looked forward to buying it for her family when it was released. I remember being prepared to send the manuscript to a hundred publishers and being both surprised and delighted when the third one accepted it. And when I think about this, I think of how the request from OLLI to do a second lecture on world religions led to my finding a focus for the book I had been writing for years. Had OLLI not made that request, I'd be on the nine-hundredth page of a fragmented book going nowhere. Instead, I had a small book published that made both the local bookstore and the publisher's top seller lists. I'm in the process of writing a second book on what the common themes of the world's diverse spiritual traditions have to say about change, loss, and death and their relationship to life. The subject of this book has also been influenced by the interests of OLLI students.

In response to your question, the first thing that comes to my mind about retirement is to stay open. Retirement is a very special time to explore and discover new things in life, one's own place in life and its significance. I like the Hindu description of retirement as the "forest dweller" stage of life because it suggests a time away from the hustle and hassle of the work world and affords the opportunity to explore paths not traversed before. With none of the usual street signs and road maps, a person is forced to rely on and follow his or her internal compass. It can be a scary time when the personal capabilities and self images we've always depended on begin to abandon us. However, this paring down, this stripping away of younger capabilities and identities offers new opportunities for growth and expansion unique to the time and circumstances in which older persons find themselves if they stay open. And for me personally, the greatest growth and expansion is to love more deeply and in ways I haven't before. If I had to give a message, it would be this one. And it's not academic.

In addition to my life being shaped by and influenced by the people I had the chance to know, I'm struck by how my life took certain turns and was shaped by circumstances that presented themselves beyond my imagination.

## Blue Ford

**Wendy Cleveland**

With rounded layers of hub and hood  
she sits beside the barn like a beached whale  
her baleen grill now swallowing weeds  
sprouting up and around her rusted hulk.  
I love the symmetry of her large headlamps  
and eyes of windshield split with chrome,  
glass now clouded like cataracts.  
In her day she must have been a beauty,  
a cerulean workhorse with her open flatbed  
hauling baskets of peaches and pecans  
to Savannah, Tybee, Beaufort.  
I glance inside, see the saggy seat  
spewing soft white padding, smell  
blue chicory flowers fisting a torn floorboard,  
their bitter perfume tempered with oil and grease.  
What hands, scarred and gentle on the wheel,  
angled her cab just so in the soft grass  
under the barn's slatted caves and out of the rain?

**Wendy Cleveland** earned an MST from the University of New Hampshire and taught high school English for 30 years before retiring to Auburn, Alabama, where she now mentors Auburn University student athletes. She is a member of the Alabama Writer's Forum. Her poems have appeared in journals and magazines including *Ithaca Women's Anthology*, *Yankee*, and *Red Rock Review*.

## Getting Up There

**Barry R. Berkey**

First my joints, then my sight,  
Getting old is a hellava fight.

I got wrinkles and blotches all over my skin,  
Another battle I ain't gonna' win.

My memory's slippin', my mind's not so sharp,  
But I'm still breathing, no reason to carp.

My body has shrunk, my muscles are mushy,  
If I'm not careful, I'll fall on my tushie.

My bones have grown soft, and so have my teeth,  
But I ain't ready for no funeral wreath.

**Dr. Barry Berkey**, a freelance writer and physician, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Washington and Jefferson College and received his MD from the University of Pittsburgh. He has had eight books published (some co-authored with his wife), four for adults and four for children. His writing has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Continuum Reviews*, *Stitches*, *Human Sexuality*, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, *The Poet's Domain*, and other places.

## Learning Through Art: Experiencing Challenge

**Clare B. Fischer, George L. Hersh, Susan E. Hoffman, and  
Sandra N. von Doetinchem de Rande**

### Abstract

*“Learning through Art” was a project that emerged from the OLLI @Berkeley “Learning to Learn” Interest Circle in the summer of 2009. More than 30 Interest Circle members explored their own learning styles and strengths, and explored the newest research in neuroscience and aging in order to seek ways of applying that science to their own everyday lives.*

The Interest Circle learned that a healthy diet, sleep, emotional support/ social interaction, physical exercise, and a positive mindset are all critical to healthy aging and cognitive fitness. Further, the OLLI Circle learned about the role of “challenge” and “engagement” in the process of neurogenesis, or the development of neural pathways in the brain. Both for the development of cognitive reserves and memory, and for real or “deep” learning, older adults need to challenge themselves with new and varied experiences. Some experts refer to this as a process of prompting cognitive uncertainty; others see it as changing habits of mind, or taking ourselves outside our comfort zone. While science seeks to better understand the cognitive outcomes through longitudinal studies, what is known about the experience of challenge in learning among mature learners? Is it an experience of growth or engagement, or does a challenging experience foster retreat to the familiar?

This essay presents the early findings of a study of challenge undertaken by OLLI, with a particular focus on the role of the visual arts in providing challenges at once aesthetic, emotional, personal, and political. In the summer of 2009, the Berkeley Art Museum (BAM) installed two exhibits that were promoted as challenging. One exhibit featured Fernando Botero’s oil paintings based on torture at Abu Ghraib; the other was as an

installation of Ari Marcopoulos' photography of extreme sports, suburban living, and the battered bodies of his young athlete sons. The BAM exhibitions proved to be an exciting opportunity to explore how a small group of OLLI participants might report their respective experience of challenge as a consequence of viewing these exhibitions. Recalling Susan Sontag's dictum that good art has the capacity to make us nervous, we asked the Learning to Learn Interest Circle to participate in a project exploring what was challenging to them when they viewed the exhibits.

### Viewers: Who Were They and How Did They Participate?

A preliminary inquiry was sent to the OLLI Learning to Learn Interest Circle inviting them to participate in the project. The participants, a self-selected subset of OLLI members and one faculty, were provided an initial survey to complete. Professor Gerald Mendelsohn of Psychology at UC Berkeley who had taught at OLLI, assisted with the preparation of both surveys and served as the lead for the approval process with Berkeley's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. Participants were asked to complete this initial online survey that probed their prior art experience—as artists, art historians, museum/gallery goers. This information was instructive and suggested some significant differences among the 27 respondents (25 from OLLI and 2 from Kaiser Permanente). Half of the respondents to the pre-survey reported earlier instruction in the practice of one of the visual arts, approximately two-thirds had taken academic courses in art history, and another two-thirds showed a strong interest in modern art. An overlapping one-third showed a strong interest in contemporary art, the locus of the two exhibitions used in the study. About 45 percent were familiar with the work of Fernando Botero. Only a small number were similarly familiar with the work of Ari Marcopoulos. It is noted that prior art knowledge was a potentially significant indicator of “comfort zones” for the viewer.

The Museum made it possible for the participants to view the exhibits without charge. They were instructed to enter the exhibit and choose an individual artwork that they found immediately difficult or challenging, then to spend time engaging that work and track their own responses to it over time, and then complete an exit survey that captured their responses to the work (and to themselves)

Questions emerged from the responses. Was the exposure to art prior to viewing the two BAM exhibits important? Would there have been expressions of greater dislocation and provocation had the viewers little or no art knowledge? Conversely, did our participants' degree of experience lead them to deeper engagement? Further, responders might have been asked about preferences with respect to painting, photography, and video representation. To what extent were taste and familiarity factors in the

...the OLLI Circle learned about the role of “challenge” and “engagement” in the process of neurogenesis, or the development of neural pathways in the brain.

## Learning Through Art: Experiencing Challenge

experience of challenge? If challenge is linked to exposure to novel images and styles, how important is the notion of reaching beyond the already known? To what extent is the viewer perceiving and judging material that extends the continuum of learning experience? These inquiries and others led OLLI staff to consider how to assess the information secured from both surveys.

Two forms of analysis emerged and became the basis for the creation of a “team” of interpreters/analysts. A formal analysis of the survey data was undertaken by Sandra von Doetinchem, a graduate student researcher and one of four interpreters on the team. (These survey instruments, findings, and graphs are all available through the OLLI@Berkeley web site ([olli.berkeley.edu](http://olli.berkeley.edu)) under Resources. Susan Hoffman, OLLI@Berkeley Director, who facilitated the Learning to Learn Interest Circle, consulted with Sandra and two OLLI volunteers who agreed to prepare a substantive analysis based on the participant/observer approach. George Hersh, a psychologist, and Clare Fischer, a sociologist (see biographies at end of essay), are members of OLLI and completed all of the requisite steps of the project. Initially, they had agreed to read the survey data summaries in an effort to assess how well the core question of the study was conveyed. Did the survey clearly report whether viewer/participants experienced a challenge in attending to the creative works of both artists? They agreed that the survey responses offered a remarkable array of testimonies and deserved closer study of the prose texts. The review that follows is in their voices.

### Approaching the Texts

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The co-authors of the following discussion (Clare and George) volunteered to analyze the prose texts provided by the respondents. The materials available to us were the texts of the study structure, the exhibits which were the objects observed, the compiled survey texts provided by the participants, our memories of our experiences, and the initial analytic study of responses. Our approach included review of the prose responses, including our own respective commentary. We found that extensive life experience informed many responses and provided a wealth of insight about art learning.

We sought to respect the participants’ texts while taking into account our respective experiences as viewers of the exhibitions, respondents to the survey, and as analysts of the insights embedded in the survey texts. In short, the analysis that follows reflects, in part, participant-observer method. Participant-observer studies are familiar procedures in anthropology, sociology, and psychology. In considering this approach, we found Susan Krieger’s recent study, *Traveling Blind* (2010), useful in her recognition of the value of the first-person approach in acquiring academic knowledge. The participant observer does not contaminate information, she

asserts, rather subjective experiences “inform about larger social processes” (p.2). We follow Krieger, picking up threads after information has been gathered, without prior personal preparation or formed intention. Further, we describe the event as a staged process that includes our respective articulations of meaning drawn from the survey text.

Our analysis includes our personal responses to the two art exhibits, our further responses to the prose comments from the study surveys, and our attempts to understand and characterize the diversity of these responses in light of the core concern regarding the function of challenge in learning. Included in our observations are preliminary thoughts about the respondents’ experience of material that expresses novelty and diversity.

...the concept of “challenge” has many aspects and many levels of meaning.

### The Glance and Vision: Challenges of Visual Art

Scientists such as Professor Marian Diamond of UC Berkeley’s Integrative Biology Department have believed in neurogenesis, the ability for people at any age to grow new neural pathways, so our study began with the question of proper stimulation, or what neuroscientists are calling “challenge.” Such challenge usually requires a prolonged and consistent effort. No brief experience can guarantee a subsequent continuous alteration of levels of performance and comprehension. The challenge presented by a single brief experience (for example, exposure to unexpected content or to an unfamiliar mode of expression), can act more as an evocation of existing coping mechanisms than as a training ground for new development. Yet, even brief exposure to the challenge of the unfamiliar might enable the viewer to see an area to be explored, an opening to a potential new extended challenge of the form that can induce positive growth and beneficial neural plasticity.

In short, the concept of “challenge” has many aspects and many levels of meaning. The challenge experienced in the “glance” can be a component of the challenge created by reflective “vision.” We will examine, to the extent that we can identify them here, some of the strategies used by members of our group in response to a pair of artistic challenges, the two art exhibitions that were obviously not intended to be comforting or familiar.

### The Event: Looking and Assessing Experience

The Learning through Art project can best be understood as a staged process. Participants accepted the task of viewing two exhibitions on the same occasion. No instructions were provided or descriptions given about the exhibited material except that one of Botero’s paintings and one of Marcopoulos’ photographs/or video was to be selected for focused viewing. There is no certainty that all of the participants followed this request. Answers, for the most part, offer general assessments although particular images are referenced. The exhibitions were adjacent to one another, and

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viewers could begin with one or the other display. It is notable that several respondents regretted beginning with the Botero paintings.

Botero's works included a large series of sketches and paintings inspired from the artist's reading of Seymour Hersh's 2004 *New Yorker* article on the prison conditions of Abu Ghraib. According to the curator's text, Botero completed this work without reference to the subsequent release of photographs taken by the prison's guards. The Marcopoulos exhibition was a retrospective including an extended body of work in still photography, video interviews, and recordings of sports events.

The event demanded several activities of the OLLI participants: they were asked to: be present to the art, look at many images in several media, discern and focus with the selection of one painting and photograph from each exhibit, and remember the experience of viewing these displays. The museum experience entailed a variety of activities: embracing multi-imaged and multi-media displays, decision-making and focusing on particular art pieces, and providing answers to the survey questions. In all stages of the participant's effort attention proved to be a pivotal experience. In the last stage, visual memory was critical to a viewer's response.

Clearly, translating the experience of looking into words descriptive of that experience is itself a challenge. The OLLI research project, in addressing the question of mature learning, advanced the notion that visual experiences of novel creative expression could yield growth in the learner's capacity for knowing. Perhaps the challenge of formulating remembered visual imagery is an equally important dimension of that learning.

Analytical essays based on Clare's and George's experience of seeing the exhibitions and reading the prose texts of the original study follow.

### Looking as Discipline: Clare Fischer

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My visit to view the two exhibitions was highly instructive—both at the time and in the months that have passed. The latter, associated with my effort to read and analyze 27 respondent statements, prompted me to consider certain texts that offered insight about the character of seeing/looking, most notably John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1973) and Simone Weil's classic essay on reading, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies" (1951). Immediately after my visit to the Botero and Marcopoulos exhibits I responded to the OLLI survey and attempted to be faithful to my experience and my sense of the "learning" garnered from this experience.

