Osher Hangout Sports New Look  
*By Sylvia Sachs*

There's a new look to the headquarters of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon, and member Betsy Martin can take much of the credit for this landmark in the remarkable history and expansion of this organization.

In late 1992, the basement of Carnegie Mellon's Alumni House became the hangout for the first members and officers of the Academy for Lifelong Learning when the group was small and still unaware of its future as one of the largest and most admired adult learning organizations in the country.

"Hangout" was a good description of the space since it was a haphazard collection of secondhand furniture and office equipment donated from CMU's or some member's unused old stuff. The atmosphere was an older-adult version of the neighborhood kids' clubhouse.

Not to knock it. The Alumni House was fun...at first. So what if drops of water sometimes plopped on the heads of early volunteers folding and stuffing letters in one of the dimly lit rooms? Or if scarce storage space sometimes booby-trapped workers, or extra seating turned out to be overturned wooden boxes?

One of the pluses of this early situation was the congenial relationship that built up between our volunteers and the CMU staff workers there. However, by 2000 it was time to find bigger quarters, and A.L.L. accepted Gloriana St. Clair's offer of the space in the lower level of Hunt Library. The next step, with the help of a gift of $10,000 in 2006 in memory of member Martha Orringer, was to redesign the conference/classroom attached to the Hunt Library office, and then, with the anticipation of a second $100,000 grant from the Osher Foundation, to completely redo the office to its present design.

That's where Betsy Martin comes into the picture. Betsy was just the person we needed when redesign first came up. A few details about her background illustrate her devotion to this area and to Carnegie Mellon. Her family has a long history around here, including membership in the venerable Iron City Fishing Club in Canada, where a group of Pittsburgh families have summered for generations. Betsy remembers enjoying living in her grandparents' tent there when she was a child. Children and grandchildren, including Betsy's, still spend part of each summer there.

After graduation from Wellesley, Betsy came back to the School of Architecture at Carnegie Tech, where she met Derek Martin, an architect teaching in the department. They married, had four great children, and eventually worked together in an architectural office until Derek's death in 1994. They designed, built, and for many years lived in a very modern house. Betsy now lives in a circa 1871 stone house in Crafton.

Betsy has always volunteered, usually in conjunction with her interest in historic preservation. She cofounded the Neville House Auxiliary and has worked for 23 years on the preservation and restoration of the Andrew Carnegie Free Library in Carnegie.

So with her many years' experience focusing on interior design, she worked along with Ray Schinhofen, Bea Jones, and the late Ed Fisher to devise the new look of the office. During the renovation, she spent many hours directing the project, coordinating the work along with CMU people who were also reconfiguring the basement space.

All new furniture was selected (except for the old metal cabinets, now hardly recognizable with a new black matte finish). Betsy's subtle use of color, curving planes contrasting with squared-off design points, have resulted in an attractive, sophisticated, and efficient office.

Everyone should stop into the office to admire its new look. And we all should say thank you to our inhouse designer, Betsy Martin.
Ice Cream Social Fetes Volunteers and Study Leaders

By Filomena Conti, Chair, Social Committee

On August 30 we celebrated the fifth annual Ice Cream Social for our study leaders and volunteers. This was an opportunity for everyone to greet and meet while enjoying self-made ice cream sundaes along with cookies and coffee.

Jack Dick’s music on the keyboard served as a background for the many conversations of the volunteers and study leaders.

In addition to her welcoming remarks, President Rita Zecher gave a full explanation of A.L.L.’s transition to becoming the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon.

Special thanks to Sally Davoren, Ron Fuchs, Lois Gongaware, Liz Jawalek, Catherine Lazarus, Jane Souser, and co-chair Betsy Martin of the Social Committee for making the Ice Cream Social in the Rangos Ballroom such a fun occasion.

From the President

By Rita Zecher

This has been a summer of change: our new name and the remodeling of our office and conference room. We never thought it would be ready by September for the fall session; miraculously, it was finished.

Many thanks to our member Betsy Martin, who is an architect, and, incidentally, our vice-president. She worked with the university and oversaw the design and structure of our space. We are planning a dedication of the Martha Orringer Conference Room, and grand reopening of our offices on Saturday, December 1. Watch your mail for your invitation and come see for yourselves.

