Prose Meets Poetry: Intergenerational Reading by Betsy Rotondi

Last September two diverse classes met on the Tufts campus to begin their respective writing courses. One was an elective undergraduate English course called Poetry Explorations. The other was a group of retired or semi-retired students interested in the Memoir Writing course under the leadership of Miriam Levine. I am one of those students.

Right from the start Miriam guided us with skill and understanding. She knew when to prod and when to praise. We read excerpts from such writers as Collette and Doris Lessing. We discussed some proven writing techniques and thought about our topic of the day. Then Miriam beamed her beautiful smile and had us begin our essays. She reminded us to “drop the clichés, leave out the mush and let us see it, smell, and feel it.” She exhorted us to “Make it Real.”

By the time we finished the four-week mini-course we appreciated the fact that there was a story within all of us. Although they varied in style and content, we heard some lovely, heartfelt, and often humorous narratives.

In another classroom across campus a group of thirteen freshmen embarked on their poetry explorations course. Grace Talusan served as their faculty advisor and James Wiley and Andrew Hastings–Black were their student teachers. The class was approached in an informal manner. Several poets were introduced with Mary Ruffell and Jack Gilbert being two of the favorites.

On October 15, prose met poetry. Our director, Marilyn Blumsack invited both groups to a lovely luncheon in Dewick-MacPhie. After finishing a delicious meal we put down our forks and picked up our papers. Four Tufts students impressed us and regaled us with their imaginative, colorful, and sometimes punchy poetry. Then five, randomly chosen Osher students ended the class with some pieces that were tender, picturesque, and tongue-in-cheek humorous, perhaps a preview of their future memoirs.

This luncheon gave both groups an opportunity to bridge the generational gap in our shared interest of writing and literature. The freshmen offered us a serving of enthusiasm, spontaneity, and clever wit. Osher writers wrapped it up with reminiscences, observations, and equally clever wit. What a treat!
The Director’s Corner

Happy New Year, my dear Osher LLI friends, may it be a peaceful, healthy and prosperous new year for all. A couple of milestones happened today: the weather hit a new record, 66 degrees and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Tufts University hit a new record, 500 members!!! And a reminder that we are still accepting registrations for the Winter program which begins January 23rd and the Spring program registration just began. We know all of you are as pleased as we are with this good news. Fifteen of you have been members since the beginning of the program way back in the Fall of 2000 when we had but 80 members. I want to thank you for being with us over the years and to our new members, welcome to our community. We are privileged that you chose the Tufts Osher Lifelong Learning Institute as you embark on your lifelong learning adventure. You will not be disappointed. We offer a plethora of diverse study groups, a lunch and learn series, EDventures for those who want socialization or academic programming, the ability to attend Tufts University events, along with Massachusetts Historical Society and Brookhaven events at no added cost and an opportunity for you to share your knowledge or expertise as a study group leader in any format you wish, whenever you have time. Being a study group leader is the best thing you can do for yourself and let me assure you that you will find our community of members the warmest, most appreciative audience of all. We celebrate all of you whenever we can and indeed, on December 12 we celebrated our past summer and fall study group leaders at An Appreciation Reception in the Coolidge Room in Ballou Hall. Provost Jamshed Bharucha addressed the attendees noting his feelings about lifelong learning and how pleased he is with our program. What a great way to conclude 2007. Now, (borrowing somewhat from Edith Lovejoy Pierce) we open the book for 2008. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called “Opportunity” and being a member of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Tufts is the first chapter.

With love,
Yours for Osher,
Marilyn Blumsack, Director

Appreciation Reception for Study Group Leaders

An Appreciation Reception for Study Group Leaders was held on December 12, 2007, in the Coolidge Room in Ballou Hall at Tufts University.
Profiles of Osher Leaders by Fred Laffert Jr.

Dana MacDonald

Dana McDonald was born and raised in Somerville and attended the local schools. He entered Tufts in January 1943 and joined the Navy ROTC, becoming part of the Navy’s V-12 program, which was an effort to increase the number of qualified officer personnel during the war. He went on active duty later in 1943 and, after additional training, was commissioned an ensign and assigned to the fleet for active duty. He served on minesweepers for the rest of the war, first in the Atlantic, and later in the Pacific. After the war, he was released from active duty, but remained in the Reserves. He later would be called back to active duty during the Korean War, serving as a lieutenant in command of a minesweeper. He remained in the Naval Reserve after the Korean War until retiring as a lieutenant commander.