I had some exposure to reproductions of Botero's representations of the imprisoned figures at Abu Ghraib and was anxious to look at original canvases and sketches. On the other hand, I knew nothing about the photographic art of Marcopoulos; the latter proved compelling in its diverse presentation of people and landscape. Each of Botero's large paintings

called to mind Simone Weil's (1957) philosophical concerns with violence and oppression and her insight about the permeable boundary between victim and perpetrator noted in *The Iliad, or The Poem of Force*. I recognized the representations on canvas for what they were: anguished statements about the impunity of action by ruthless agents of terror. Of course, the irony did not escape me that the imprisoned, isolated, and vulnerable "terrorists" were subject to the terror of military guards.

Absorption with the Botero exhibit reduced my capacity for a focused study of Marcopoulos' photography. Exercising some visual discipline, I moved around the display and found that the contrast in the representations of people and environment proved seductive. Yet, I sought parallels between the two exhibitions: were both artists representing the fragility of human life? Was risk-taking (by guards on the one hand and youthful challenges of gravity on the other) a shared factor in the curatorial planning of both displays? Was looking at painted canvas, video screen and photographic image a challenge with respect to diverse media?

Was anything learned? Studying other respondents' replies in the context of my own experience, the answer is "yes." Indeed, respondents attested to having learned something. Less clear was whether that learning constituted substantive challenge.

### George Hersh Observations

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I was among the participants who had no previous familiarity with the work of either Botero or Marcopoulos, and each exhibit presented me with quite different challenges. The Botero materials appeared as a closely focused and unified group of artistic reactions to a profoundly moving set of facts. I had read the Seymour Hersh (2004) report and had also followed the various disclosures and photographs published in the wake of the original article. Accordingly, the images in the Botero exhibit did not convey "new" information. Instead, they forced me to rediscover and then to reconsider my original ego-defensive responses to the earlier disclosures. Going through the exhibit, I identified Botero's graphic conventions and idiom as derived from the earlier political and revolutionary art of the Mexican muralists: Diego Rivera, Jose' C. Orozco, and David A. Siqueiros. This personal classification response allowed me to accept what I saw as cartoon-like simplifications of form, the repetitive use of a stock obese body-type, and the detailed explicit depictions of suffering and torture. The insulating effect of pseudo-familiarity allowed my remembered emotions to be re-stimulated and turned in a new direction, to new levels of specificity, indignation, sorrow, and shame. The overall effect of the exhibit was to trap me in a feeling of acute distress that I felt powerless to escape or evade.

The Marcopoulos exhibit was much more difficult for me to categorize and classify. A few of the images were so strong and so disturbing that

The OLLI research project, in addressing the question of mature learning, advanced the notion that visual experiences of novel creative expression could yield growth in the learner's capacity for knowing.

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they compelled an instant complex response. In particular, I was transfixed by an enlarged photograph of an open-shirted boy or young man exhibiting his acutely emaciated torso. My immediate explanatory associations were with the skeletal survivors and corpses of the death camps, the bodies of AIDS patients in extreme wasting, and the body distortions of severe anorexia. Another immediately compelling work was a video loop, a telephoto view of a snowboarder descending a steep and unstable slope, setting off an avalanche, and veering off to one side as the snow tumbled down into the steep gorge below. The loop repeated over and over. After several repetitions, I noticed that a group of other snowboarders was waiting at the top of the slope, apparently ready to follow in the track of the first boarder. Other still photographs and video loops of snowboarding and skateboarding pushed me to the belief that the distant participants in the avalanche loop were teenaged extreme-sports enthusiasts, essentially children willing to put their lives in acute hazard for whatever rewards they experienced in the activity.

Once I had allowed the perceptions of these two striking elements of a much larger exhibit to modify my point of view and preconceptions, I began to see the entire exhibit as a catalog of people whose living conditions were stifling and monotonously ugly and whose escapes included devaluation of self-worth, thrill seeking, and a kind of limiting self-involvement and dismissal of the world around them as a trivialized arena for their self-experiences.

Of the 27 individuals who completed the process, 10 used language indicating acute distress in response to the Botero exhibit. "Unlike any other contemporary artwork I can think of." "More graphic, more real, leaving nothing to the imagination." "Botero seems to paint actual scenes he has witnessed." "Disbelief, anger, disgust that such barbaric acts exist here and now." "Unimaginable."

Another 10 used less extreme language. They found the exhibits "disturbing." "Sobering, graphic, and very disturbing." A few expressed anger or irritation with Botero: "a gross exaggeration of the topic." "The painter is an over-the-top publicity-seeking exhibitionist." "As a mother of an active duty career army officer, I was horrified and somewhat offended that Botero would depict these scenes so graphically." "A form of distancing, denial: the dogs don't look real; the prisoners didn't look like young Arabs."

Four individuals responded by providing aesthetic or artistic judgments of the exhibit, distancing themselves from overt emotional response by using technical language and abstract considerations. "I was interested that the paintings were so large, wondered whether his standard work is that large (I've only seen posters or small prints) or whether he used here a large format appropriate to the subject." "Predictable flat surfaces."

Four other individuals used the artistic judgment strategy in part, but fell among the previously identified "distressed" and "disturbed." "Abu

Ghraib as reported by a classic Mexican muralist/activist, say Diego Rivera.” “I am not a ‘fan’ of Botero’s stylized predictable rendering of the human form. I found the repetitive representations dulled the impact of the content.”

These distinctions are based upon my subjective and imprecise readings. The Marcopoulos exhibit evoked a broader and more varied range of responses. Some were negative or dismissive: “Trite.” “I’d describe it as very large, varied, and—to my eye—dull.” “Baffling.” “A mixed bag of photographs in different formats, predominantly street shots.” Others were mildly positive but general or vague: “Interesting but confusing at times.” “Variable impact, some good pictures, some less good.” “A bit of a mish mash due to the broad time span.” “An interesting photography exhibit. Some of very high quality, others pretty mid-level illustrator level.” “It was a pleasant, eclectic display of photographic technique.”

Others responded by identifying a theme or unifying concept: “A series of photographs of sad and bewildered people in mostly everyday situations of pain, bewilderment, and in some cases apparent hopelessness, as well as situations of potential danger and exhilaration (skiers).” “A diverse and sometimes beautiful record of humans challenging gravity. Some photographs recorded the sweetness of human frailty.” “A close look at several aspects of society, of individuals, young, old, related or strangers.” Yet others distanced themselves into analysis: “An observer of the disaffected, the alienated, and the walking wounded of our society, reported in a multitude of different formats and expressions.” “After a while, I began to think that it was primarily a study of the impact of testosterone.” “It took a while to figure out what he was all about. But once you figured out the basic orientation, even the most banal images were loaded with meaning.”

## Reading our—and others’—responses

Clare Fischer

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“We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.” *Talmud*

In an effort to describe the shape and character of challenge, I arranged responses as expressions of taste (“I dislike,” etc.), of descriptive assessments of the art object (e.g., the representation of Botero’s tortured “looked like sausages piled upon one another”) and the discovery of some meaning. This simple classification of responses seemingly worked for responses about Botero’s contribution but was less useful for the Marcopoulos photographs. Initially I discovered that a list of words, especially after viewing Botero’s work, provided a clue to the immediate experience of looking: e.g., “real,” “vivid,” “sense of disgust,” “nausea,” etc. But Marcopoulos’ photography, more often than not, brought positive comments (e.g.: “pleasant”).

There may be some connection between “glance” as a brief encounter

“We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.” *Talmud*

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with the art piece and attentive looking in the respondent's answer. The capacity for attention seems to invite the viewer to respond to the experience in a richer descriptive manner. Each viewer was asked to choose one art object from each exhibit and give some time to looking at it. There is no way of ascertaining whether this request was followed by most, but some responses provide testimony that particular art objects demanded concerted effort. I am persuaded that this effort, paying attention, produces a far richer experience and the potential for growing in spite of what many identified as disturbing content. One respondent stated, "my brain was stretched."

"Attention" is a core dimension of Weil's (1951) approach to learning as deep knowing (p. 111). Her idea of the reading of any text (including visual representations) is useful in recognizing that learning is a process that moves through many layers of looking. I suspect that the OLLI participant who accepted the challenge of patient looking and paying attention, discovered complexities in the observed art object and in self-reflection that the hasty viewer did not experience.

Similarly, Berger's (1973) assertion that images produced through painting or photography represent products of choice has bearing on what we experienced, and the responses of so many of our fellow participants. He writes "although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing" (p.10). Those viewers of Botero's and Marcopoulos' works brought their respective histories and left with either a clearer grasp of that past knowledge, a disconnection from what had been assumed as reliable knowledge, or a sense of self as perceiving through a new lens. In all events the sustained engagement with the art prompted an experience of challenge.

Moreover, participants demonstrated the variety of "ways of seeing" when writing of their experiences, filtered through their memories of the "seen" and interpretations prompted by the survey questions. Some respondents offered glimpses of a viewer self before visiting BAM and articulated words of critical confidence and comparative insight (for example, seeing a parallel artistic expression between Botero and the Mexican muralists, or between Marcopoulos' photographic subjects and the photographer Diane Arbus). Others referred to knowledge of Seymour Hersh's *New Yorker* essay (2004) and drew some insight from reading and seeing Botero's paintings. Some respondent's wrote that the Botero display was "important," hinting at the historical connection between the artist's subject, the paintings on the museum wall, and contemporary dialogue about terror and torture.

Responses that emphasize one of three expressions of seeing and interpreting can be advanced as a typology that holds in tension: self-assessment, descriptive evaluation, and projections of moral or political significance. The first obviously refers to awareness of art that inspires appreciation, negation, physical reactions ("disgust"). The juxtaposition of the two

exhibits prompted several viewers to remark that they felt relief after leaving the Botero exhibit, or that they would have been more receptive to Marcopoulos' works had they viewed those varied images first.

The majority of responses to both exhibitions fall into the category of descriptive interpretation. Several responses noted that Marcopoulos' show lacked clarity of theme. Writing as criticism of curatorial practice, some expressed confusion about the scope of the photographer's subjects, the "vast and varied" character of his contribution, and lack of understanding generated by the assembly of images. In short, the responders to the Marcopoulos piece of the survey expressed some impatience with the rationale for this retrospective display.

Is there a connection between seeking meaning and comparative assessment of other art works? Naming the familiar emerged in certain responses to include expressed concerns about a painting or photograph that appeared to be jarring, exhibiting inappropriate elements in the composition. Among respondents were statements about some feature of animals out of place or off scale. In the former instance, several respondents wrote of the Marcopoulos image of a youth with feathered arms outstretched and their puzzlement. The photograph was not perceived by any as an image conveying avian freedom. Writing about dogs in the Botero paintings, several commented that the size was too large and one reported that the painting transformed common domestic pets into "destroyers."

There are many models of learning that could prove useful in the analysis of the OLLI project. One that I regard as particularly salient is found in the feminist epistemological writings of Belenky, Clinchy, and Tarule (1986) who developed a five-stage theory that envisioned development in knowledge from exaggerated reticence to creativity. The authors refined their model in a later study (Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, and Belenky, 1997) from staged learning to an elaborate notion of alternative strategies of learning. Their approach has possibilities for understanding mature learners who experience novel images and experience a sense of challenge. Under this rubric, our repertoires of knowing include strategies of: silence, received knowing, subjective knowing, procedural knowing, and constructed knowing.

Although virtually no one participating in the Berkeley project can be classified in the first strategy (i.e., silence), the idea of received knowing points to the reliance on external authority. "Out there" presumes trustworthy knowledge, deference to another's knowledge with the consequent effacement of self in learning. Could reference to other artists to enhance a reply to the OLLI survey indicate that the viewer sees what is recognized (i.e., acceptable in the art community) beyond personal assessment? In this case, the viewer has absorbed earlier knowledge of a "received" work of art and has learned little new, unless discovering parallels with recognized art can be termed change.

Is there a connection between seeking meaning and comparative assessment of other art works?

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Clearly, subjective knowing is more fully developed than received knowing, acknowledging that a self emerges as a conscious, confident learner. However, knowledge associated exclusively with the particularity of experience (“I know this because I have experience...”) is limited. The respondents who answered the survey about reading about or prior viewing of Botero’s work signal this subjective strategy. Several responders referred to having seen Botero’s Abu Ghraib paintings at an earlier time and asserted strong views about the display at BAM.

The translation of the Belenky et al. (1986) typology to the OLLI project may be best applied with respect to that study’s final two strategies of knowing. To know procedurally is to advance criteria for evaluation, to learn beyond intuition. The search for meaning, especially moral or political meaning, was encoded in responses about Marcopoulos’ and Botero’s contribution. The latter’s work inspired commentary on the cruelty and evil of the torturers as well as recognition of actions that defied a sense of American justice. Marcopoulos’ photography prompted responses about risk-taking and daredevil activities. There are implied rules of behavior with regard to the safekeeping and health of all, even athletes. This assumption points to the notion of procedural conformity to good practices. Don’t create avalanches!

Finally, how does the strategy of constructed knowing emerge from some responses to the art? I am impressed with those who expressly named their struggle to “figure out” what was going on, especially in Marcopoulos’ images. One responder noted, “It took a while to figure out what this was all about. But once you figured out the basic orientation, even the most banal images were loaded with meaning.” The learner refuses to pass on to other images and seeks to construct something meaningful. While such commentary was uncommon, it epitomizes for me the capacity to stand before an image and be sufficiently challenged to know something. It is in this stance that the mature art learner becomes a challenged learner.

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### Conclusion

OLLI@Berkeley members displayed a remarkable breadth of responses to the two exhibits. Many of these responses seemed to be psychological defenses against unwanted challenge and against undesired emotional responses. People became irritated with artists or retreated into vague appreciative generalizations or adopted aesthetic and critical positions that opened a safe distance from the immediate emotional evocative power of the works. But irritation does not mean learning was not taking place.

Others engaged the work openly, drawing upon prior knowledge or providing a broader context for “reading” the work. Others came less “prepared” by knowledge of art but no less prepared by life, and saw their initial responses (often of disgust or anger or fear) translate into a deeper sense of meaning. In a great majority of participants, the sustained

viewing—moving from a glance to a vision—provided the experience of stretching and growing and knowing.