We were very busy preparing our proposal to the Osher Foundation for our second grant. The many details that are needed for a name change include new stationery, web pages, notice to our members, and much more. A special thank you to Bob Bowden for the gift of his talent designing our stationery, newsletter masthead, and brochure that is sent to the wait list applicants. Bob is one of our study leaders.

In October we celebrated Millie Lynch’s first anniversary as administrative coordinator. This summer she ran the office out of cartons and debris in a tiny section of the conference room while the office was being remodeled. It was a challenge! I’Il bet Millie didn’t expect that ordeal her first year.

Along with Mary Cay Burke-Hamill and her data-entry volunteer committee, and a strong core of experienced reception-desk volunteers, we managed to get the winter catalog out. Whew!

We look forward to 2008 with an expanded membership of over 1,500 members. We are proud to be one of the largest of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes in the United States.

Winter 2008 Course Catalog
The OLLI at Carnegie Mellon Traveler

By Elaine Light

I went to Argentina last January because the leader of a group of food writers I travel with was looking for some place warm. She lives in Minnesota! Buenos Aires, a 10½-hour flight from Atlanta, was basking in its 85-90 degree summer.

The world’s ninth-largest city, Buenos Aires has grand boulevards and tall buildings. The Avenida 9 de Julio is so wide it takes three sets of traffic lights to cross it. At the outskirts of the city are polo and soccer fields. Also horrific slums where people exist in a tangle of old cardboard and newspaper shelters.

The peso was devalued several years ago, so for foreign visitors, taxis and food are inexpensive. The dinner hour is late, and even at midnight, as we would be returning to our hotel we would see, through the windows of brightly lit restaurants, families with young children.

The national dish is the empanada, served, depending on filling, as an appetizer, main course, or dessert. It is a small pastry turnover that is either baked or fried. We kept trying to get the recipe for the dough until it turned out they were all made with purchased pastry rounds. I found them in the frozen foods case at Reyna’s in the Strip District. They are made in Argentina.

The most famous Argentine is Eva Peron, wife of the late dictator Juan Peron. A must-see for all tourists is her tomb in La Recoleta cemetery. Her body was kidnapped and found many years later in Milan, Italy. It is now buried three layers deep in her father’s family tomb.

Equally popular is the museum, devoted to her life, housed in an elegant town house on a leafy street. Here you can see her designer clothes and shoes, plus a photographic history of her short (33 years) but controversial life.

Since this was a food-oriented trip, we enjoyed many meals at the parrillas, or grills, that specialize in the grass-fed Argentine beef. The dinner always started with two little grilled sausages, pork, and morcilla, a black blood sausage. This was followed by about a pound of rib eye, generally well-done and heavily salted. It was served with chimichurri, an herb and olive oil sauce, also heavily salted. Potatoes, roasted or fried, were the only accompaniment. A lightly dressed salad of garden lettuce and tomato completed the meal. I never saw ketchup or any vegetable.

We enjoyed some fine Italian foods in the wine region the wine region when we visited Mendoza. Eighty percent of the populace there have Italian ancestors. Argentina has many nationalities, and there are sections that are French, German, and even Welsh—where it is reported tea is served every afternoon. This would be English tea, not the national drink, mate, which Argentines drink all day. This is brewed from an herb and is definitely an acquired taste.

Thanks to Homecoming Helpers

Many thanks to the seven stalwart Osher members who answered the call to serve at CMU Homecoming on October 25-27 this year. They included Filomena Conti, Art Daravanis, Bea Jones, Millie Lynch, Sylvia Rutledge, Joe Scorpion, and Rita Zecher.

Our members acted as greeters and assistants in the hospitality room of the Alumni Lounge in the University Center, where they provided guidance and direction to alumni in attendance.

A special thank you to long-time volunteer Art Daravanis, who recently moved back to Chicago (his home town), but returned to help us at this event.

Joe Scorpion
A Win-Win Situation

By Sally Cohen
Chair, Curriculum Committee

It’s amazing, our membership keeps growing, and we don’t seem to be able to shrink our waiting list. Recently we admitted over 200 new members, and because people continue to apply for membership, at this writing the waiting list numbers 600. We were surprised and pleased to learn that Osher at Carnegie Mellon’s numbers (members and those waiting to join) are significantly larger than those of most Lifelong Learning Institutes in the United States.

