Meet the President
By Rita Zecher

Little did I realize when I joined A.L.L. in the summer of 1997 that ten years later I would be elected president. I am honored to be asked to serve. As a lifelong learner, I am enjoying the diversity of classes, the wonderful study leaders, and the camaraderie of my fellow students on the beautiful Carnegie Mellon campus. The day trips and overnight trips add to a wonderful learning experience.

My involvement with A.L.L. as a volunteer started at the reception desk in the basement of the Alumni House; it was a treat to have a nice outer office when we moved to the Hunt Library. I have been membership chair and on the board of A.L.L. for three years. It gave me great pleasure as a volunteer to welcome new members to A.L.L.

I am a native Pittsburgher and graduated from Taylor Allderdice High School and attended the University of Pittsburgh. I worked for many years in real estate and the family jewelry business.

My hobby is music. I have studied singing and participate in the A.L.L. chorus and the Temple Sinai choir; I have participated in oratorios and concerts in the Pittsburgh area and was active in the Tuesday Musical Club, Vocal and Opera Divisions. I sang with the Pittsburgh Savoyards for many years. My greatest achievement is my three children and nine grandchildren.

My wish list for A.L.L. this coming year is to sustain our level of academic excellence and to expand our extracurricular activities. I look forward to the challenges of the coming year as we continue to grow and flourish.

Board Decides to Apply for Second Osher Grant,
Affiliate with Osher Network
By Rita Zecher

At a special meeting, our Board of Directors has approved a request to the Bernard Osher Foundation for a second grant of $100,000 in 2007-08, with the understanding that we will be eligible for an endowment of $1 million the following year.

The Bernard Osher Foundation, based in San Francisco, was established in 1977 by Bernard Osher, a businessman and community leader. The foundation has supported a wide range of educational, cultural, and other nonprofit organizations.

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Summer 2007
Election, Entertainment, Food Featured at Fifteenth Annual Meeting
By Gloria Kleiman

The sun was shining brightly in a cloudless sky on April 24. It was a perfect spring day for A.L.L.’s Annual Meeting at the Pittsburgh Golf Club. For the first time, the arrangements included a luncheon served to the 107 members who attended.

Outgoing President Pat Swedlow presided over the fifteenth Annual Meeting. The business was efficiently accomplished—the attendees heard a review of the past year and approved the budget for the coming year. New officers and members of the Board of Directors nominated for 2007-2008 were unanimously elected.

As is A.L.L.’s custom, an annual gift is made to a CMU department. This year $1500 was donated for the Maggie Murph Café in the Hunt Library.

Pat Swedlow summed up the activities of the year. Among the many accomplishments were A.L.L.’s two new classrooms and the receipt of funds from the Osher Foundation. Rita Zecher, the incoming president, next spoke of how much of A.L.L.’s success is related to, and dependent on, being a volunteer organization.

As a thank-you for two wonderful and productive years as president, Rita presented Pat with a weekender luggage bag. We hope Pat will use it often and remember with pleasure her service to A.L.L.

Immediately after the meeting came a brief cocktail hour, followed by a delicious lunch of salad, seafood-filled crepes or chicken with cranberry sauce, and a scrumptious fruit tart for dessert. There was no need to even think about dinner.

But there was another dessert. We were then treated to a performance by soprano Kathy Soroka singing songs by Samuel Barber and George Gershwin, accompanied by pianist Natasha Snitkovsky.

It was an afternoon that will be long remembered, and many hope, will be repeated in the future.
Osher Grant

Continued from page 1

The first grant to a senior lifelong learning program was made in 2001. Grants have been made both to start up programs, and, as in the case of A.L.L., to strengthen existing ones.

The network of lifelong learning institutes across the United States now includes 115 programs operating on college campuses across the United States.

To give us the grant, the Osher Foundation makes the following requirements:

- Incorporate the name “Osher” by changing our name to “Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon University.”
- Have a presence on the CMU campus.
- Have a separate means of income, such as dues, registration fees, etc.

The Osher Foundation does not stipulate any other requirements from the lifelong learning institutes. Foundation funds can be spent only in direct support of the lifelong learning program; no funds can be expended for university overhead or indirect costs.

The name change was a sticking point for some in the A.L.L. community, especially among the longest-term members. But changing the name doesn’t change the essentials of what we do or how we do it, and the grant money will help us manage the needs of our ever-growing membership. Affiliating with Osher also connects us to a lively network of institutes of all sizes and shapes throughout the country. There are periodic Osher institute network conferences as well as a National Resource Center, headquartered at the University of Southern Maine, which provide the various institutes opportunities for communication, professional development, and sharing other activities.