How do we older learners handle challenge? How can challenge be made a condition for growth rather than a discomfort to be evaded or avoided? Surely, people who seek out the intellectually demanding content of OLLI@Berkeley classes are going to show us many valuable and transferable ways to link an extended life experience to engaged survival under the waterfall of change. How can we best continue to explore this well defended territory? Can colleagues in the OLLI network further this discussion, and perhaps the research?

But irritation does not mean learning was not taking place.

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**Clare B. Fischer**, PhD, has instructed courses in the OLLI program. She retired from full-time instruction at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, as Reinhardt Professor Emerita in Religion and Culture in 2005. She continues to teach as an adjunct Professor in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Francisco. Her scholarly foci include sociology of religions, feminist studies, and comparative cultural studies in tourism.

**George L. Hersh** is a licensed clinical psychologist practicing in Berkeley, California. He holds a PhD in Psychology from the Wright Institute

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(1999) and a PhD in Zoology from the University of California at Berkeley (1966). He has served as an Administrative Law Judge (CPUC), a Division Chief (Resources Recovery SWMB), and as an Environmental Specialist (WRCB) for the State of California. He taught biology at St. Mary's College of California. He served in the US Naval Reserve (active duty as Electronics Technician with Bathyscaph TRIESTE, Navy Unit Commendation 1962-1964). He is an elder and clergy, Covenant of the Goddess.

**Susan E. Hoffman** is the director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of California, Berkeley. For the past 17 years she has worked at University of California and California State University campuses, launching new interdisciplinary and international programs. Before then, she served as the Executive Director of the California Confederation of the Arts, representing California artists, art educators and arts organizations in Sacramento and Washington for a decade. Her creative work includes being a writer and filmmaker. Her faculty appointments have been in creative writing, theatre and political philosophy.

**Sandra N. von Doetinchem de Rande** is a researcher from Germany, currently living in Berkeley, California. She holds a diploma in educational sciences with focus on adult education (comparable to the American BA and MA) from the University Duisburg-Essen, Germany. Her research interests include lifelong learning internationally, Global Aging, and education of high old people (80+).

## World War II Memories: Time Is of the Essence

**Gary L. Oberts**

### Abstract

*Time is running out to hear firsthand experiences told by World War II veterans and those supporting them at home. An amazing collection of stories is potentially waiting for OLLI classes from our own members who lived during this period in our history. OLLI at the University of California, Irvine, heard tales from two theaters of operation, as well as from the home fronts of the US and England. Heroes are very likely sitting among you—all you have to do is ask to hear their stories.*

At no time in modern history did events change lives more quickly than during the World War II era.

“What an amazing and emotional journey.”

“These people are our OLLI treasures.”

“These sessions became alive with the first-hand stories of those who lived them.”

### Background

At no time in modern history did events change lives more quickly than during the World War II era. Imagine being a high school graduate yesterday and a US Marine starting down a road that would lead to Iwo Jima today. Or a US or British soldier landing on Normandy 10 days after the beach was secured, then moving inland into Nazi-fortified territory and on to Berlin. Imagine the journey of a Jewish teenager growing up in Hamburg, then being uprooted by parents aware of the Nazi threat and brought to the US, later to join the armed forces and serve in the South Pacific. How about life at home in either the US or England, or in a support role as a nurse or a Navy seaman? Or living under the Liverpool flight path of German bombers on their way to deliver their loads?

Putting together a class to hear these stories from those who lived them

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started as a thought by a group of OLLI at University of California, Irvine, Board members after a summary of discussions held at the 2009 OLLI annual meeting. One of the topics suggested at the annual meeting was capturing stories of World War II. Once the wheels began turning, there was no stopping the energy that flowed from organizers and participants. We were underway with one of the most successful OLLI classes ever, according to many of the attendees.

### The Class: World War II Remembered

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The goal of the class was to obtain firsthand stories of life during WW II from OLLI members who served abroad or lived on the home front. Organizers included four members of the OLLI at UCI Board with an interest in the topic and the requisite amount of energy to devote to getting it organized and presented. The incentive to develop and present the class was the fact that our WW II era veterans and civilians are dying at an alarming rate. The Veterans Administration estimates a death rate of 1,000 veterans per day, with only a few million of the over 16 million WW II vets still living. Also decreasing in number are the civilians who lived and worked on the home front and have stories to tell. The necessity to act fast was apparent to us all. In fact, one of the participants, aged 92, urged us to get the class presented as soon as possible because “we won’t be around for long!”

The planning group for the class (Julie Hume, Jnana Anderson, Jessie Tromberg and myself) knew that we needed a lot of time to gather participants and help them prepare their presentations. We started meeting in January 2010 for a fall 2010 class. We suggested a name for the class of “Heroes Among Us—Stories of WW II,” but our heroes did not want anything to do with that title. They told us, as typical for the Greatest Generation, that they were just doing their jobs like everyone else in that period, so the class title became “World War II Remembered.”

Recruitment was very simple. We put a call for participants into our monthly OLLI newsletter asking for anyone with a good story to come to an organizational meeting. The first meeting yielded six of the 10 presenters we would ultimately work with. One attendee withdrew midway through the first meeting when discussion moved to the support by those serving in the South Pacific for the atomic bomb drops on Japan—she disagreed and pulled out of the group, even though we would have welcomed her dissenting opinion as part of the discussion. Those serving in the South Pacific noted that the bomb drops prevented an estimated one million U.S. military deaths had an attack on the Japanese homeland occurred.

By the third meeting, word of the class had spread around OLLI, and we had all presenters confirmed. We also decided to present an introduction to the series. We thought that this perspective was essential because, surprisingly, many of the attendees were not familiar with the details of

the war. Although many OLLI members had lived through that period, most were either young children or had not yet been born during the war years. Our OLLI also has a fair number of members not from the US with different backgrounds, knowledge, and perspectives about the war. Each future presenter was introduced to the class, followed by an historical perspective given by a retired US Air Force Judge Advocate General Colonel Jay Cooper, a lifelong student of WW II. Jay served in the US Merchant Marines in the Pacific and Italy during WW II.

The second class was devoted to the European front with presentations by an English Army (Red Cross) nurse Olive Rumbellow, who accompanied British troops heading out of Normandy. She discussed her pre-war training and the trip she made following the troops as they proceeded to encounter Nazi forces while heading toward Berlin. She also discussed her meeting and eventual marriage to English Army Captain Victor Rumbellow, who managed the transportation corridor for the troops as they moved, usually at a rapid pace. Victor landed at Normandy on D-Day plus 10, June 16, 1944. This date, by a remarkable coincidence, is the same date that an American tank commander, Ret. Army Col. Jack Libby, landed at Omaha Beach with his men and equipment. Col. Libby told of his exploits moving from Normandy to the Elbe River, where he met up with the advancing Russians. Along the way he fought in many battles including the Battle of the Bulge. He received three Silver Stars, two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star, the Legion of Merit Award, the French Croix de Guerre, and the Belgian Fourragere.

The third class began with the story of a young, Jewish, New York City student who graduated from high school on a Friday and was inducted into the US Marines the following day. Michael Morse then went through Marine training and headed to the West coast for transport to the South Pacific. After a short period of additional training, he packed up on a ship and was told he was heading for a small mop-up operation on an island—that island was Iwo Jima. The 72 hours those Marines expected to be there turned into weeks of hell. Michael is one of only 17 Marines in his group of about 200 to survive without injury. His stories earned him a self-proclaimed title of “luckiest man alive.” Death surrounded him and missed him by inches many times. Afterward, Michael said, “I finally feel some sense of relief after this class. I have not talked about my (Iwo Jima) story for 65 years.”

Fred Stern was a Jewish teenager in Köln (Cologne) Germany in the mid-1930s when his parents sensed disaster brewing and took the family to the US. Fred landed in Kansas City, where he quickly learned English and graduated from high school. In spite of his fluency in German, Fred ended up in the South Pacific as a radio operator and on-ground flight coordinator for the Army Air Corps. Strafing and bombing by Japanese planes became a common occurrence as Fred operated on various islands.

...surprisingly, many of the attendees were not familiar with the details of the war. Although many OLLI members had lived through that period, most were either young children or had not yet been born during the war years.

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A US Navy seaman named Larry Wayne was typical of young men in the early 1940s—he wanted to get into action as fast as he could. After training in radar and electronics, Larry waited in San Francisco to embark for the South Pacific where he was to be a forward aviation spotter. The ship to take him there, however, was brand new and had many trouble-shooting delays before it became operational and ready for action. When he was finally on the way to his location in the Pacific, the war ended. Larry did proceed to Japan as part of the occupation force and saw firsthand the destruction caused by the atomic bombs as well as the subjugation of the Japanese homeland.

The final week of the class was devoted to life on the home front, both in the US and England. Julie Hume, one of the facilitators, started the presentation summarizing life as she experienced it as a young girl in Oregon during the war. Sally Schwartz helped set the stage by describing what life was like in the US as well as describing her time as a Red Cross Grey Lady. The Grey Ladies assisted wounded servicemen in their recovery, mostly helping them communicate with loved ones. Marilyn Goldberg grew up in New York City and became a United Service Organizations (USO) hostess there near the end of the war. Marilyn danced with the servicemen and provided some camaraderie for them while they were away from home. She was in Times Square for the VE Day celebration and for General Eisenhower's victory parade.

The final presenter was Julie Cohen, who grew up in Liverpool, England, under the flight path of German bombers heading to the Liverpool harbor. She told the story of a young, Jewish child sitting in bomb shelters, wearing a gas mask for hours at a time. She brought examples of the meager portions of food allocated weekly to each person during the war, and also told some sad stories of life in anti-Semitic England during this period.

### Lessons for OLLI

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The descriptions above barely scratch the surface of the emotional highs and lows that we had. The quotes that began this *LLI Review* article reflect some of the very positive feedback we received from our attendees. We learned some valuable lessons that we would like to pass on to other OLLI planners who might want to pursue a similar class.

*Time is of the essence!*

As previously mentioned, our WW II era vets and citizens are disappearing at an alarming rate. It looks as though we have about 10 more years to catch this population before it is severely depleted. If you have any thoughts about a class, do it now!

*Recruitment*

We knew that we had several WW II era vets and members in our ranks,

but we had no idea how many there were. The initial recruitment via newsletter was successful. Today we could add our OLLI blog and a weekly news blurb (Keep In Touch—KIT) as vehicles for recruitment. Although we wanted to limit the presenters to members of OLLI, we did find that adding a friend of an OLLI member (Colonel Libby) certainly enhanced the experience. We are doing a follow-up class in the fall of 2011 and have actually recruited non-OLLI presenters to fill our list of desired topics.

### *Capturing the class on videotape*

We were fortunate to have a program of the university interested in videotaping our class to capture the oral history it offered. Without going into detail, one of the four sessions was not captured, and the quality of the three that were captured was poor. Our advice is to interview the videographer and make sure the individual is willing to become engaged in the class and truly has an interest in the topic. Get all of the agreements and expectations down in writing well before the class begins, so that a change can be made if it looks like the goals of OLLI might not be met.

### *Support*

OLLI support of the presenters is essential. We dedicated a substantial amount of time collecting pictures, souvenirs, and artifacts from the presenters. The pictures were all entered into PowerPoint for the presenters to use. Although a few of the presenters were computer-graphic savvy, most were not. The superlatives used by the presenters to describe the presentation support were heartening to hear, since most were not aware of current technology for scanning their photos and importing them into PowerPoint. The facilitators also met with their sub-groups and assisted them with creating and practicing their presentations. One group decided not to practice so the unrehearsed and energetic spontaneity of their presentation would be there.

OLLI also undertook a search for and provided WW II era photos both from war zones and the home front. It was amazing how many of the images that were shown immediately generated a response from the presenters and audience. Numerous collections of WW II photos can be found by doing an Internet search. Also, music of the WW II era was played in the background before the class and during the breaks. Many members sang along and talked of memories that the songs brought back.

### *Concurrent Activities*

While planning for the WW II class, we pursued a tour of the Marine Corps Air Facility in Tustin, California. This base is the location of two 1,100-foot-long by 300-foot-wide blimp hangars that were used during WW II. The base is now closed, but the hangars remain as testimony to the huge military infrastructure assembled very quickly for the war years. We found that connecting with local military history by way of touring a facility was very moving for some of our members who had interacted

OLLI also undertook a search for and provided WW II era photos both from war zones and the home front. It was amazing how many of the images that were shown immediately generated a response from the presenters and audience.

World War II Memories:  
Time Is of the Essence

in some way with that history. One of our OLLI members was married to the man in charge of fueling the blimps during the war years, and she was especially appreciative of the tour because of its connection to her late husband. She had never before been inside of the security gate, but did get a chance to visit his actual fueling station during this tour. A follow-up WW II class being planned for the fall of 2011 will offer a tour to Lyons Air Museum, a military air museum at the Orange County (John Wayne) Airport. OLLI at UCI has several former military pilots who flew planes like those at this museum.

### Conclusions

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OLLI at the University of California, Irvine, heard stories of heroism and common life at home by organizing a class entitled “World War II Memories.” Amidst some tears and some happy memories, we heard of valor and fear, trauma and resolve, intense focus and national dedication. Any OLLI program interested in doing the same is urged to waste no time—the people telling these stories are disappearing fast. Now is the time!

**Gary L. Oberts** has been a board member of the OLLI at the University of California, Irvine, and is currently a member of the Science Committee. As the son of a WW II Navy veteran, he has had a lifelong interest in the war, which led him to develop this classroom series. He retired from a career in water resources in 2008 and has devoted his time to teaching and facilitating courses at OLLI ever since.