Between his active duty periods, Dana returned to Tufts and received his degree in Management with the class of 1948. His wife, whom he met there, was also class of 1948. His brother is also a Tufts graduate. After graduation, he held positions in manufacturing management in several companies in different industries in a number of locations, ending as a VP/General Manager of an electronics company. He then began a 20-year career as a management consultant in the areas of project management and marketing. The family returned to the Greater Boston area during this period and remained here when he retired. They have two children and five grandchildren. Dana has been an active volunteer in retirement, consulting for non-profit organizations (such as Habitat for Humanity), serving as the administrator of a 250-member professional organization, and developing and running a program to assist retiring military to transition to civilian positions. He also did personal job consulting and for seven years chaired a committee that ran a daylong retirement gathering program for 300 attendees.

He liked the concept of the Tufts Lifelong Learning Program and joined as it was forming. He has served as Marketing Manager, on the Executive Committee, and has been an active participant in study groups and activities over the years.

Dana is an avid reader, enjoys doing woodworking projects at the family house on Cape Cod, and does acrylic painting. He has exhibited his work at both the Belmont and the Watertown Art Association’s annual shows and has received a number of awards.
Deborah Senay: Adventurer and World Traveler by Caroline Freeman

Adventurer and world traveler, Deborah Senay has returned to her native Massachusetts long enough to contribute her considerable energies to Osher LLI at Tufts. Since joining Osher LLI in the fall of 2006, Deb has not only enrolled in numerous study groups but has also chaired the Hospitality Committee—makers of coffee, providers of coffee-time treats, organizers of end-of-term luncheons.

Deb's round-the-world odyssey began in Leominster, where she was born, raised, and schooled. The larger world beckoned, however, and she left home to study at Trinity College, majoring in political science. After completing her B.A., she was off--to Africa for two years with the Peace Corps, teaching English in an Ivory Coast secondary school. In addition, she volunteered in a local hospital, worked with women's groups on family planning, and "tried to instill some pride and determination for equality" in her female students.

Returning to the U.S. after her service in Africa, Deb began "a pretty traditional career in the computer industry," during which she obtained "one of those funky master's degrees that are custom work/study programs you can get, or at least used to be able to get, by working on government projects." But that career took her into more adventures abroad: "I was offered a job by one of my customers which gave me a chance to move to Hong Kong and open a sales office, selling packaged systems to China." These required both export licenses from the U.S. and import licenses from China. "The politics involved were far more interesting than the job," Deb says. Then "Tiananmen Square happened and we came home."

"We" by then included Bob Wisniewski, Deb's husband, who had worked for the same company. "Home" gave Deb an opportunity to work with high tech start-ups--"the early-adopters," "the lunatic fringe."

Working for start-ups, however, can be risky and exhausting, and after an interval that included both the high-tech boom and the subsequent bust, Deb and Bob geared their lives down and spent several years living on a boat they had purchased--sailing up and down the east coast and enjoying "gin and bitter lemon in the cockpit at sunset."

Then came their return to Massachusetts and life in a converted mill in Lowell, near Deb's family. But perhaps not forever: Bob and Deb are on the hunt for another sailboat, and adventure may beckon at any time.

London/Stratford Tour, Dec. 3-9, 2007 by Dot Dudley, Tour Leader

“All the world’s a stage,” and Tufts/Osher Lifelong learners played their parts brilliantly, as we traveled to London and Stratford last December. In London we enjoyed a tour of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, replicated in 1999 on the South Bank of the Thames, near the site of the original Globe. This was just one of the several high points of our 3-night theater-filled London stay.

Departing London, we stopped for a brief tour of Oxford, before continuing on to Stratford-upon-Avon, where we visited Shakespeare’s birthplace, his grave in Holy Trinity Church, and

(continued on page 5)
**Book Reviews by Tania B. Friedman**

*When the Emperor Was Divine* by Julie Otsuka.