Yet we have never advertised! There is great word-of-mouth praise for our program. In social, business, and academic groups, there often is a “buzz” about our courses and study leaders. New ideas percolate, and frequently individuals who are unaffiliated with our organization are stimulated to become part of our faculty.

I recently talked with a man, new to Pittsburgh, who attended a Carnegie Mellon event and heard someone say, “A lot of people from ‘that organization’ are here.” Further inquiry led him to our office hoping to teach and, perhaps, become a member. As chair of the Curriculum Committee, I made contact with him, explained the curriculum process, and discussed possible course plans. Then his name was put on a list with other new study leaders and their qualifications, and suggested courses were discussed at curriculum meetings. As usually happens, in a matter of months new courses appeared in our catalog.

So it is our reputation that keeps us growing. The programs we offer attract students with a variety of interests. In any setting where the buzz about Osher at Carnegie Mellon occurs, members usually talk about the fascinating classes they have taken, the breadth of topics that are available, and how this experience gives them a wonderful opportunity to stay active and continue to learn.

Members also tell us they look forward to new catalogs and are intrigued by the changing mix of courses. Along with registering for courses they have taken previously or for those they have heard about but not yet taken, they are eager to find interesting new classes. For many, looking through a catalog is an exciting experience.

In addition, people like the fact that they can participate in program development. They are encouraged to request additional classes with subject matter that appeals to them and to identify instructors who teach interesting topics. They also are asked to offer constructive criticism about program details.

The genuine interest members show in enhancing the program is an enormous motivator for the committee. It encourages our program to move forward. When requests can be granted and particular instructors are successfully linked with fresh topics, a win-win situation occurs and we create a stimulating experience for both students and instructors. The resonating dynamics that exist between study leaders and students make Osher at Carnegie Mellon a unique, independent entity.

There is a reciprocal payoff: students learn from study leaders; and, frequently, study leaders are fascinated by how much they learn from students—how much life experience can add to a course plan. There is enthusiastic give-and-take. Instructors also feel that being part of this faculty enables them to teach highly motivated people who want to be in class and to learn. What’s more, for many study leaders, teaching in a lifelong learning program provides an opportunity to give something back to a community whom they respect and from whom they have gained experience and expertise over the years.

Many challenges face everyone involved in creating a successful program. The Curriculum Committee willingly takes them on and is constantly learning what works and what doesn’t, what should be attempted and what possible sources to contact for program expansion. Our resources have grown. Moreover, people in the community see us as a resource that helps energize them, stretches their knowledge, and provides enjoyment and entertainment. We are proud of everyone who helps us be what we are!

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon thanks Sylvia Fischer for her gift in memory of her husband, Ben Fischer
Notes from the Office
By Millicent M. Lynch, Administrative Coordinator

Our new offices are beautiful, colorful, modern, uncluttered, and comfortable. Thanks to the talents and extraordinary efforts of member/architect Betsy Martin, our surroundings have vastly improved. The cabinets hide all of the necessities of office life—supplies, files, and other resources. The cork floors are green—environmentally friendly, although a toasty speckled brown in color. The cork floors are also soft on the feet and muffle noise.

The conference room is surrounded by color—greens, reds, and beiges—and subtle lighting. It now contains a closet for our television and shelves for art teachers to store supplies.

Funding for the renovations was made possible by an Osher Foundation grant and from a donation by Harriet C. Rath in honor of her sister, Martha Chersky Orringer, who died on April 18, 2006. Thank you to both.

An open house will be held on December 1, at which time members can view the new offices and enjoy a continental breakfast.

The holidays are soon approaching, which means that as in previous years, members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at CMU participated in the campus food drive by bringing canned goods or dry foods to our office or our classrooms in Wean Hall and Hunt Library between October 29 and November 9. We hope that this turns out to be a banner year for food donations. Did you know that:

- In Allegheny County, 41,339 children (14.9%) lived in poverty in the year 2000.
- In the City of Pittsburgh, 17,868 children (27.5%) lived in poverty in 2000.
- More than 12,000 infants and children benefit from the WIC program in Allegheny County.
- Chronic hunger causes anxiety, low self-esteem, and hostility in children.

When our members donate food items, we can make a difference. We can help to alleviate hunger in Allegheny County.

A Transportation Solutions Shuttle, available only to Osher members, ran two days per week during the first session of the fall term and is running Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays during the second session. The shuttle stops at Hunt Library and Wean Hall. Look for the schedule in our classrooms.