Anyone who is interested in discussing the OLLI at UCI effort described in this essay is encouraged to contact Gary Oberts at [GLOberts@gmail.com](mailto:GLOberts@gmail.com) or 714-389-6379. He and colleagues are trying to produce a DVD from the video shot during the class and could make it available when completed.

# Why We Sing

**Ruth Flexman**

## Abstract

*The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Delaware promotes a mission of providing older adults opportunities for intellectual development and social interaction to enhance their quality of life. How members experience the fulfillment of this mission was the question in a qualitative study of the chorus course. The chorus members were asked to describe the three most important benefits they felt they received from participating in the chorus. Benefits identified by participants were compared with research results and recommendations for quality of life from authorities in the field of aging.*

## Introduction

Improving quality of life for older adults is an important goal. A crucial question is how programs can achieve this goal. Research on the brain and the factors correlated with positive aging has provided opportunities to develop and expand programs which provide experiential opportunities for developing and maintaining the capacities of older adults. At the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at University of Delaware in Wilmington, the Music Committee decided to ask participants how they felt they benefited from their participation in band and chorus. This provided data which could be compared with the research on quality of life implications for older adults.

Wilmington's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute offers about 225 courses taught by 220 volunteer instructors to 2,100 members per semester. More information is available at [www.lifelonglearning.udel.edu](http://www.lifelonglearning.udel.edu). In the last decade of this 30-year-old program, the performing arts courses have grown in numbers from under 10 in 2000 to about 30 per semester. Of the more than 7,000 course registrations per semester, over 1,000 are in performing arts participation and appreciation. To better understand the benefits of participation, the Music Committee decided to ask a sample of partici-

At the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at University of Delaware in Wilmington, the Music Committee decided to ask participants how they felt they benefited from their participation in band and chorus.

## Why We Sing

pants about their experience. One project was to prepare a video showing interviews with some of the 78 members of the concert band. Another project was to study the benefits perceived by members of the chorus. This report gives results from a qualitative study conducted with the 72 chorus members who registered for the chorus course in fall of 2008 where chorus participants were asked to describe the three most important benefits they felt they received from participating in the chorus.

### Subjects

Participants were the 47 of the 72 members registered for chorus who returned the completed questionnaire. The ages of chorus members ranged from 61 to 87 with an average age of 74, while the average age of all lifelong learning members in the Wilmington program was 71. Chorus met once per week for an hour and a quarter at 9:00 on Thursday mornings for 13 weeks each semester.

### Procedures

A one-page form was distributed during chorus with the request to list the “three most important benefits you feel you receive from participating in the chorus” and to return the form to the office. Other information solicited included number of years as a member, number of years in chorus, and year of birth. No attempt was made to contact members who were absent on the day the form was distributed.

Methods of qualitative analysis (Strauss, 1990) were used in analyzing the data. Responses were coded and eight categories were identified based on the number of respondents identifying the particular benefit. Percentages of responses per category were calculated.

### Results

Eight categories of responses from the 47 returned responses were identified with a range of 11 to 34 respondents listing the benefit in each of the categories.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of References</b>
1. Opportunity to sing with peers	72%
2. Friendship	64%
3. Learn new music	53%
4. Professional leadership	43%
5. Singing beautiful music	38%
6. Singing makes me feel happy	34%
7. Enjoy performing for appreciative audiences	30%
8. Singing improves my health	23%

## Discussion

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Responses to the question about benefits from singing in the chorus are discussed in the following eight categories. After the category name, responses are quoted to further illustrate the benefit. Comparisons with the literature and additional comments follow for each category.

### 1. *Opportunity to sing with peers*

Chorus members benefit because they have an opportunity to sing with their peers. “An opportunity to keeping singing—the only place these days.” “I have not sung with a group for over 40 years.” Some continued a lifetime experience of singing while others became active with their lifelong learning membership. Motivation for continuing to select chorus as one of 225 courses offered continued over time. The average length of lifelong learning program membership was 8.1 years, while the average for years in the chorus was 6.8 years. The longest chorus membership reported was 30 years by an 86-year-old.

Singing offers an opportunity for creative expression. While losses such as speed of response occur with the aging process, creativity continues throughout the lifespan and adds to the quality of life (Cohen, 2004).

### 2. *Friendship*

Chorus members benefit because they develop new musical and social friendships. Specific responses included “I have developed many new friendships in the chorus,” “companionship with some great people,” “development of friendships with others that have a love of music, and “a chorus is, in a sense, a social unit.”

The cognitive scientist Paul Nussbaum writes that “Human beings need to be with other human beings. We really do not have a choice regarding this fact as it has been in our DNA since the beginning of time” (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 30). He recommends socialization as one of the five components of a brain-healthy lifestyle along with physical activity, mental stimulation, spirituality, and nutrition.

### 3. *Learn new music*

Chorus members benefit because they appreciate the opportunity to improve their singing ability and learn new music. Specifically, “the challenge of learning new music,” “opportunity to sing and improve my ability to sing,” “reading and singing music is another activity of keeping your mind active,” and “opportunity to sing interesting and challenging music” were mentioned by respondents.

With the research over the last 20 years on how the brain functions and the importance of keeping the mind stimulated, the value of music for stimulating various parts of the brain has been identified. Amen (2005) has reported that “Singing expands the lungs and increases the flow of oxygen to the body and brain...Singing and music have been connected to intelligence, creativity, emotion and memory” (p. 160).

### 4. *Professional leadership*

Chorus members benefit because they can learn under professional lead-

Chorus members benefit because they have an opportunity to sing with their peers.

## Why We Sing

ership. One respondent in this study reported that the director elevated her musical ability and communicated a great deal of care for chorus members. Another said that this was “the finest director I have ever sung under.”

In an investigation of professionally conducted cultural programs, scholars have reported the following: “We have witnessed true health promotion and preventive effects...achieved through sustained involvement in a high-quality participatory art program—in this case, in an ongoing chorale directed by a professional conductor” (Cohen et. al., 2006, p. 733).

Although the instructors for the lifelong learning program are all volunteers and no professional credentials are required, the instructor for chorus had a BS in music education, 29 years’ experience in music in the public schools, and was involved in a variety of volunteer musical roles.

### 5. *Singing beautiful music*

Chorus members benefit because they enjoy singing beautiful music. Specific responses included: “The challenge of singing new and beautiful music;” “The music selection is varied and challenging;” “Enjoyment from singing good music varying from classical to Broadway.”

Music has been found to release dopamine, a chemical that gives pleasure. Dopamine is involved both in anticipating a particularly thrilling musical moment and in feeling the rush from it (Salimpoor, Benovoy, Larcher, Dagher, and Zatorre, 2011). The descriptors that chorus members communicated included the experience of feeling uplifted, happy, and joyful.

Levitin made the following observation about the sensing experience of music: “The types of sounds, rhythms, and musical textures we find pleasing are generally extensions of previous positive experiences we’ve had with music in our lives. This is because hearing a song that you like is a lot like having any other pleasant sensory experience” (Levitin, 2007, p. 242). Great attention is given to the types of music selected which enhances the pleasurable experience of chorus members and the audiences when the chorus presents a concert.

### 6. *Singing makes me feel happy*

Chorus members benefit because they experience feelings of joy. Direct quotes from survey respondents include:

“Singing makes me feel happy.”

“The sheer joy of singing, blending voices with others...is mood altering and psychologically uplifting.”

“Chorus provides a most uplifting and satisfying experience.”

“Thursday morning is the best time of the week.”

Music has the capacity to affect morale. Cohen et al. (2006) reported the morale of those participating in performing arts was higher than that in the comparison group. Vaillant (2002), in his study of human development, cited four basic activities that make retirement rewarding: replacing workmates with another social network, rediscovering how to play, making

creativity a goal, and continuing lifelong learning. Benefits identified by participants in chorus are consistent with these recommendations.

### *7. Enjoy performing for appreciative audiences*

Chorus members benefit because they have an opportunity to perform before appreciative audiences. Respondents commented on how much they enjoy performing for appreciative audiences, the feelings of accomplishment and increased self-worth they have had, and how energizing and exciting this activity has been. One OLLI member also noted how rewarding it was to sing for people who lived in retirement homes in the area.

Participating in a concert is a way of giving, and research demonstrates a link between doing good and living a longer, healthier, happier life (Post and Neimark, 2007). Many examples of the importance of giving and of finding meaning in later life stages are found in publications about retirement, but the importance of finding meaning is best illustrated by Frankl (2006) who, from his experience as a Nazi prisoner of war, noted that the ability to find meaning in life, even in dire circumstances, made the difference between life and death.

### *8. Singing improves my health*

The final theme that emerged from this survey was that singing improves health. This finding correlates positively with the research conducted by Cohen et al. (2006) who discovered that people participating in cultural programs reported better ratings in overall health as compared with those in a comparison group. This was illustrated by fewer visits to the doctor and less use of medication.

Quality of life is enhanced by the creative and pleasurable experience of singing beautiful music, by elevation in morale, by improved health, and by finding meaning in life.

## Conclusions

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The benefits of participating in the chorus as identified by members are consistent with research results and with fulfilling the lifelong learning program mission of providing opportunities for intellectual development and social interactions that enhance quality of life. Chorus participants have their minds stimulated by learning new music and working under the direction of a talented director. They increase social connections through the opportunity to sing with their peers. Quality of life is enhanced by the creative and pleasurable experience of singing beautiful music, by elevation in morale, by improved health, and by finding meaning in life.

## Applications

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This study highlighted the importance of an excellent director. When the director in 2008 found in 2009 that health reasons prevented her from continuing, the search began to find a new director with a strong professional background. A special committee of members with many connections to the local music community was formed. They identified potential

## Why We Sing

candidates and found a very talented and energetic director. The chorus has continued with enthusiasm under his direction. His professional background includes an MS in music education and 38 years of teaching music, plus he has many musical involvements as a volunteer.

Sharing the results of the study with the chorus members affirmed their participation and the effort of the director. Affirmation is a particularly important factor in a program which operates on a learning cooperative model since positive feedback contributes to a sense of meaning in life (Frankl, 2006). The feeling of pride of being part of the chorus was expressed by many chorus members when they learned the study results.

Reasons for participating in musical groups are incorporated into information used in recruiting new members as the program continues to improve the quality of life for older adults. Members set up a special table at registration and talk with potential members about the benefits of music in their lives.

Benefits identified by chorus explain this is "Why We Sing." Although chorus members may not be aware of all of the researched benefits, they are aware of the importance in their lives of singing in the chorus.

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**Ruth Flexman**, PhD, is currently the Statewide Program Coordinator at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Delaware. OLLI at the University of Delaware has programs in all three counties of the state with 2,100 members and 225 courses taught by volunteers in Wilmington, 60 courses and 450 members in Lewes, and a new program in Dover with 18 courses and 125 members in its first semester in fall of 2010. For the previous 16 years Ruth was first University Coordinator and then Program Coordinator with Wilmington's lifelong learning program. As a trainer, she has presented 36 American Society on Aging MindAlert programs on cognitive fitness throughout the United States. Locally, she serves on the boards of the Delaware Coalition for Mental Fitness and Coming of Age.

# The Rifle

**M. E. Hansburg**

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

The moonlight spilled out across the mountains like a glass of milk turned over. In the eerie light, shapes and forms blended into the horizon. Grandma Squeezer stood on her porch and peered over the barrel of her rifle, "Ralph," looking into the deep purple of the woods which surrounded her cabin.

Grandma Squeezer came into town about once or twice a week. She needed a few things and wanted the solace of another person's voice besides her own. Sooner or later, you need the thinking of another person... Someone to hear you and respond.

It wasn't uncommon for Grandma Squeezer to sit in her rocker on the porch and peer into the deepness of the night. Often she would sit in the dark until 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. and watch. Night creatures knew her, and some feared the wrath of her rifle. But about the only creatures that Grandma Squeezer absolutely hated were raccoons. Here she had an uncommon rage. The Maloney's place was down the road and Phil Maloney, who worked on the road crews, thought Grandma Squeezer was a nut cake.

"She's downright dangerous!" Phil Maloney told the Sheriff. He demanded the Sheriff do something to limit the nocturnal shooting sprees of one rifle-toting Grandma who was on a one-person vendetta against raccoons.

"How do you even know that she sees that good in the dark? She could shoot a kid, one of my kids for that matter. Sheriff, you gotta do something about her. She is a public menace." Phil bent the ear of the Sheriff with his anger.

The Sheriff had to admit that Grandma Squeezer did pose a possible problem, or maybe it was her rifle that was the problem? Either way, the Sheriff determined he needed to talk with Grandma Squeezer about her raccoon vendetta.

"How do you even know that she sees that good in the dark? She could shoot a kid, one of my kids for that matter. Sheriff, you gotta do something about her. She is a public menace." Phil bent the ear of the Sheriff with his anger.

## The Rifle

All of this was what awaited the Sheriff upon his return from a fishing trip at Lake Erie. He came back to frustrated deputies who wanted no part of Grandma Squeezer. She ran the last two of them off her property by walking into the long and curving drive cradling “Ralph” her rifle in the crook of her arm. The deputies took one long look at the rifle, warned Grandma not to fire into the night, and backed their cruiser down the gravel drive, leaving the “taming of the wild Grandma” to the Sheriff. He was really good with folks and had a way with the eccentric residents of Three Creeks and Jefferson County.

Shortly after coming into the office on Tuesday morning and getting the 411 on the situation, the Sheriff decided to give Sister Rose a call. Sister worked at the Blessed Sacrament Retirement Center, and was knowledgeable about programs and opportunities for the “Senior Options” through Jefferson County. Perhaps together, they could find a way to reorient Grandma Squeezer’s habit of staying up late and shooting raccoons in the dead of night. What Squeezer needed was a busier day and a calmer night. Up her social connections, and perhaps Grandma wouldn’t wanna commune with raccoons.