Julie Otsuka has written an eloquent novel about the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Initially there were appeals for tolerance after Pearl Harbor; but with a history of intolerance toward Orientals, racism reared its ugly head. Historically this racism had deep roots. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. Soon after, the Japanese were included. In 1924 Congress cut off Japanese immigration. Japanese immigrants were barred from becoming American citizens; and, in California, they were not permitted to lease or own any land.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, military officials claimed that there had been Japanese espionage and acts of sabotage and argued for mass internment in spite of having no evidence of such acts. Though there was recognition that second and third generation Japanese had become “Americanized,” the view that “a Jap is a Jap” prevailed. President Roosevelt signed the executive order for the internment of more than 110,000 Japanese-Americans in 1942.

Otsuka begins her story with the internment of a Japanese-American family that is not named. The father had been arrested by the FBI and sent to a camp, but he writes upbeat notes to his family assuring them that he is fine. The mother and her seven-year-old son and ten-year-old daughter have to evacuate their home, leaving everything behind. They are put on a train to Topaz, Utah, which is surrounded by desert. They have been told they were there for their own protection and this was an opportunity for them to prove their loyalty. At first the boy thinks he sees his father everywhere. His sister reminds him that his father is gone. Their mother runs into her former housekeeper, who tries to carry a bucket of water for her. The mother tells her “Here we are all equals.” In the camp there are rules about language, i.e., they are residents not evacuees. There are rules about food and no books in Japanese are permitted. Their lives are very circumscribed. The boy plays marbles and cops and robbers but is disturbed by his family’s plight. In spite of this he manages to write positive letters to his father. The daughter knows what she likes, and as she becomes a teenager talks back to her mother.

When the war is over, they return to their home with $25 given by the government for each of them. The home they left has been vandalized and neglected. The first night back home they sleep in their blankets on the floor. With courage they slowly rebuild their lives and eventually their father is reunited with his family.

Otsuka conveys so much in understated, subtle language. She tells us that everything was taken away from these people, and that she withheld their names from the reader so that their names would remain theirs alone. She says that she wrote this book to describe the predicament of ordinary people caught in the extraordinary. Otsuka succeeds in telling their story with restraint and mesmerizing, elegant writing.

Consider joining us for another memory-making adventure when we travel to the West Country of Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy, and be with us for the Victorian Bookends tour Sept. 7-14, 2008.

*Heed Charles Dickens and Travel with Osher*

"It is required of every man," the ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and, if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death."

Charles Dickens *A Christmas Carol* 1843

**Anne Hathaway’s Cottage.** On each of our 2 evenings in Stratford, we were treated to performances by the Royal Shakespeare Company of HENRY IV, part II and HENRY V, respectively. To see the plays performed by the RSC on Shakespeare’s home turf was pure pleasure for us all. The greatest joy, however, came from the wonderful camaraderie of our merry band—the warm memories of our shared experiences will last a lifetime.
Irene Weigel by Joyce Ananian

In both her personal and professional worlds, Irene Weigel drinks deeply of all that life offers. To her teaching at Tufts Osher Lifelong Learning she brings passion, curiosity, knowledge, and thoughtfulness. The classroom is energized by her powerful, confident teaching style.

It is especially surprising to learn that her course on world faiths began when a good friend told Irene that she had to “walk through her fear.” The fear was of teaching a course on the tenets of world faiths in the Universalist Unitarian church where her friend was the director of religious education. Thus began Irene’s fascinating journey of learning, sharing, and enlightening herself and her students.

A sense of adventure and a love of learning led Irene to her passion for exploring living faiths. Irene and her husband met while both were students at Harvard University. They traveled around the world in the year between her husband’s residency and fellowship. Half of their trip was spent in the Far East, sparking Irene’s passion for creating courses that do much more than provide information.

In order to prepare for her courses, Irene embarked on a self-study program including courses at Harvard Extension, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, and Hebrew College, among others. The seminars also are forums where participants can wrestle with questions about their convictions and the ways in which they relate to those held by others. She is a model in her classroom of openness to differing beliefs and a level of acceptance that transcends the need to judge and value. Once her students are able to see what brings meaning to another, they open up to the human and emotional dimensions of faith.