This is a trial. If our members use the shuttle, we will consider expanding service in the future. There isn’t a long wait, as the shuttle does not drive through Oakland before dropping off members on campus.

Bad weather reminder: On those days when Old Man Winter reappears, please remember that we will not have classes when the Pittsburgh Public Schools are closed. Please watch TV stations KDKA, WTAE, or WPXI or tune your radio to KDKA to get the updated list of school closings. Our closing information will also be indicated under Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon. Please remember to use your own discretion in bad weather and put your safety first.

Safety issues: If a fire alarm sounds in a campus building, please evacuate as quickly and calmly as possible. If you have mobility problems, stay where you are, close the door, and ask someone to contact campus police to alert them that you are in the building. Those evacuating a building should not use the elevator. If you are in Wean Hall, turn right as you exit the classroom and follow the corridor around until you see the exit directly in front of you, just past Room 4602. This will lead to a stairwell where another exit door leads to the parking lot.

The Board of Directors has authorized purchasing two AED devices, one to be placed outside the classrooms in Wean Hall and the other outside the Orringer Conference Room in Hunt Library. The device is for use in cardiac arrest situations. Members interested in receiving training in how to use the devices should call the office at 412-268-7489.
“Hot Topics” has been one of the most frequent offerings in the catalogs—not as frequent as the really venerable “Short Stories” and “Great Novels Revisited” courses, but in the running for a well-attended, popular study group. The idea is to schedule discussions of matters of current interest, led by someone informed on the subject. For the most part, we have been able to meet this intention. The late Allegheny County Commissioner Tom Foerster spoke about county government just months after he left office. (He was so impressed with the people in the class, he agreed to present his own six-week class the next term.) Bill Green, from the other side of the political spectrum, was often a “Hot Topics” leader, and evoked lots of groans before the 2000 national election when he predicted the election of George W. Bush. But he was invited back many times and always caused a lively class. Other political people like Barbara Hafer, Bill Peduto, Jim Roddey, and Pennsylvania House member Don Walko were exciting study leaders.

Then there were columnists like Brian O’Neill and Tony Norman, and cartoonist Rob Rogers, and editors from both the Tribune Review and the Post-Gazette. At one session Dr. Lewis H. Kuller, head of Pitt’s Center for Healthy Aging brought us up-to-date on that important subject.

The most-recent “Hot Topics” session, by lucky chance, featured some “big name” speakers, and several new people in the class indicated that these “celebrities”—rather than their subject matter—inspired their desire to attend the class! Well, the participation of political insider, women’s rights advocate, and all-round society personality Elsie Hillman filled that bill. “Elsie,” as everyone calls her, talked about some of her fascinating life experiences, including some frank observations on political personalities. This series also featured Dr. John Murray, former president of Duquesne University, who led the COMPAC 21 Committee, which led to the restructuring of Allegheny County government, and Richard Armstrong, director of the Carnegie Museum of Art, who couldn’t be a more perfect image of the role. Ted Black of the Pittsburgh Penguins turned every listener into an instant hockey fan.

All this is leading up to the fact that “Hot Topics” has been going for lo these many years and is ready for a new leader and new blood. Please, somebody, volunteer to hop in and take over this popular study group. This weary organizer will happily attend and take a front-row seat.

Mary Lou Ende is one of Osher at CMU’s best-known members because of her great job staffing the reception desk at our office in Hunt Library with well-trained volunteers. These volunteers have really important duties assisting Administrative Coordinator Millie Lynch and keeping our organization running.

For most people this time-consuming responsibility would be enough volunteer work, but not for Mary Lou. For 10 years she has been a team member of the TV Ministry at St. Paul’s Cathedral in Oakland. This ministry, which started 16 years ago, photographs every Mass at the Cathedral and sends it to the local cable TV station, where it becomes available to people viewing in their homes. Two people work together on this project at each Mass; one sits in an office working the controls, and one is in the sanctuary operating the camera and choosing the angle or focus most appropriate for viewing at home. Mary Lou enjoys being the camera person and volunteers two or three times a week.

“Mostly we come in at 8:15 in the mornings, but sometimes if something special is going on, we come in at 8,” says Mary Lou. “We were there early, for sure, when the new bishop was installed in October. We got new camera equipment recently and that’s wonderful. The old cameras were really old.”