“Hi, Sheriff, this is Sister Rose,” so said Rose into the phone as she stood by her desk and filed the loose paperwork into piles. This desk looked good if you could see “desk part” by the end of the work day.

“Oh, Rose, thanks for returning my call. I need help with one of our residents and thought that you might have some ideas.”

“Sure, sure...what’s happening?” Rose smiled as she remembered some of the adventures that she and the Sheriff had with the town’s older residents.

“Well, it’s Grandma Squeezer. She is busy sitting up nights and taking potshots at raccoons. About to drive Phil Maloney crazy and, truly, he’s really worried about his kids. They play up and down that road with their bikes. Phil’s sure that Squeezer will take out one of his five kids.”

“My, that is quite a story. Isn’t Squeezer a former sharpshooter? She used to be a crack marksman and could take on any of the men at the Jefferson County Fair. This could be quite a challenge.”

“Tell me about it. But I also remember that she was quite the quilter too. Didn’t she take all kinds of prizes for her quilts? Wonder why she stopped doing that? Maybe too many of her cronies moved on into town. Not living on the mountain anymore.”

“Yes, Sheriff, Squeezer was a crack shot, seamless quilter, and great cook. My Mama used to say nobody could make hot corn bread, pinto beans, and fried okra like Squeezer. What do think we can do?” responded Sister Rose.

“I’m sure that Squeezer is lonely, and stays up nights counting stars and shooting raccoons. Sorta gives her a crusade and a reason to be. Maybe we could get her interested in coming down the mountain to see what classes

are happening at the Center? Whatya think?”

“If I recall, Squeezer won’t just accept any suggestion. You’re going to have to make it a howdodo experience...a challenge.” Rose paused, cradling the phone in her free hand.

“What if we planted a small challenge for Squeezer? You have to go see her anyway about the shooting. You could drop the news that Maddie Gowank’s getting lots of praise for her quilting. Hmm, there’s a challenge. Someone a better quilter than Squeezer? We’ve got a quilting frame set up and another one stored in the outback building. They do take up quite a large bit of room. But I can find room in the Rec areas if you can convince Squeezer to come down off the mountain, say twice a week in good weather. From my sense of their friendship and rivalry, it just may put focus into the day for Squeezer and limit her nightly activity. How about we start with that as a plan?” Rose moved the phone to her other ear and sat down.

“Sister, you’re the best. I’m off up the mountain to plant the seeds. I’ll talk with you later. Or can you meet me, say five-ish at the Red Rooster, and I will fill you in on the details?”

“Okay sure,” said Sister Rose. “See you then ... five-ish at the Rooster.” So saying, Rose rang off and the Sheriff started out the door. In a blink, the Sheriff was up, out the door of his office with his keys in one hand and his cowboy hat in the other.

Twenty-five minutes later the Sheriff pulled into Grandma Squeezer’s long and curvy gravel driveway. He opened the door to the truck and hopped out. Hearing a truck come up the drive, Squeezer came out of the cabin and stood on the porch, a dish towel in her hand and soapy water dripping on the porch. Squeezer was in one of her cleaning moods and was soaping any and all things in the cabin. Squeezer frowned from the porch. She’d known the Sheriff since he was a boy, and now seeing him as the strapping man he was made her feel older than time, and that made her grumpy.

“Morning Grandma Squeezer,” volunteered the Sheriff as he leaned up against the driver’s door.

“Morning, Sheriff. What can I do for ya?” said Squeezer as she cleared her throat.

“Well, I’ve come to chat about the problems with the raccoons. I understand that you are being overrun with these vermin. I am thinking that Billy Watkins from the Cincy ODNR Office could help us with this problem. He could trap ’em and move them down river.

What ya think?” The Sheriff inhaled deeply, trying to calm his irritation at this morning’s errand. Bank robbers and bad guys he expected, but rifle-toting Grandmas were enough to drive you nuts.

“Well, I dunno. Seems just as easy to shoot ’em,” responded Squeezer.

“Yes, that’s one way to deal with the problem. But it puts you in violation of the law.

“I’m sure that Squeezer is lonely, and stays up nights counting stars and shooting raccoons. Sorta gives her a crusade and a reason to be.”

## The Rifle

We don't want that. Besides, isn't it better to use that eye-ball talent on something creative like quilting? You are a crack shot, but a better quilter. At least in my opinion. Of course, Maddie Gowank, living at Blessed Sacrament, she has a big floor loom up and is working on a quilt. Sister Rose told me it's quite beautiful."

"She is?" responded Squeezer. "Too bad. I'm better at quilting than Maddie. She's good, mind you, but I'm better. My square knots are always perfect and my hemline straight as an arrow." Squeezer filled up with pride of work.

"Yes, I believe that," said the Sheriff. "Too bad nobody knows but you and me.

Too bad that other floor loom just gathers dust in the back shed. I bet you could make it sing with the work of a r-e-a-l quilter." The Sheriff kept his eyes cast down, trying to gauge Squeezer's mood. He wanted to move her into the quilt competition-mode, but this had to be Squeezer's idea.

"Sister Mary Rose has another standup loom? Nobody working it? Do ya think she'd set it up for anybody? For me, if'n I were to stop in at the Center when I'm in town to do my shopping and errands?" asked Squeezer dubiously.

"Well, I think so, and I can sure ask her. We're going over notes for the September Food Drive tonight. I am meeting her at Red Rooster. Do ya want me to mention it?"

The Sheriff rolled his tongue to keep from smiling.

"Well, yes that'd be all right," replied Squeezer.

"And what about the call to Cincy ODNR? You pay your taxes Squeezer, you might as well collect on some of the services of the county. Shall I look into it? That way you can save your sight for the quilting." By this time the Sheriff was standing on one leg to keep from smiling. Squeezer seemed ready to focus on proving Maddie Gowank a grade "below perfect" in quilting.

"Well, if you were to mention it to Sister Rose, that'd be okay. An' I guess you can call the ODNR folks. I gotta get back to work in my house." Squeezer clearly indicated that the conversation was over. She turned on the heel of her boot and started back into the cabin, dish towel in her hand. Squeezer shot one more comment the Sheriff's way.

"Oh, you can tell Phil that I'll lay off shooting the raccoons. I gotta save my eyesight for the really important things—I have to be able to tie a perfect square knot." With that, Squeezer slid through the door of the cabin, the screen door slamming behind her.

The Sheriff climbed into his truck. He turned around in the gravel drive and started down the mountain. He smiled all day and into the Rooster at 5:05 p.m.

Sister Rose saw the Sheriff's smile and relaxed into the booth. Now she had to find room to set up the second quilting frame.

Educated at the Gustavus Adolphus College, University of Chicago, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and The Ohio State University, **M. E. Hansburg** is a humanities instructor and Fellow of the National Writing Project. She is currently teaching at Columbus School for Girls in Bexley, Ohio, and at Columbus State University in Columbus, Ohio.

## Solving Problems Through Action Research

**R. Jack Hansen and E. Michael Brady**

### Abstract

*Action research is a practical tool that is often used by leaders of organizations to answer questions or solve problems. This article serves as a brief primer on what action research is and how it may help OLLI programs deal with issues they are currently facing or may encounter in the future.*

**A**s Osher Lifelong Learning Programs across the United States continue to expand and grow, issues arise that need to be addressed. These may be related to marketing, registration procedures, recruiting qualified faculty, managing volunteers, ensuring high-quality curriculum, and other matters important to the operation of a successful lifelong learning program.

Sometimes problems can be faced and decisions made based on plain common sense. Directors and other leaders are usually practical people and have a wealth of personal and professional experience from which to weigh alternative decisions and make the best one for their OLLI program. But there are other situations in which leaders need a more in-depth and systematic approach to problem solving. If this occurs, you have considered entering the world of action research.

### What is action research?

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Stringer (2007), who has written voluminously about action research, defines it as “a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives” (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). Stringer goes on to suggest that action research provides the means by which people in schools, businesses, and community organizations may increase the effectiveness of the work in which they are engaged. It assists them in working through the sometimes puzzling

complexity of the issues they confront to make their work more meaningful and fulfilling (p.1).

Action research is both similar to and different than more traditional kinds of basic and applied research. Action research is similar to these more well-known types of research in that it involves careful and systematic examination of key questions or variables. Like other kinds of investigations action research may be substantially influenced by a rigorous review of research already done in the area to be studied (although it's also true that not all action research involves in-depth literature reviews). In most cases action research involves interaction with human subjects. And, once the investigation is complete, results are communicated through a written report or presentation to key stakeholders and decision makers and in rare situations may even find its way into a published article.

It differs from most basic and applied research, however, in one important respect. These more traditional types of research tend to be conducted in such a way that the results may be generalized to a broad range of contexts and variables. Action research, in contrast, focuses on specific situations and localized solutions (this is one reason why much action research is not published and read by wider audiences. It is intended from the start to focus on a specific institution/program/set of issues).

The broad range of practical problems that may be addressed through action research may require any one of a number of different specific data collection techniques or some combination thereof. For example, some action research investigations are looking for descriptive and statistical "answers" to questions and thus lend themselves to survey research. Others may desire an in-depth understanding of opinions or behaviors and therefore use interviews and/or focus groups. There is no "single method" with action research, and, in fact, in many studies using multiple or "mixed" methods is the preferred approach.

## Working With Human Subjects

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One of the factors that makes action research especially challenging, albeit also rich in possibility, is that it almost inevitably involves surveying, interviewing, or otherwise communicating with people. Twenty years ago university staff could whip up a survey or pull together a focus group, invite participants to respond, and never have to undergo a review of their procedures by a third party. Because of changes in Federal Law this is no longer the case.

Nearly every college and university in the United States that has a federal student loan program or that accepts US Government research grants has an Institutional Review Board (IRB). This body has the responsibility for reviewing any sociological, psychological, or biological research undertaken by the university in order to ensure that the interests

Sometimes problems can be faced and decisions made based on plain common sense.

...But there are other situations in which leaders need a more in-depth and systematic approach to problem solving. If this occurs, you have considered entering the world of action research.

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of human subjects are protected. In most cases the IRB consists of experienced professionals from the institution and volunteers from the local community. Because many OLLIs are located at large research universities, chances are that IRB procedures at your institution are well established and documented.

The best advice we can give with regard to this important (and legally necessary) aspect of conducting action research is to get in touch with the IRB in your college or university. Begin a conversation about what kind of research you wish to conduct, who the human subjects are with whom you'd like to communicate, how you plan to collect data, and related matters. The job of the professional staff in an Office of Research Compliance (or related departments in which the review boards themselves are often situated) is to help colleagues in academic departments and programs such as OLLI to succeed in undertaking human subjects research. You may also wish to familiarize yourself with IRB functions by reviewing a Wikipedia article on this topic: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutional\\_review\\_board](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutional_review_board).

## Use of Surveys (Quantitative Research)

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Perhaps the most frequent approach to action research within OLLI and other lifelong learning programs is through the use of a survey. Surveys may be employed to judge the effectiveness of individual instructors, the likely popularity of a proposed course offering or offerings in previously unaddressed topical areas, the possible impact of changes in the fee structure on the number of courses taken by members, and to answer a host of other practical questions that may arise in the operation of a successful OLLI program. Numerous textbooks and papers describe survey research and can be located through a World Wide Web search using the keywords "conducting surveys."

Until recently surveys were conducted primarily by mailing questionnaires to a target population. More recently, numerous companies have made online survey tools available, including Survey Monkey, Survey-Gizmo, Zoomerang, and a host of others that can be located through a World Wide Web search of "online survey tools." These online tools are useful when the target audience is somewhat computer literate and has access to the Internet.

Our own experience with the use of surveys is that great care is often taken in developing the questions for such surveys, but inadequate attention is paid to performing the analyses that contribute most to the correct interpretation of the results. (Moreover, the online survey programs do not necessarily offer a full suite of relevant analysis tools, though such tools are usually accessible in spreadsheet programs). In this section we shall explore the most common and useful analysis methods for answering specific and

practical questions about the survey results. We shall do this by discussing a hypothetical survey question, the key question that must be answered to interpret the results, and the nature of the method that yields this answer.

Consider first a survey question to evaluate the satisfaction of students with various courses. For purposes of a simple example, suppose each of three courses is evaluated by five students who took that particular course, and the results are as follows:

	<b>Student 1</b>	<b>Student 2</b>	<b>Student 3</b>	<b>Student 4</b>	<b>Student 5</b>
Course 1	3	3	3	3	3
Course 2	1	1	3	5	5
Course 3	1	2	3	4	5

The survey asks the students to rank the course on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is unsatisfactory and 5 is highly satisfactory. In this example, all five students who took Course 1 give it a ranking of 3. The response to Course 2 is rather different, with two students ranking it as 1, one as 3, and two as 5. And finally for Course three, each of the students rank the course differently (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.) Intuitively, we might realize that the evaluations of the three courses tell three different stories, even though the average evaluation of the three courses is the same. (The average evaluation of each course is simply the sum of the evaluations by each student divided by the number of students.) Given that all five students give Course 1 the same evaluation of 3, we may be confident that this evaluation is representative of student attitude toward the course. Course 2 is a very different story, with some students very positively disposed and others very negative about the course. This may suggest that we need to dig deeper to find out what student population likes and dislikes the course. And the evaluations for Course 3 tell no consistent story.

A common way to quantify the variability in survey responses is the so-called sample standard deviation. It is a rather simple calculation for which the formula is included in the Appendix. Its usefulness in the context of evaluating survey results is that it quantifies the variability among responses, which was easy to do in the notional example given above because we assumed a small number of participants but harder in a typical survey with many participants. In the example above the standard deviation among responses for course 1 is 0, for course 2 is 2, and for course 3 is 1.58.