Fritz Okie, chair of the Osher Grant Committee, will lead the preparation of the proposal to the Osher Foundation. Other committee members are Pat Swedlow, Rita Zecher, Stephanie Birnberg, Julian Eligator, Gloriana St. Clair, and Millie Lynch.

After 15 years, A.L.L. is embarking on a new phase that will enable us to grow. Our mission will stay the same: we will continue to govern ourselves; we will continue to offer lectures, field trips, and other events designed to increase knowledge and sharpen intellectual skills.

We are unusual among Osher institutes in having a large waiting list. We don’t have to sell ourselves to the community. We hope to welcome more members from the wait list and to take our classes to available spaces in the neighborhood of CMU. We are anxious to find a web master so that we can make better use of our web site. We are pleased to join the Osher institutes to expand our organization for the future.

Spring 2007 catalog of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Yavapai College, Prescott, Arizona
A.L.L. Members Explore China’s Infinite Variety

By Barbara and Arthur Grossman

Armed with Ambien, Advil, Imodium, Purell, wipes, toilet paper, Kleenex, and lists of advice and warnings, we set out in April on the path of Marco Polo. Our trip with Road Scholar, a division of Elderhostel, was billed as “The Infinite Variety of China.”

We had taken two terrific A.L.L. courses about modern Chinese history and contemporary culture and had read nearly all the books recommended by Road Scholar. We expected to find a warm, friendly people whose culture is very different from ours. We hoped to find an “infinite variety” in the lifestyles of different regions despite the years of totalitarian rule and the recent attempt to leap double-time into the twenty-first century. We were not disappointed.

The three large cities we visited: Beijing, Chongqing, and Shanghai, have a lot in common with the cities we know in the West. Construction sites and traffic jams are the norm. Gone are the streets full of bicycles we had anticipated based on photos of China from the recent past. The automobile has taken over, but the drivers think they are still manipulating bikes. Traffic lights are a rarity. There are pedestrian overpasses in some places, but when one must actually cross the street, it’s more dangerous than eating street food.

Art of the American West Enjoyed at the Duquesne Club

By Sylvia Sachs

The baronial ambiance of the Reading Room at the Duquesne Club was the perfect setting for the “Art of the American West” presented by the Duquesne Club Art Society during April and May. Members of A.L.L. visited this private exhibit on three days through the good offices of Lucian Caste, former president of A.L.L. and current president of the Society, who was in charge of assembling the paintings, photographs, and sculpture in the show.

“The West of Manifest Destiny “of cowboys and Indians was a myth in its own time,” according to Mary Thomas, art critic of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in a review of the show. The myth, she wrote, was embellished through such art and articles, novels, and, later on, movies that romanticized the period and brought it popularity that still exists today.

Many artists immortalized the era’s people and settings. Among them were Frederick Remington and Charles Russell, whose works were well-represented in the Duquesne Club show. The works fascinated the visitors with the beauty and history represented. Lucian Caste lectured on the art at two of the gatherings, and Sally Horseman discussed it on the third occasion. Luncheon was served after each lecture in a bright, cheerful private dining room on the third floor of the club. It gave attendees a chance to talk over and analyze the art they had viewed.
Grossmans Explore China
Continued from page 4

At any tourist site, one can be accosted by peddlers anxious to sell almost anything (post cards, kites, roller skates, “Rolex” watches, “Gucci” bags) for one to five dollars. Street market kiosks are set up everywhere. Yet one can also locate all the finest designer stores with newly rich Chinese customers in them.

Any morning in a city, inside parks and on plazas, one can see people, most of retirement age, practicing Tai Chi both in groups and alone. Pet birds hang in cages from trees, getting their own form of outdoor activity. Some exercise groups use fans or swords, and some are actually doing some type of aerobic dancing. The Chinese pay no heed to what they look like in their various contortions, but when our group of Americans (“big noses,” as Chinese dub us) practiced Tai Chi, it was free entertainment.