More chance to be creative, Mary Lou? Another Osher at Carnegie Mellon member, Martha Malinzak, is a fellow TV personality at St. Paul’s Cathedral, Mary Lou reports.

All Joe Scorpion’s buddies have heard about his grandson, Steve Scorpion. Steve starred in basketball at Franklin Regional High School and at Pitt-Johnstown, making his grandfather, the ultimate sports fan, very proud. Now, Joe has another Steve accomplishment to be proud of. Steve is now an assistant coach at Polk Community College in Winter Haven, Florida.

Congratulations, Steve . . . and Joe.
Familiar Faces Seen on the Internet

By Rosalyn Treger

We may be the last generation to remember typewriter ribbons and carbon paper, but we hold our own with the computer, and we know our way around the Internet. Sometimes while surfing we see familiar faces from Osher at CMU on the web.


JaneStories recently ran a contest for flash fiction. “The assignment was to write a drabble—100 words, not counting the title—on the theme of ‘womanliness.’” And the first-prize winner was our own member and study leader Judith Robinson.

Judy’s biography on the Janestories web site ran considerably longer than her winning entry, and it mentioned A.L.L. (now Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) at Carnegie Mellon several times. Some excerpts follow:

“Judith Robinson is an editor, teacher, fiction writer, and poet. . . . She has been published in numerous magazines, newspapers and anthologies. She was editor of Living Inland, 1989, Bennington Press; and author of The Beautiful Wife and Other Stories 1996, Aegina Press. She is poetry editor and contributor to Signatures Volumes 1, 2, and 3, 2001, 2003, and 2006, Academy for Lifelong Learning at Carnegie Mellon University and Ring Road Press. She is senior editor of Only the Sea keeps: Poetry of the Tsunami, 2005, Rupa Publishers, Inc. and Bayeux Arts. Currently she is editing Along These Rivers, a poetry anthology celebrating the 250th anniversary of the City of Pittsburgh in 2008. . . . She currently teaches poetry in the ALL Program [now Osher] at Carnegie Mellon University.”

Here is Judith Robinson’s winning entry.

A Catholic Funeral

Though young when she died, Patricia had written with an old woman’s wisdom—ideas multi-layered for the hungry like flaky pastry that yields more fullness with each bite; beauty, too, subtle, the kind it took eyes fired by spirit to see.

The lucky saw what she allowed: the intimate parts, body locations that suffered, taut soul wrestling with frenzy and raw death premonition.

My quarrel is not that she’s gone, but gone without a laurel crown, or even historical context; no, the praise that day was for Messiah, when I longed to hear her voice, to know her maiden name.

Member and study leader Lois Perelman laughs that she never thought emphysema would make her famous. Lois uses oxygen shopping, exercising, and teaching her OLLI at CMU class “Aging with Wit and Wisdom” in a video, “Breathe Easy,” posted on YouTube (search for LoisPerelman). There have been over 2,200 hits on the video.

A birthday gift from Lois’s sister, the video is “about living an active, positive life with the handicap of severe COPD/emphysema and the need to use supplemental oxygen.

“It is also about living fully with any condition at any age.

“Even though you have the physical problem, you are still free to choose your attitude about it.

“As Albert Ellis said, ‘People are disturbed not by what happens to them, but by their view of what happens to them.’

“Breathe easy.”

On video: teacher Lois Perelman, students Irv Rosenthal and Verna Hart
What I Liked About Rose Marie’s October Osher at CMU Tour to New York City

By Marilyn McDevitt Rubin

I liked everything.
I liked riding in the bus. It was so much better than flying into a New York City airport. Zoos is what they are. Driving a car to New York City is an alternative to flying, but parking in Manhattan is impossible (and if you can find space, it’s costly).

In our comfortable bus we read, we napped, we visited, we made our necessary stops and arrived in good spirits.

In a city with staggering hotel prices, the Hotel Belleclaire seemed first-class to me. It had recently been renovated and was pretty, comfortable, and spotlessly clean. Since the bus was our transportation within the city, there was no need to worry about location, but if Rose Marie stays there again, (and I hope she will), those taking the trip may be interested to know that there is a subway line two blocks away at West 79th St.