A substantially different kind of question, in which we are seeking to determine if there is a relationship between two quantities, also requires a different analysis method. For example, we might wish to see if the number of courses taken in a term by a student is related to how far they drive or

Our own experience with the use of surveys is that great care is often taken in developing the questions for such surveys, but inadequate attention is paid to performing the analyses that contribute most to the correct interpretation of the results.

Solving Problems  
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Research

how long they have been retired. This could be accomplished by asking three questions on a survey:

- (1) How many courses did you take last term?
- (2) How far do you drive (one way) to get to class? Answer 1 if you drive between 0 to 5 miles, 2 if 5 to 10 miles, 3 if 10 to 15 miles, and 4 if over 15 miles.
- (3) How long have you been retired? Answer 1 if you have been retired 2 years or less, 2 if retired between 3 and 5 years, three if between 6 and 10 years, and 4 if over 10 years.

Table 2 shows the hypothetical response of five students to these questions. Just looking at the numerical responses, one might conclude that number of courses and distance driven trend in opposite directions, or in other words, that people who drive further take fewer courses. In contrast, there seems to be no consistent relationship between number of courses taken and years since retirement.

	<b>Courses</b>	<b>Distance</b>	<b>Years Retired</b>
Student 1	1	4	1
Student 2	2	4	4
Student 3	2	3	3
Student 4	3	2	2
Student 5	4	1	1

The most common way to characterize the actual relationship, or lack thereof, between two quantities in a survey is called the correlation coefficient. This quantity varies from a value of minus one to plus one. A value near minus one indicates that the two quantities are closely related, with one increasing as the other decreases. Likewise, a value near plus one shows the two quantities closely related in such a way that one increases as the other increases. In contrast, a value nearer zero indicates that the two quantities are not closely related. In the current examples, the number of courses taken has a correlation coefficient of -0.942 with distance driven to class. In other words, we can conclude from this hypothetical survey result that a strong relationship exists between driving distance and course load, with the number of courses taken increasing with decreasing driving distance. In contrast, the correlation coefficient between the number of courses taken and the number of years since retirement is only -0.235. In this example, there is a weak relationship between the two quantities.

One caution is offered when using measures of correlation. Correlation does not equal causation. In other words, in the example of number of courses taken and driving distance, the two quantities are related, but this does not prove that increased driving distance causes a change in the number of courses taken. A cause-effect relationship is much more difficult to establish. It can sometimes be done with mathematical methods such as that developed at Carnegie Mellon University. See the following web site for details: <http://www.phil.cmu.edu/projects/tetrad/tetrad4.html>. These methods are in general more complex than will be utilized in an OLLI program for survey analysis. Most often, it will be sufficient to simply note that quantities are correlated and compute the correlation coefficients.

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret and derive meaning from their experience.

### Use of Interviews and Focus Groups (Qualitative Research)

Qualitative research is fundamentally different from quantitative research in that it tends to use words as compared with numbers, although in some situations numbers may also be used (to a moderate degree) in more qualitatively-focused studies. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret and derive meaning from their experience. While quantitative research would be appropriate to answer the kinds of questions posed in the previous section and other questions (e.g., What percentage of our OLLI program membership is retired from full-time employment? What is the female-to-male ratio? How many members leave OLLI after one year of participation?), qualitative research would be the approach best suited to ask and answer questions related to the nature of the experience people are having at OLLI.

A common practice is to gather qualitative data by way of interviews. The adult education researcher Merriam (2009) defines a research interview as a process in which an investigator and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study (Merriam, 2009). The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another. Such interviews may be undertaken in person (face-to-face), by telephone, via computer (using Skype or some other two-way video technology), or solely through writing using email communication.

Person-to-person interviews can be designed in a number of ways ranging from highly structured (standardized) all the way to informal. There are distinct advantages and disadvantages to each approach. In highly structured interviews the specific wording of questions is predetermined and their order is strictly prescribed. Such a process helps to ensure consistency and diminishes the influence the researcher can have on the data being collected. On the other end of the continuum is the unstructured interview which has open-ended questions, is flexible and exploratory, and more conversational in tone. The advantage here is that research

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subjects get to express themselves freely which can often yield a rich set of data. However, free-ranging interviews may be difficult to keep focused and also sometimes generate information that is challenging to analyze and make sense of. A middle option between these extremes is called the semi-structured interview in which the researcher uses a guide that involves both more and less structured questions.

An alternative to the individual interview is the group interview, often called focus groups. A focus group is an interview on a topic with a group of people who have some knowledge of that topic. The interactions that take place between people in the group are an important aspect of this research. In other words, what someone in the group says may be reacted to by another member, and that person's response reacted to by yet another person. One of the authors of this article (Brady) has used focus group research to explore several issues related to lifelong learning institutes including teaching styles (Brady, Holt, and Welt, 2003) and the overall experience of learning among OLLI members at the University of Southern Maine (Lamb and Brady, 2005). An excellent guidebook to help the inexperienced action researcher design and conduct a focus group study is *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* by Richard Krueger and Mary Anne Casey (2009).

## Potential Research Topics

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Whereas a significant body of scholarly research has been done on the topic of aging, making the transition to life beyond full-time work and living productively in this new phase of life has received much less attention by the research community. OLLI programs and their host institutions have the potential to contribute significantly to this rich research area. The following areas are representative examples.

- Popularity of various types of course offerings and other programs: One very useful kind of information from member surveys might be the kinds of courses or programs that are most popular or growing in popularity among OLLI participants. This information, which particularly trends over time, might help OLLI programs think about new offerings or increased emphasis on certain types of course offerings or programs.
- Emerging retirement trends: There is a lot of speculation about how retirees of the baby-boomer generation might approach this phase of life differently than their predecessors, but not much that is concrete. A better understanding of these trends is important both societally and, more specifically, for OLLI programs. Such an understanding would assist these programs to be proactive in positioning themselves for their coming

membership as well as the current membership.

- Improved understanding of the personal dimensions of retirement: In writing *Shaping a Life of Significance for Retirement*, one of the current authors (Hansen, 2010) sought to elucidate the impact of retirement on such personal matters as family relationships, friendships, personal growth, and feelings of self worth. While we were able to identify a number of important personal transitions, opportunities, and challenges associated with this phase of life, much remains to be done. The research literature, as well as the popular literature, is quite deficient on this topic, but it has real implications for OLLI programs.
- Variability in current and emerging retirement attitudes among different ethnic and other groups of retirees and pre-retirees: Very little has been done on this topic to date. It could be relevant to OLLI programs in understanding how to reach and serve different retiree populations. Other groups and organizations that seek to serve retirees could benefit from this information as well.
- The potential for electronic course delivery and community building among retirees: We are in a period of rapid transition in terms of computer literacy and social networking among retirees. Any steps that might clarify how to employ these trends to serve retiree populations would be welcome.

As we noted at the beginning of this article, OLLIs and other lifelong learning institutes across the United States are growing and oftentimes this growth will be accompanied by questions and problems that will need to be addressed. These questions and problems may relate to program marketing, quality control, volunteer management, registration and other administrative tasks, or a whole host of other important matters. With a modest commitment of time and energy, action research could help administrators and volunteer leaders in OLLIs to answer key questions and pose useful solutions to problems.

## Appendix

The Sample Standard Deviation (SD) is computed using the following formula:

$SD = \text{Square Root}\{\text{Sum}[X-M]^2/(N-1)\}$ , for all values of X in the survey,  
where X is the value for a given response

M is the average of all responses

N is the number of responses.

The correlation coefficient,  $R^2$ , is given by the following quotient:

$R = (S_{XY}) / \text{SquareRoot}[(S_{XX})(S_{YY})]$

where X and Y are the two variables for which correlation is being tested. In

With a modest commitment of time and energy, action research could help administrators and volunteer leaders in OLLIs to answer key questions and pose useful solutions to problems.

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the first example in the text X and Y would be driving distance and number of courses taken, whereas in the second example X would be the number of years retired and Y again the number of courses taken.

$$S_{XY} = \text{Sum}[(X - X_{AVE})(Y - Y_{AVE})]$$

for all values of X and Y in the survey.

$$S_{XX} = \text{Sum}[(X - X_{AVE})^2]$$

$$S_{YY} = \text{Sum}[(Y - Y_{AVE})^2]$$

It should be noted that such quantities as average, variance, and correlation coefficient, are readily computed from tabular data by functions available in common spreadsheet programs (e.g., Excel) as well as statistical programs. It should also be noted that some texts refer to the correlation coefficient as R and others define it as R2. In our view the use of R is preferable because its sign (plus or minus) indicates whether one variable increases or decreases as the other increases.

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**R. Jack Hansen** is active in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. Prior to retirement he held executive positions in academic and government research organizations and still consults for such entities.

**E. Michael Brady** is Professor of Adult and Higher Education at the University of Southern Maine and editor of *The LLI Review*.

## At Carriage Hill

**Martha B. Horne**

Mother lived a hundred years and so  
    mourning came way before her death.  
Wheelchair bound and shrunken  
    to bones and sometimes brittle feelings,  
I took her to the garden. We watched  
    leaves warm and wane. We sat  
    silent. I read snippets of the news  
    which she could seem to understand.  
Hungry, I brought food one day  
    for me. She could not swallow sandwiches.  
Leaves swirled in the aimless wind and she  
    got cold despite the blankets, sweater, coat I tucked her in.  
She motioned  
    to go inside and then as clear  
    as yesterday she told me to  
    finish my sandwich first.

**Martha B. Horne** is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College, specializing in Special Education and Clinical Social Work. Martha has always loved poetry. She wrote poetry in high school and nurtured thoughts for poems while raising four children. Jenny Pierson, the excellent poetry group leader at the OLLI at American University in Washington, D.C., helped Martha and many others turn these thoughts into poetic forms.

## Pure Class At Myrtle Beach

**Robert L. Graham**

Elderly lady of slim grace  
Arrives on the beach  
At her selected place.  
Delicately she arranges with precision:  
    Folding chair  
    Beach towel  
    Stylish straw hat  
    Elegant handbag  
    Small cooler  
The precise measures  
Of a spiritual satisfying routine.  
She is seated,  
lowered with a light but graceful thud.  
Then with a smile,  
her small hand pulls  
a wet can from the cooler.  
Next, a little snap, a sigh,  
she opens her first Bud Lite.

**Robert L. Graham** participates in the OLLI Poetry Workshop at George Mason University. He comments that for many participants in the workshop “this is an absolutely new experience, one of many new tracks one can take when embracing the opportunities within OLLI.”

# It Comes With The Territory

**Marcella Lorfing**

## Abstract

*The age of most OLLI members presents particular challenges to those coordinating their activities, especially dealing with the three “D’s”: disability, dementia, and death. Some instructors and students are disabled, show signs of early Alzheimer’s disease, or actually die mid-quarter. The OLLI Board of Directors at the University of California-Davis Extension has considered setting guidelines for these situations.*

“He’s falling!” someone screamed. The tall, distinguished professor in his 80s was just about to make a point in his lecture on nuclear physics in one of our OLLI classes at University of California, Davis. He suddenly began to falter and fall to his right. People rushed to his side, caught and propped him upright. They gave him a chair, someone brought water, and everyone hovered around him. He seemed stunned and dazed, unable to get his breath.

Someone called, “Is there a doctor in the room?” Two people said “yes,” but one was in a wheelchair and the other had Parkinson’s disease and couldn’t help. Fortunately, we had two capable retired nurses also in the class, and they took charge. They rode to the hospital with the professor and stayed until they heard that he had just had a minor seizure, probably due to extra cold medications he took that day.

Unfortunately, this incident was not the first we experienced at our OLLI program over the 10 years we have been operating. As our faculty ages along with our member population, we find ourselves quite often dealing with three big “Ds”: disability, dementia, and death. Such things come to us all, and most seniors who make it past 70 in reasonably good health and mental attitude, develop a sardonic humor and sense of self-deprecation that help take the sting out of growing old. Thus, we email “geezer jokes” to each other or “Madge” cartoons that show a cranky old lady saying all the things we’d like to say but don’t dare to in polite company. (We come from a refined era.)

As our faculty ages along with our member population, we find ourselves quite often dealing with three big “Ds”: disability, dementia, and death.

## It Comes With The Territory

A popular science teacher in his early 80s once finished a lecture on cardiac health at 3 p.m. and was in the hospital at 6 p.m. with a heart attack. He was back in the classroom the following quarter, laughing at the irony of the occasion. We are also a resilient group.

We have had instructors whose forgetfulness has caused them to come late to classes or even miss a class or go to another building. In some instances we've had to refund enrollment fees because of this situation. Many of our students also have memory problems and forget to attend classes they have paid for. We debated about having our teaching assistants provide reminder calls, but so far do not have any policy for this.

We hold successful film series in a local theater with a full-sized screen. They have been very popular, particularly with the more elderly of our members, and we must make careful accommodations for their canes and walkers and wheelchairs, especially in the dark after the movie starts. We try to encourage them to come early, but as one of their caregivers told us, "He must have his lunch at a certain time and then come to the movies." (When you get old, you get stubborn, but as Mel Brooks says, "You're entitled.") Therefore, this movie-lover comes in late with his walker, and we have volunteers with flashlights guiding him to his seat. In spite of that, we had one instance in the dark when an ambulatory student tripped on the walker in the aisle and ended up entangled in a heap with the instructor and the walker on the floor.

Other seriously disabled students sign up for discussion classes which are their only social outlet and which they dearly love. One woman, bent fully over with osteoporosis, had to have a driver bring her to and from the classroom, but she couldn't afford the cost. We have a scholarship program for special situations, and the Board debated whether to pay for this woman's driver. Before we could make a decision, she stopped attending, apparently too weak even to come to her favorite class.