Before meeting the challenge of creating the course on world faiths, Irene had been a researcher, sociologist, and management consultant. She feels that her early work in the theater helps her in her presentations as well as her ability to engage her class. When asked about where and in what she acted, she revealed that while attending a private girls’ high school, she acted with Glenn Close for three years. One of the plays they performed in together was Romeo and Juliet.

Family is very important to this high-energy speaker. She and her husband have a 27-year-old daughter who is an artist working in India and a son who is a junior at Harvard University in global public health policy.

Irene has been an organic gardener for the past 25 years and enjoys cooking. The family also values their getaway home in the Colorado Mountains where they can appreciate the huge spaces of nature.

Teaching her course on World Faiths at Tufts is just one way in which Irene can live out her gratitude and desire to give to others. The Tufts Osher Lifelong Learning community reaps the benefit of Irene’s willingness to “walk through her fear” and emerge on the other side as a dynamic teacher.

Focus on a Study Group Leader

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Registration is Now Open

Spring 2008 Study Groups, E-Learning Groups & Workshops
March 17 - May 9, 2008

Check our website for course descriptions, Osher LLI news, activities, calendar, publications, forms, and resources!
www.ase.tufts.edu/lli

Join Our On-Line Book Club

Our next book is Ahab’s Wife by Sena Jeter Naslund. John Murphy, of Punta Gorda, FL is the On-Line Book Club Coordinator. Contact John (hamjfm@embarqmail.com) if you are interested or want more details. The only charge to you is the time you spend in front of your computer.
My Dearest Friend Reading at Faneuil Hall by Muffy Lutzin

On a blustery November evening, more than thirty members of Osher LLI at Tufts braved the elements and headed to Faneuil Hall. Marilyn Blumsack reserved seats for the group, who came to hear eminent Massachusetts politicians and their wives read selected letters of John and Abigail Adams. The Massachusetts Historical Society and Harvard University Press co-sponsored the program to celebrate a new release, My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams.

Above the stage, a bust of John Adams stared down at the throngs of people packing the hall. WCVB-TV’s Mary Richardson moderated the program, filling in historical context as Senator Edward Kennedy and Mrs. Victoria Kennedy, Governor Deval Patrick and Mrs. Diane Patrick, and former Governor Michael Dukakis and Mrs. Kitty Dukakis read letters describing the hard work, horrors of war, stresses of everyday life, and thoughtfulness that went into the creation of our country and its government.

We heard the frustration of two people in love, long separated from each other as each served their country: John out in front, and Abigail very evident in the background. John listened carefully to the advice Abigail penned to him as he worked to get our fledgling country on its feet. He often used her counsel, although he was not ready to accede to her admonishment to “remember the ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors”.

The personalities of the pen pals and the distinguished readers made for a remarkable evening in this historic venue. The program is available at: http://forum.wgbh.org/wgbh/forum.php?lecture_id=3775.

Brookhaven at Lexington by Lynne Romboli, Director of Resident Services

Greetings and a very Happy New Year from Brookhaven! It was a busy fall term here at the Satellite Campus and we were so pleased that participants in study groups included both Brookhaven residents and Osher members at large. A number of our residents also enjoyed attending study groups at the Medford campus. Osher LLI is a valued part of the Wellness Works program at Brookhaven and we are very proud of our affiliation and growing membership.

As we look ahead to Winter Session, followed by the wonderful array of study groups, EDventures and special programs highlighted in the Spring brochure, we are ever grateful for the many volunteer hours so generously given by all of the Osher Committee members and Study Group Leaders who are an integral part of the program’s success. I have had the great good fortune to work with Marilyn Blumsack and her staff even more intensely over the past year. I continue to be impressed with their remarkable dedication and enthusiasm.

Please be sure to have a look at some of the programs and events here at Brookhaven (see enclosed flyer) that are open to Osher members on a space available basis. With our new expanded Auditorium, we now have extra seating capacity; so don’t hesitate to give me a call to reserve your seat! We look forward to seeing you.

Warmest regards, Lynne Romboli
lromboli@brookhavenatlexington.org
781-863-9660 x241
Opening Reception for All Osher LLI Members March 16th

You don’t have to be Irish to kiss the Blarney Stone or to celebrate the opening of the Osher LLI Spring Session.

Save Sunday, March 16, 2008 for a celebration with food, fun, music, and friends.

See enclosed flyer for details.