The museums we visited housed fabulous collections, and there was a guide in each choice. At the Metropolitan he was clever, wicked, and funny, given to wild gestures and wisecracks. At the Morgan the guide was one of us. She looked like we look and she thought the way we did. What she told us was what we wanted to know. At MOMA the gorgeous young woman guide spoke perfect English with hints of something foreign. It’s my guess that in her own country she is a princess. When she returns home, it will be to manage the royal family art collection and increase its holdings. Her idea of a tour was to get us to think and to share observations.

The New York City Opera, included in every tour I’ve been on, is always worthwhile. This time it was a naughty version of Handel’s “Agrippina,” with lots of larking about in the bedroom. The staging was clever and the voices were beautiful.

Dinners are arranged by Rose Marie and are all-inclusive. As food is my thing, I sometimes leave the tour in search of a restaurant and pay for the meals myself. This time my two best picks were dinner at L’Atelier de Joel Robuchon and a late lunch at the Morgan Dining Room, whose executive chef is a woman, Charlene Shade. Next year my intention is to have the tasting menu and wine pairing at Le Bernardin. I saw it on a list of things to do before you die. The chef, Eric Ripert, along with Chef Thomas Keller and Chef Jean Georges Vongerichten made chefs of the year in both the Michelin and Zagat restaurant guides.

For information about Rose Marie’s tours watch for mailings from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon.

Class Coordinators

Thanks to our unsung volunteers, who are important to our success. The coordinators recruit the study leader assistants and send the class lists, attendance sheets, and instructions to the assistants. They are

- Norma Artman
- Dolores Blumstein
- Suzanne Flood
- Bernice Levine
Looking Ahead to Special Events in 2008

By Gerry Smith

Osher at Carnegie Mellon special events take a back seat to our upcoming holiday season, from Thanksgiving to Hanukkah to Christmas to New Year festivities.

But fast-forward to January 2, 2008, and you might already be feeling a bit of post-traumatic letdown. Time to call Rose Marie!

No, she’s not a psychiatrist. She is (by her own definition) “Personalized, Pampered Service in Motorcoach Travel.” Bye-bye airport security! Bye bye, holiday jamups and lost luggage! It’s over the river and through the woods to your 2008 summer destination of choice, via leisurely, scenic highway and air-conditioned motorcoach. Where and when?

- Cape Cod with Martha’s Vineyard and Provincetown (June 22-28)
- Niagara on the Lake, Ontario (Shaw Festival July 22-25)
- Chautauqua Institute (August 25-29)
- Biltmore Estate, Asheville, N.C. (September 16-19)
- New York City (October 20-23)

An interesting trip to museums of Toronto and Buffalo (May 28-31) is still tentative. Stay tuned!

Prefer to sleep in your own bed? Then the one-day trips planned by Bob Dickman might be more your preference.

“We try to do three or four one-day trips a year,” Bob informs us. “We’ve not yet decided for 2008, but I’m sure there will be something in the spring. Got an idea? He’s open to suggestions.

Most recently, Bob hosted the trip November 3 to the Cleveland Museum of Art (Monet to Dali) and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. Cleveland’s well-known deli Corky & Lenny’s provided box lunches enjoyed on the bus en route to the Maltz, which featured the exhibit “Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race.” The day ended with wine and cheese served on the bus as the group headed home from a very full day.

Fall Lectures: From Cyberspace to Inner Space

By Rosalyn Treger

The Osher Lifelong Institute at CMU is known for the lively variety of our programs. The fall lecture schedule could be a poster child for this variety.

- On October 29, Dena Haritos Tsamitis spoke to members, guests, and waitlisters on the topic “From User Beware to Cyberaware: Safe and Responsible Use of the Internet.”

Ms. Tsamitis leads Carnegie Mellon’s Information Networking Institute. She is also director of education, training, and outreach for the Carnegie Mellon CyLab and represents CMU on the Department of Homeland Security Task Force for Information Security Education and Awareness.

- On November 7, Zeid Ra’ad Zeid Al-Hussein, Jordan’s ambassador to the U.S. and permanent representative to the U.N. talked in Joseph Eaton’s course on “Why Has There Been No Two State Agreement in Palestine?” The lecture was opened to all members of OLLI at CMU and took place in the evening in Levy Hall at Rodef Shalom Congregation.

Dr. Zeid was the first president of the governing body of the International Criminal Court. He currently chairs the Consultative Committee for the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

- “Jeans and Genes—Understanding the Hand-Me-Downs that We Give to Our Children and Grandchildren” was the topic of genetic counselor Sheila Solomon’s talk on November 12. Ms. Solomon worked for the West Penn Allegheny Health System from 2001 to 2007 and currently lectures on the relationship between family history and health awareness and healthy living.