The major famous sites are not overrated. We found the Great Wall and the terra cotta warriors, for example, awe inspiring. Our travels in the countryside took us to many villages where minority cultures dominate. We heard a lecture by a professor from Yunnan University who did his best to convince us that China could never break up as the USSR had because of the way the recognized minorities are encouraged to preserve their languages and cultures. In Yongshuo, Guilin, Dali, and Lijiang we visited homes and met people of the ethnic groups of each area. We went to a market in every village—one more colorful than the next—and observed the farming methods that rely consistently on women, men, and water buffaloes. Our tour bus participated in the threshing of grain for the livestock. Wheat and rice stalks are are thrown onto the road to be driven over by passing vehicles.

We had excellent guides and very congenial fellow travelers. We attended lectures, concerts, and an acrobatic performance. The Chinese may have laughed at our Tai Chi, but we had some giggles at their translations. One example from the table at a hotel restaurant: “If you bring beverage by yourself you must be pay 30% service charge.” From a park: “Be aware of falling in water.” In a hotel room: “For you have a good rest, if you need to clean the room, please to show the signs or dial the number 60,5200. We will serve all the times for you.”

Despite the long overseas flights, seven internal flights, eight sleeping sites, too many restaurant meals—even when they were mainly delicious—this was a marvelous trip that we would recommend to anyone. We can even provide Advil, Imodium, Purell, wipes, toilet paper, or Kleenex. We used the Ambien.

It’s A.L.L. Talk welcomes contributions from members with interesting travel tales.
The Importance of Being Earnest

By Sally Cohen
Curriculum Chair

Our curriculum program continues to grow, in numbers, and, we hope, in quality. The general membership is contributing to it more and more. Now, it is vitally important that we understand the importance of being earnest when registering for classes. Let me explain.

Some A.L.L. members have told us that filling out class registration forms can take a lot of time. They say that reading a new catalog can be an adventure because many course descriptions are so intriguing that they have difficulty making choices as well as listing courses in order of preference.

But the registration forms provide crucial information that determines who will be in what class, whether lotteries are needed for classes with limited enrollment, whether classes have to be canceled due to under-enrollment, which classes fit into the A.L.L. classrooms, and whether we need to ask CMU for extra classrooms or look for more space in the Pittsburgh community.

Ultimately the details of our program are established. We give the study leaders their class rosters, and they come to look at their class sites. They and we have class plans, schedules, and a general sense of what things should look like. But we know this only on paper! We find that once classes start, class compositions can look quite different. Some people who have signed up may no longer want to or be able to take a course. We understand. But, please, call the A.L.L. office at 412 268-2131 and let us know this.

When we know about dropouts, we can bring people on waiting lists into class, and we can adjust the class roster so the study leaders will know how many students to expect. Occasional explained absences are understandable, but repeated, unexplained absences significantly shrink classes and are very disturbing, especially to study leaders who have put thought, time, and enthusiastic energy into planning and teaching their courses. It is embarrassing for us and for them.

We have always marveled at the varied talents of our study leaders and at the caliber of their expertise. We are amazed that they want to take time away from their busy schedules and devote it to our A.L.L. students. They tell us repeatedly that teaching A.L.L. students is one of the high points in their lives. Our enthusiasm and interest in learning, as well as the valuable knowledge and inquisitiveness that we bring to class, are “turn-ons.” They are payoffs; they provide challenges to students and instructors; they represent what lifelong learning is all about. The A.L.L. study leaders make our program the success that it is. They are volunteers in our volunteer-based organization, and they are earnest about their commitment to our program. We need to make earnest commitments too.

For Sale: After the office renovations are completed in August, we will be selling one oak computer desk, one metal computer desk, two 8’ long folding tables, one tall dark mahogany bookcase with 4 shelves, one 18’ x 30” table, and four upholstered office chairs on casters. If you are interested in any of these items, please call the office at 412 268-7489 by August 1.
A.L.L.’s First Barbecue a Summery Success

By Elayne Rosen
Chair, Luncheon Committee

The gods were with us. Our first barbecue on the CMU campus took place on June 9 with perfect weather. Forty-four members met at the Merson Courtyard of the University Center from 5 to 9 p.m. for the luncheon program’s first evening offering. The second barbecue on Saturday, June 23, attracted an equal turnout and enjoyed equally fine weather.

The umbrella tables kept us cool and comfortable. Old and new friends chatted away as they went back and forth to pick out their dinners from the row of chafing dishes prepared by the CMU catering staff. The choices ranged from hot dogs and hamburgers to veggie burgers, grilled chicken, and ribs. The dessert table held melon, sodas, and wonderful brownies.

Because it was such a beautiful evening, many stayed until 9 p.m. to visit and relax with friends. I think this was a good “maiden voyage,” and with some suggested adjustments, for example, adding entertainment, A.L.L. should consider repeating it next year.