The lessons we've learned from such incidents include providing director's chairs for our professors to sit on while they're lecturing, having teaching assistants trained in CPR, and setting and posting guidelines for instructors and teaching assistants in emergency situations.

When we hear of an OLLI member's death, we mourn individually and sometimes send condolences from the Board of Directors. We hesitated about putting an "In Memoriam" column in our quarterly newsletter lest we leave out someone or invade the privacy of the deceased's family. We would like to hear how other OLLI programs handle this situation.

Of course, we have the common problems with "seasoned" learners— hearing and sight impairment for which we have to make adjustments in every classroom. Many otherwise experienced teachers do not realize their students have these problems, and they speak softly or prepare visual presentations in 12-point type. On their evaluation forms our students let these teachers know where they went wrong. Our audio-visual team makes

sure each teacher has a microphone and that our sound system is equipped with fresh batteries.

What, if anything, can we do to cope with these challenges? I already mentioned a few ways we have devised to handle certain situations, but it is my hope that a workshop at the national OLLI conference will generate ideas for “crisis guidelines” each OLLI can incorporate. At the very least, individual OLLIs can develop their own guidelines. The big “D’s” will not Discourage us.

**Marcella Lorfing** is a retired English teacher who has been writing and teaching memoir writing and literature courses for the OLLI program at University of California Davis Extension for several years. She has a BA from San Jose State University and taught secondary English and history for 15 years. She also worked for 22 years in the aerospace industry as a technical writer and communications director. Marcella is currently serving her second year as president of the OLLI Board of Directors.

What, if anything,  
can we do to  
cope with these  
challenges?

## Vietnam Memorial

**Morton Katz**

### Abstract

*The author claims he cannot recall what he ate for dinner yesterday, but the intended consequence of what, at the time, he thought to be a good deed 44 years ago remains fresh in his mind: "I will probably carry that memory to my grave." Although they were in a theater of war, where bad things happened daily, the young man and author were not involved in war "business," but mundane healthcare matters that should not have had such a significant outcome for either of them.*

**H**e is always with me...a faceless, nameless young man. Our paths crossed but once, yet I cannot escape either the memory of our encounter or the burden of its consequences.

The year was 1967. The place was a former Michelin rubber plantation 40 miles northwest of Saigon. From my tent I could see Cambodia, or at least the summit of the Tay Ninh Mountain rising above the perfect rows of rubber trees oozing sticky white latex and the scattered clumps of palms and bamboo bending to the occasional breeze. It was the dry season, a welcome respite after eight months of monsoon; welcome, that is, but for the swirling dust that coated all surfaces and added grit to every swallow whenever a Huey helicopter or a fixed-wing recon plane landed or took off.

On the far side of the French planter's dirt landing strip, a single strand of concertina wire separated us from them—the Vietnamese villagers of Dau Tieng and an unseen but ever-present enemy. Certain knowledge that Viet Cong lived in that village as shopkeepers and rice farmers by day, and as enemy combatants by night, kept me sleeping fitfully. The fully loaded, round-chambered .45 under my pillow was for psychological comfort. In no way was I capable of defending myself with my handgun, should the meager perimeter have been breached.

I was serving as the dental officer in support of a small unit of the

Fourth Infantry Division on the day that a company clerk entered my tent and pointed to his discolored maxillary central incisor and its draining fistula. The tooth had abscessed, but my options to treat him in the field were limited. Having neither X-ray equipment nor root canal reamers and files and gutta-percha points, I was unable to conserve the front tooth, but could only extract it and leave him with an aesthetic problem. Frustrated, I tossed the mouth mirror onto the bracket table. The mirror found a new resting place out of register with the clean impression of itself left in the layer of dust that had accumulated overnight.

We chatted. The specialist had been enrolled in college, studying journalism, and he'd had the security of a draft deferment. But his country was at war, and he felt the calling to leave college and enlist in the infantry. Someone at basic training must have recognized his education and above-ordinary verbal skills and assigned him to be a company clerk (a task that rankled him because he wanted a combat role).

He was handsome, he was intelligent, he was an idealist, and he was patriotic. My decision to do him a special favor is what got him killed.

My parent unit at Cu Chi had an endodontist with all the knowledge and equipment needed to preserve his front tooth. Being so impressed with the young man's attitude, I chose to go the extra mile for him and arrange a helicopter evacuation back to Cu Chi, where he could get dental treatment, have access to a PX, and enjoy a few creature comforts away from enemy contact in our base camp. Unfortunately, he was bumped off my arranged chopper ride. He was impatient to get back to his buddies, so rather than wait for another flight to be arranged, he joined the daily overland convoy to Tay Ninh and down Route 1 to Cu Chi.

Several hours later a soldier pressed into my hand a shredded medical file. Clipped to the tan folder was a scrap of paper displaying a partial sentence: the diagnosis, in my handwritten scrawl. With my fingers clutching my neck, I tried to hold back the acid rising into my throat. I became lightheaded and had to sit down. The soldier proceeded to relate to me in a detached, matter-of-fact tone how the Viet Cong had planted a command-detonated mine in the road, had allowed the jeeps and troop-carrying trucks to pass over, had waited for the Red Cross-marked ambulance in the middle of the convoy, and had exploded the mine.

I must have been in shock in the immediate aftermath, or I would have had the presence of mind to write down the young man's name and unit. But at the time, contact information seemed so needless. It was not until many years later, and the Vietnam Memorial had been dedicated, that I began to feel the pain that could come from not knowing. A memorial composed of names demands of us that we know the name of our fallen, that we look up his name in the lists placed about the grounds and locate him among the 58,261. Only then can we have an unspoken communication with our deceased comrade. It pains me that I cannot leave a flower

He is always with me...a faceless, nameless young man. Our paths crossed but once, yet I cannot escape either the memory of our encounter or the burden of its consequences.

## Vietnam Memorial

or a token, touch the spot where his name is chiseled into the black granite and wipe away the dust—the damn dust.

Not until I became the father of boys myself did I fully realize what the parents of that young soldier must have experienced. Had I known his name and explored the army records, could I—or should I—have contacted the bereaved parents in 1967, or sometime later, to express my heartfelt sadness over their loss? Would my condolences have given them comfort? Would the guilt have shown, the guilt I felt for having been an unwitting instrument in his passing? Would that emotion have only increased their bitterness? I will never have answers to these questions.

Today, when I read a death notice for another young man who volunteered, who answered the country's call to fight in some far-off land and who paid the ultimate price, my thoughts travel back four decades, and I again feel the emptiness...for another life not fully lived.

**Morton Katz** was raised in the Baltimore suburb of Forest Park. He was one generation removed from his family's immigrant forebears and school was his ticket into America's middle class. Following graduation from dental school he served in the Army Dental Corps. Upon completion of an orthodontic residency he practiced in Owings Mills and became a faculty member in Howard University's orthodontic program. Thirty-one years later he retired as a tenured full professor and joined the Johns Hopkins Evergreen/Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

## Math Limits

**Janet Stebbins**

The axis of window mullions,  
Tangent to deep woods,  
Creates a line graph  
With tree limbs trellising up the Y  
Or growing out of the X.  
Tree leaves plot points of infinite detail.  
Another branch heads into negative territory  
Where a perched crow becomes a variable.  
So too rays of the setting sun emerge from clouds  
Delineating vectors of possibility.  
Trees are not subject to the limits of X and Y in the twilight.  
Branches extend beyond the window's range  
As dusk softens sharp values.  
So when a fragrant breeze stirs the tree tops  
And mazy motion enters the equation—  
Softly plotting its own curves—  
Inequalities rule.  
And absolute answers drift pointlessly in the night sky  
Naturally subtracted from the back of the book.

**Janet Stebbins** has been writing poetry for over 50 years, and her poems have appeared in several publications. Born left-handed in Hawaii, she was educated in California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Maine as well as Germany and England. She won the University of Maine freshman creative writing prize in 1972 and later, the “Ugly Dog” poetry contest. She was Academic Dean at two New England boarding schools and now lives on the coast of Maine.

## The Griot's Story

**Brenda Aronowitz**

### Abstract

*The Griot's Story, written in the tradition of an oral storyteller, is a memoir of the possibility of transformation. Haunted by the untimely deaths of her sister and later her daughter, a woman sets out in search of the courage she needs to survive. Along the way, she encounters the terror of the abyss and the hollowness of conventional wisdom. Eventually she will discover that beauty and artistic creation renew vitality and awaken hope.*

I come from a long line of griots, wandering people with the compulsion to tell a story. Some of our stories are uplifting, inspiring; others may contain finger-wagging lessons of life. This story may be neither of those. This story might only show how it is possible, oh so slowly, to transform grief into the echo of a single pure tone. Yes, it is slow, oh so slow, like the slightest green stalk pushing through the smallest crack in a massive rock. And, like that rock, this story is so heavy that I must lay it down now at your feet, this story so sad and so beautiful.

The griots' stories always begin a long time ago; this story, too. A long time ago in a happy place, there is a mother holding the hands of her two little girls. The three of them go everywhere together. The woman, herself middle girl of three daughters, thrives in this triad, the harmony of three. Music always fills her heart; in fact, when she sings to her daughters, her voice is so pure that it silences birds in the treetops. On the day when the time came for each little girl to grow up, the woman would open her hands with joy, releasing their fragile butterfly wings into the air. As the girls flew off, exulting in new freedoms and possibilities, the woman, too, looked into the future with anticipation and hope.

And so the story goes that one day in early spring this happy woman received bad news, news so very bad that she nearly stopped breathing. Because far away, over the hilltops and across many big rivers, the woman's little sister had died. On one sunny afternoon,

the woman's little sister of the sad dark eyes had used a gun—why, oh why?—had used a gun to kill herself.

The woman's mind grew clouded with sorrow and dark with anger. Pain was a hard rock in her stomach. She writhed in the dust, wondering, *If I used a gun, could I banish forever this boundless pain?* And with that thought, a deep shadow fell across her life. With that thought, the golem arrived.

Let me tell you about that golem. In Hebrew *golem* means *rock*, so imagine this golem as a rock, maybe appearing like a human body but lacking any soul. Certainly it was insensate, indisputably it was relentless, constantly it was there, the golem like a shadow at the woman's heel. Always too heavy to heave out of the way, always too canny to be able to dodge, always this golem hissing, *She did, so why don't you?* Taunting, teasing, defying the woman to find a gun, to pull the trigger too.

In this way, for many years, the golem pursued the woman. Sometimes she would go faster; other times, slower, always trying to hide, but she could never evade the golem, who matched her stride for stride for stride. Sometimes she would sing, her voice rich with tinkling bells and bottomless echoes. Then, for a while, the golem would be hushed. So in this way the woman dodged the golem for many years.

Now comes the part of the story almost too hard to tell. Now is the time when the golem grows stronger. Now is the time when the golem will even laugh. But you and I, we might shudder from the anguish and the misery of this story.

One night late in the autumn of the year, this woman received tragic news, news so calamitous that her blood froze and her throat closed up in horror and disbelief. The news told of the woman's younger daughter, the one with the vivid patterned wings, the one whose desires and emotions were overflowing—too high, too fast, too far—the news told that that younger daughter had died. One night late in the autumn of the year, there was again a gun—why, oh why?—and the younger daughter died.

In that moment, the golem shouted in triumph, hurling rocks at the woman. Heavy rocks to grind, grind, grind her down. Huge rocks to squeeze out her soul. Then the taunting of the golem grew louder, more insistent, more tenacious, still hissing, *You can use the gun now. Be rid of your pain. Why don't you?*

The woman tried to cover her ears, but there was no way to escape the voice, that call of the golem that resounded inside her skull. So she resolved to run away. She wrapped her bundle in a bright headcloth, took a crust of bread, and set out on her pilgrimage.

Sometimes she got sick, sometimes the path was rocky, often her hard-calloused feet would bleed. Every night she was afraid when the darkness came. She knew she had to try to escape the golem while she could still resist its sibilant temptations. In desperation she would try to sing, but

This story might only show how it is possible, oh so slowly, to transform grief into the echo of a single pure tone.

## The Griot's Story

every time the song died, for it found no joy within her. Meanwhile, very close by, the golem waited.

The woman needed great courage to cross the swift-flowing rivers filled with crocodile eyes. She needed great determination to climb the steep-sided mountain trails. She endured great pain to walk all day in the bright sun on the sharp volcanic shale. She suffered great anguish each night in the moonless dark, shivering, alone and helpless.

Finally, in desperation, like you or me, she went in search of help. Whenever she found a wise person by the side of the road, she would ask, "How can I become free again? How can I go home?"

She heard throngs of voices recommending remedies. "Sacrifice this world to gain life everlasting," preached one. "Love the Lord our God, follow his commandments, and do good," advocated another. "Hail Mary, full of grace!" prayed someone else. "Meditate" advised the Buddhist. "Seek community," proclaimed the humanist. "Come apart!" advocated the mystic. "Salute the Sun!" urged the yogi. "Sit and tell me all about it," queried the therapist. "Avoid meat!" proposed someone. "Serve humankind," instructed another. "Flagellate yourself!" admonished yet others even as the Sufi cried, "Dance ecstatically!" All seemed to be proclaiming, "Do it my way!"

The crowds beckoned her to buy at the bustling bazaar, but she had few coins to offer, and the countless choices bewildered her. So she kept on walking. And the longer she walked, the more desperate she grew.

After darkness fell each night, she would sit on a rock, pulling up her knees to her chin, pondering how it was that she had become a wanderer, grieving and alone, unable to find even a thread of hope or a single note of song. For only the golem was there, always there.

In quiet moments, she would remember with tears her bright valley and her two little girls, running and leaping and skipping in the tall grass. She would remember how the little one with the bouncing curls wanted to experience everything, to jump the streams, to reach for the lightning, to dance in the thunder, to sing to snakes and talk to crocodiles. The mother had feared, then, for the dangers of thorns and poisonous vines, the dangers of snakes and of crocodiles, but never, never in the mother's fears had she even imagined there might be a gun.