- On Wednesday, December 12, Professor Ronald H. Linden will talk at 7:30 p.m. in the Connan Room of the University Center on “Picking up the Pieces: Foreign Policy after George Bush.” Dr. Linden is the former director of the Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies at Pitt.
Speaking Of Books

By Helen-Faye Rosenblum


“Reading may be the last secretive behavior that is neither pathological or [sic] prosecutable.”—Richard Powers, in the Introduction to The Paris Review Book for Planes, Trains, Elevators, and Waiting Rooms.

... And speaking of means of transportation or chambers of transition, time was not so long ago when many a reader thought that short stories existed for just those venues—although, of course, that was long before we all said “venue.” Another truism held that stories were the quick and easy money factories writers relied on to tide them over between the real (respectable) labor of completing their novels.

Fortunately, in recent decades the literary world has witnessed an overdue sea-change in the respect, attention, and shelf space paid to the modern English-language short story. Dazzling and distinguished literary journals abound. Some are independently supported, such as Glimmer Train, Granta, Tin House, and Zoetrope, to name a better known, established quartet out of scores of exciting examples. Others, some prestigious and venerable, enjoy the aegis of their respective universities. Think of the Kenyon Review, Ploughshares, or the Virginia Quarterly Review, for starters. Among commercial publications, the New Yorker still holds singular prestige as a fearless nurturer of literary talent both fresh and time-tested. In some other quadrant of the courage matrix lies One Story, a periodical whose mission is just what it says: to publish exactly one outstanding piece of work, nothing else, in a tiny format in every issue. And it does.

Even newspapers, both the dailies and the weeklies, occasionally give themselves over to short fiction, presumably in the effort to diversify their offerings as subscribers drift toward the Internet. And, yes, the Internet. It’s possible to download short fiction from any number of publishers, periodicals, and author websites. And there’s no telling how much original work is out there in cyberspace, posted and blogged and e-mailed by the generations who have learned to bypass the rigors of the traditional publication process and head straight for the generational cohorts who have learned to get their fiction fix this way.

In the mainstream, though, it’s positively exhilarating to note how many publishers are giving short fiction a chance. In a recent edition of the Sunday New York Times Book Review, two of six—that’s 33-1/3 per cent!—of the fiction books reviewed were volumes of short stories. William Trevor’s Cheating at Canasta, which reviewer William Boyd describes as “magisterial,” is the work of a singular author who was born in 1928 and still writes with the vigor of youth, the wisdom of age, and the language of genius. Ellen Litman’s The Last Chicken in America, written (in English) by a prolifically talented young Russian expatriate, receives praise for its “elegantly constructed web of stories about Russian-Jewish immigrants. ...” The witty, ironic, and insightful volume might have special appeal to Osher at Carnegie Mellon readers, because said immigrants live in Squirrel Hill.

Why, then, with more than a groundswell of excitement about the short fiction that’s appearing in diverse and accessible locations, and with short fiction reading and writing being taught across a spectrum of ages and institutions nationwide, would Stephen King open his introduction to The Best American Short Stories: 2007 this way: “The American short story is alive and well. Do you like the sound of that? Me too. I only wish it were true.” King, himself no amateur at the art of short fiction, goes on to opine that the art form itself is alive, and that the stories he’d read in the preparation for this book were fine: “Some were very good. And some—you will find them in this book—seemed to touch greatness. ... But well? That’s a different story.”

Perhaps Mr. King was offering a sort of stalking horse, a decoy of an issue aimed at directing fresh waves of attention toward the subject. He did, after all, publish a form of that very essay in the Times Book Review. Perhaps, acting as midwife to a book destined never to reach the stratosphere sales heights of, say, Carrie or Cujo, he is indeed righteously indignant at the comparative statistics, and wishes to alter the statistics any way he can. Whatever the case, I believe to my core that the state of the commerce is far healthier than Mr. King does. Where we agree is on the state of the art.

The Best American contains 20 stories, culled from sources as disparate as the New Yorker (Alice Munro), Fantasy and Science Fiction (Bruce McAllister), and Subtropics (Eileen Pollack). There is no unifying theme, style, voice, or attitude.