As time passed, a deep weariness engulfed her. By and by, she hardly felt the cold or the hunger. But the seduction of the golem grew ever more insistent. In desperation, she would wrap the torn faded headscarf over her ears, but she could not stifle the hissing of the golem's taunt. *Why don't you do it too? Why don't you do it now?*

"If only I could sing just a little," she thought, envying the birds in the bushes. But her voice, once so honored in her bright valley, was now only a parched squawk. So one day in utter hopelessness she took up a stick and in the dust of the trail drew two little lines, the hillsides of the valley she remembered. And for a moment, just a brief moment,

the golem was silent. The next day, when exhaustion once again slowed her steps, she sank down into the dust once more and took up another drawing stick. To the slopes of the valley she added the stream that ran clear and the trees that gave shade in the summer. Again the golem stopped to watch and gave her that much respite.

Every day her steps grew weaker on the steep mountain trails. When she crossed the swift-flowing rivers the golem was just behind her and her balance would seem about to fail. In the grey-green waters below, she saw the patient eyes of the crocodiles, watching hungrily, waiting, waiting, waiting. Each time she reached the far bank, she sank down trembling, desperately drawing her picture to hold the golem back. And each time as her picture became more and more lovely, the golem stopped to watch. Each time the golem gave her more respite.

Eventually, the time came when she no longer feared the cold, nor the hunger, nor even the golem's mocking. And that was when she could turn around.

Now her broken feet found coolness on the stepping stones through rivers where no crocodile snout broke the surface. New strength flowed through her legs as she devoured the berries that little birds were eating. Along the way, she spied clear streams where she could slake her thirst. And one day she stood on a ridge and saw her valley beyond.

For a while she could not tear her eyes from the view, but she knew that she could not go home until she had turned around once more. And so she turned. She turned to look long and carefully at the way that she had come. She needed to know, to know for sure, if what she felt in her bones was really true. And as she knew it would be, there was no telltale dust rising from the trail, there was no mocking taunt carried forward on the breeze. It was really true that there was no shadow following, no rock in sight, no golem there anymore.

Now, griots do not always know the end of their stories, and I do not yet know how this story will end, either. But I do know that the woman sang softly to herself as she walked down that hill and back into her bright valley again.

"If only I could sing just a little," she thought, envying the birds in the bushes.

**Brenda Aronowitz** spent 30 productive years as a teacher and administrator in a small independent high school. Only after retiring did she discover the rich delight and occasional drudgery of creative writing. Brenda co-authored the award-winning *Good Grief for Kids: A Manual for Hospice Volunteers* and contributed to the textbook *English Literature and World Masterpieces*. Brenda and her husband call California home, although they frequently explore American byways in a little travel trailer.

## The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education

**Edited by Steven Glazer**

*Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999*

*ISBN-10 0-87477-955-3*

*Paperback, 288 pages, \$16.95*

**Reviewed by Carl Marsak**

There are few books that I would recommend more to administrators, teachers and students in LLI programs than this anthology on the vital subject of integrating spiritual education into our curricula in non-sectarian and non-dogmatic ways. Editor Steven Glazer remarks that this book “articulates an approach to integrating spiritual development and learning rooted neither in church, state, religion, nor politics. Instead, the heart of learning is revealed *within* each of us: rooted in the spirit” (p. 1). This is a bold foray into what can be a touchy subject in our country, but he goes on to say that spirituality in education is about several things, including: 1) Reconnecting with personal experience; 2) Dealing with existential and spiritual issues such as anxiety, meaninglessness, and alienation; 3) Showing us how such education can serve as the core of a lifelong journey toward wholeness.

Anthologies are potentially troublesome for both editors and readers. The entries may be too long or too short, overly scholarly or under-researched, to the point or ramble off the mark. This one, however, avoids these problems because each of the 14 chapters is actually a selected, edited, and revised version of a presentation given at the Spirituality in Education Conference hosted by the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, in the summer of 1997. The result is that they are alive, passionate, and inspiring contributions—not dry, pedantic essays. Presenters included spiritual teachers such as H.H. Dalai Lama and Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, clinicians such as Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, and educators such as Ron Miller and John Taylor Gatto. The four conference themes make up the divisions of the book and serve as the internal structure for what might otherwise, given the subject matter, have been a vast and daunting project. Each part is introduced and framed by the editor, which provides a narrative thread that

skillfully ties the text together into a greater whole. The following is a brief look at four sample chapters, one from each part.

In *Part I: Sacredness: The Ground of Learning*, Glazer notes that “American education has become grounded in disconnection, in particular, the separation between the spiritual and the material ... Public and higher education have drawn a bold line between the world we experience and share, and the sacred” (p. 9). Then Parker J. Palmer, in his talk “The Grace of Great Things: Reclaiming the Sacred in Knowing, Teaching and Learning,” says that education at its best “is not just about getting information or getting a job. Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life” (pp. 18-19).

In *Part II: Identity*, Glazer asks an important question for the 21st century: “How do we establish or support the formation of inner spiritual identity without resorting to indoctrination or imposition of ideology?” (p. 82). In her presentation “Embracing Freedom: Spirituality and Liberation,” bell hooks challenges teachers and students to discover their own “life in the spirit,” and then to embody that in daily life (including the classroom!). She also challenges us to move beyond fixed identities that limit our awareness and expressions of compassion: “Why do we first have the experience of the sea of whiteness and blackness rather than a sea of love? Why is the fire of love not burning so hot that we have not even a moment to think about race, class or gender?” (p. 124).

*Part III: Relationship and Community* begins with the editor asking a provocative and poignant question: “In what ways are these [educational] institutions themselves ... harmful, even a hindrance?” (p. 133). He goes on to note that our public education generally values the global perspective over the local, the abstract rather than the concrete, and the conceptual above the experiential. Later, anthropologist Joan Halifax’s talk entitled “Learning as Initiation: Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Healing” expounds upon the fact that within tribal cultures the complement of education as we know it in the West is spiritual initiation. She asks the questions: “What does it mean in our culture to be a wise woman or wise man?” (p. 178). And, “How might we educate our young people so that they return to their communities with vision renewed, with love and compassion present?” (p. 179). Her partial answer is that we need to bring back rites of passage into education. We need to help our students find and touch the mythic imagination, and by doing so we will educate for redemption and service, not just for information gathering and social adaptation.

Finally, in *Part IV: Tradition and Innovation*, we find Glazer stating that “spirituality in education requires us to continually approach the present from three perspectives: experiencing the specific qualities of the moment, seeing the past in the present, and seeing the future in the present” (p. 186). The problem here is how to honor and balance both tradition and innovation—neither throwing the baby out with the bath-

The result is that they are alive, passionate, and inspiring contributions—not dry, pedantic essays.

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water, nor allowing the drag of the past to hinder constructive movement into the future. In one of my favorite chapters, “Spirituality in Education: A Dialogue,” Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Huston Smith debate the usefulness of religious tradition, and the relationship between science and religion in the contemporary world. Huston, the academic, makes the distinction between genuine science and its distorted younger brother, scientism. The latter holds two powerful opinions: 1) The scientific method is the most reliable method for getting at truth; 2) The material world is the most important thing for us to study and about which to make truth-claims. The main obstacle we face to spirituality in education then is that “there is nothing in the world right now that has the power to stop scientism” (p. 221). When in doubt he sides with religious tradition, because it can engender compassion and dedication to service, and has resources that can feed us spiritually. Zalman, the rabbi, often argues against tradition. He suggests we study and apply transpersonal psychologies in order to increase our consciousness and affective capacity, and to develop more a more feminized, earthy, and body-centered spirituality.

To sum up, in this single volume we can find discussed many if not most of the salient, yet often controversial and contentious, questions regarding the integration of spirituality into our classrooms. Lifelong learners who are searching for meaning and purpose in the second half of life will find here much to reflect upon and apply to their own spiritual journeys.

**Carl Marsak**, MA, is a teacher, writer and workshop leader. He has graduate degrees in Religious Studies (NYU) and Social and Cultural Anthropology (CIIS) and has been studying various forms of religion and spirituality since the early 1970s. He currently lives in Ashland, Oregon, and teaches at the OLLI at Southern Oregon University.

## Shaping a Life of Significance for Retirement

By **R. Jack Hansen and Jerry P. Haas**

*Upper Room Books, 2010*

*ISBN-13 978-0-8358-1025-8*

*Paperback, 110 pages, \$15*

**Reviewed by E. Michael Brady**

There are many books on the market designed to help pre-retirees think about their futures or those who have already left the workforce to adjust to the changes brought on by retirement and the aging process. However, few of these are like *Shaping a Life of Significance for Retirement*. Written by a “mostly retired” engineer and NASA scientist (Hansen) and a pastor with years of experience guiding spiritual formation (Haas), this book makes a unique contribution to the literature.

One key differentiating factor between this and other books in the genre is that much of the content of *Shaping a Life* derives from original research conducted by the authors. Hansen and Haas personally interviewed 45 individuals who were either in their early or middle retirement years, and the book is replete with stories, examples, and insights derived from these interviews. The interview questionnaire the authors used is generously shared in its entirety at the end of the book and the reader can see the straightforward yet provocative questions that were asked in four categories: personal information (for example questions about the timing of retirement, whether or not it was accompanied by other major life transitions, etc.), relationships, meaning, and spirituality.

Explorations into and discourse about spirituality persist throughout the book and are handled with subtlety and sensitivity. While one comes to expect material about finances (there is almost nothing about that topic here), relationships, volunteer activities, and other aspects of later life in books about retirement, it is rare for such a book to focus so much of its attention on matters of the spirit. Hansen and Haas explore numerous dimensions of spirituality, including what it means to people, what spiritual and emotional challenges are encountered in retirement, and what are some of the personal qualities people want to develop during this stage in their

Explorations into and discourse about spirituality persist throughout the book and are handled with subtlety and sensitivity.

## Shaping a Life of Significance for Retirement

life. As its title denotes this is a book about “significance” and the authors correctly assert that it is difficult to craft a life of meaning—in later age or at any other time—without paying attention to the interior life.

One chapter I found especially interesting is entitled “Who Am I Now That I’m Retired?” Several important issues are raised in this chapter, including whether personal identity substantially changes when people have left full-time employment and, if it does, will this discontinuity lead to a crisis? Hansen and Haas conclude that “crisis” is too strong a word to describe the experiences they encountered among the vast majority of their 45 research subjects although “transition” and “challenge” are certainly apt descriptors. An important aspect of transition and challenge involves what work has meant to the retiree and, now that they are no longer working full-time, what has disengagement from work meant? In one paragraph the authors ask what I consider to be three compelling questions related to aging and retirement (italics are in the original): (1) Am I a human *being* or a human *doing*? (2) Do I define myself primarily by what I *do* or by who I *am*? (3) Who tells me who I am? It’s hard to imagine shaping a life of significance in retirement without a serious encounter with these questions related to personal identity.

Not only does this book present itself as a thoughtful guide to individual readers who wish to explore some of the deeper and more personal aspects of retirement, but I also see it being a useful textbook for a workshop or seminar sponsored by lifelong learning institutes or other educational providers. After each chapter Hansen and Haas present a set of what they call “Questions for Reflection” that in many cases would offer substantial grist for group discussion. For example, in the chapter about identity mentioned above several of the reflection questions offered for consideration include “How do you usually introduce yourself to others?,” “What memories energize you for the present and for the future?,” and “What growth have your past choices fostered?” Imagine the energy in the room if a group of OLLI members were dialoguing about such questions!

*Shaping a Life of Significance in Retirement* is not just another retirement planning book or treatise about life in later age. It is unique because it is significantly different than most of the books I have read on these important topics. I strongly recommend it to OLLI members and other readers of this journal.

**E. Michael Brady** is Professor of Adult and Higher Education at the University of Southern Maine and is editor of *The LLI Review*.







## National Resource Center for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes

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The *LLI Review* is a publication of the National Resource Center for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes (OLLIs). The National Resource Center, the communication hub for 118 Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes on campuses of colleges and universities from Maine to Hawaii, was created in 2004 at the University of Southern Maine (USM) and is endowed by The Bernard Osher

Foundation. It provides appropriate resources and information on promising practices, creates opportunities for leaders of Osher Institutes to learn from each other through conferences and other means, and promotes learning for the joy of learning for adults over the age of 50 across America. No two Osher Institutes are alike, but each provides a distinctive array of non-credit courses and activities for seasoned adults.

Through its public web site, [www.osher.net](http://www.osher.net), the National Resource Center also shares some of its program resources with other lifelong learning institutes that are not supported by the Osher Foundation. Anyone interested in lifelong learning is welcome to contact the National Resource Center. Many OLLIs and other lifelong learning institutes are also members of the Elderhostel Institute Network ([www.roadscholar.org/ein/intro.asp](http://www.roadscholar.org/ein/intro.asp)), which shares the Osher vision of learning as a joyful activity.

## The Bernard Osher Foundation

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The Bernard Osher Foundation, headquartered in San Francisco, was founded in 1977 by Bernard Osher, a respected businessman and community leader. The Foundation seeks to improve quality of life through support for higher education and the arts.

In addition to providing support for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, the Foundation gives post-secondary scholarship funding to colleges and universities across the nation, with special attention to reentry students. It also benefits programs in integrative medicine in the United States and Sweden, including centers at the University of California, San Francisco; Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston; and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

Finally, an array of performing arts organizations, museums, and selected educational programs in Northern California and in Mr. Osher's native state of Maine receive Foundation grants. The Foundation has a nine-member Board of Directors which is chaired by the Honorable Barbro Osher, Consul General of Sweden in San Francisco.