Continued on page 11
The principal omnipresent characteristic is excellence. The volume is organized in alphabetical order by author (other editors have made other thematic choices or reversed the alphabet to confound expectations).

Louis Auchincloss, lawyer, Kennedy relative, author of more than 60 books, and a designated “Living Landmark” by the New York Landmarks Conservancy, provides the first story, “Pa’s Darling.” Mr. Auchincloss writes in the first person singular, and the persona he inhabits is that of a middle-aged woman in 1960. The narrator informs using the very first paragraph that “...people, I know, always think of me not as the widow of the brilliant young attorney, Sumner Shepard, gallantly dead in the 1940 fall of France, nor even as the present wife of Dicky Phelps, senior partner of his distinguished law firm, but as the daughter of Lionel Hemenway, the great judge of the New York Court of Appeals, renowned sage and philosopher, author of provocative books on law and literature, and the witty deity of the Patroons Club. God rest his soul if it be capable of resting.”

With this voice and language, Auchincloss immediately transports the reader to drawing rooms where footsteps are muted and emotions equally so. He masterfully limns a woman whose life is brutally subverted by the manipulations of a tyrannical father, even as each player in the family drama lives out the airs and graces and amenities of gentility and privilege. The narrator speaks in hushed tones, and agonizes within. When the story ends, the grip of this woman’s truth releases us slowly, and at last we can remember that we weren’t eavesdropping, only reading. And that the author who so brilliantly captured this woman’s tormented interior is accomplished in telling truth not through fact, but through the organized fabrications of great fiction.

In contrast, the story “Findings & Impressions” represents the very first published story by the Korean-born, New York-raised Stellar Kim. Ms. Kim’s narrator, a man, is a physician, who feels deeply for his patients, but has difficulty finding a path between objective, professional distance, and growing personal compassion. The format of the story telegraphs its emotional evolution. At first, the narrative is bounded by categorical headlines. “What I saw.” “What I also saw.” “About cancer.” “What I failed to diagnose.” As the emotional climate warms, Ms. Kim loosens the narrative. The flow of paragraph upon paragraph leads from the clinical sterility of the early scenes at the hospital to sad and lovely and fragrant moment of truth at—Victoria’s Secret. The ending, unimaginable at the outset, is nonetheless inevitable, touching, human. In “The Bris,” Eileen Pollack chooses third-person narration, but, like Auchincloss and Kim, thoroughly inhabits the point of view of someone other than herself. (Editor King, assuming that readers understand that a “bris” is a ritual Jewish circumcision, provides no translation of the term.) Marcus Sloan, the protagonist, arrives in Florida to visit his aged father, suffering terminal liver disease. Marcus, Pollack in forms us, “... prepared for the likelihood that in another few days he would be arranging his father’s funeral.” What he couldn’t have predicted was that first he would be called on to arrange his father’s bris.

In a delicious twist on expectations, Marcus learns that his father has been a secret Gentile and now wants a deathbed bris so that he can be legally buried under religious law, next to his beloved wife. Obstacles medical and religious threaten Marcus’s attempt to satisfy his father’s wish. His solution proves the ultimate compassion of a son and the ingenuity of a modern-day survivor. The story ends, as does the elder Mr. Sloan’s life, on a note of justice and of poetry.

Other stories in this splendid volume range from the downright funny to the wry, the nostalgic, the magical, and the fantastic. If short stories, as I often say, offer opportunities to meet people we would not otherwise know and travel roads we would not otherwise venture, these examples do more: they not only show us glimpses of fresh universes; they also meander through territories very close to home, and show them to us through fresh eyes. If you know the wonder of stories, you’ll be ready to pick these up. If you’re new to the game, the Best American gives you 20 separate opportunities to become a convert, and give the further lie to Stephen King’s dire outlook.

By the way, at this writing the Best American is enjoying an unprecedented third week on the New York Times Paperback Best Seller list. How “not well,” is that, Mr. King? (Or did your stalking horse outrun us all?)
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Board members serve a maximum of two three-year terms. The following board members are serving continuing terms:

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Term</th>
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<td>Stephanie Birnberg</td>
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Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon

Office Grand Reopening
Dedication of the Martha Chersky Orringer Conference Room

Saturday, December 1
10 a.m.-Noon
Lower Level Hunt Library
Continental Breakfast

Conference Room Dedication
11 a.m.