It has been a pleasure and honor to chair the luncheon program for the past two years. I will remain on the committee, but the wooden spoon goes to Jane Keffer, whose many talents will ensure that she does a splendid job. The committee welcomes suggestions for luncheon activities. It’s a great team!

Above, on June 9: Pearl Brostoff at the dessert table; below left, on June 9, from left: Elayne Rosen, Sibby and Duff McCrady; below right, on June 23: Elayne Rosen with cooks Mike Boylan, l., and Lewis White
CMU Is Newsworthy

As you read your daily newspaper and listen to local TV news programs, have you noticed how often stories about Carnegie Mellon come up? Most are very complimentary as they report some new university program or accomplishment of a faculty member or student. Having once been in the newspaper business myself, I am particularly aware of the importance of this kind of publicity to an institution like CMU.

Of course, a lot of newsworthy stuff does happen at this university, but getting attention to it in this era of information overload doesn’t happen by chance. So I asked Teresa Sokol Thomas, who heads the media relations office, how she and her staff get all this attention. “We work very hard,” said Ms. Thomas. “We estimate that our weekly publicity efforts in the U.S. often reach as many as 5.4 million listeners, readers and viewers, all of whom have learned something new about Carnegie Mellon.”

Yes, she said that much coverage can, and often does, take place in a one-week period. To show how it happened in the week of May 18 to May 24, she provided the following breakdown:

The reappointment of Jared Cohon as president was headlined in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pittsburgh Tribune Revue, Pittsburgh Business Times, and Philadelphia Daily News. Also, both the Tribune-Review and the Post-Gazette ran different articles from the Arts and Humanities Departments during that week. The Post-Gazette also had a piece on education featuring a CMU faculty member. Among more-specialized articles, the Tribune-Review had five more mentions and the Post-Gazette, four. Local reporters must bless CMU sources ever day! And as part of the CMU community, A.L.L. can take pride in these frequent reports of accomplishments at the university.

National news coverage mentioning CMU included a New York Times article on bubbles in metal and one on a new game for moviegoers; Bloomberg News carried an article about municipal bond ratings that might cost taxpayers $3.6 billion; CNET reported on a roboticist’s inspiration; and KRIS-TV talked about college degrees in the fast lane. In addition, the Information Technology Department provided material to five sources (including the New Yorker) and environment experts to two national publications. Internationally, CMU was mentioned in six sources, including the BBC, the International Herald Tribune, and the Nigerian Tribune. More reasons to applaud the Media Relations staff for its outstanding efforts.

Sadly, two mentions of A.L.L. appeared recently in news obituaries in the local newspapers. Two prominent community members who were active participants in A.L.L., Bill Mendlow and Dennis de Cazotte, died during the same period in May, and their A.L.L. connections were listed with their other accomplishments. Both will be greatly missed.

Also in May, a Post-Gazette feature story revealed that CMU computer science professor Dr. Steven Rudich was sharing honors as a co-winner of the Association for Computing Machinery’s 2007 Godel Prize for work on an unsolved theoretical computer science problem. Please don’t look here for a description of the problem!

Newspapers reported the talk given here on April 19 on the state of same-sex marriage in the United States by Evan Wolfson, author of the 2004 book Why Marriage Matters. His proud parents are A.L.L. members Jerry and Joan Wolfson. Another proud parent is Pat Swedlow, whose son, Jason, was one of the lead researchers at Dundee University in Scotland who developed a new imaging technique using a powerful microscope that enables them to film healthy, live cells within an embryo dividing and redividing. The hope is that this technique could be used by scientists to film a healthy cell at the point when it turns into a cancerous cell, possibly leading to radical new treatments.
Longtime member Marion Damick received the Thomas M. Kerr Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Civil Liberties Union of Pittsburgh at its March 19 annual meeting. It is not only a well-deserved honor for Marion, but it reminds us of Tom Kerr, who among his many services to the community, taught classes for A.L.L. Honored on June 7, when the Jewish Association on Aging celebrated “Eight over Eighty” for their community service, three A.L.L. members were on the list, and their participation in A.L.L. was noted among their activities as they were presented their awards. Congratulations to Les Berkowitz, Al Smolover, and Bob Dickman. Our deepest sympathies to Bob and his family on the recent loss of daughter Cathy Dickman-Mellot.

In another part of the community, a new A.L.L. member, Marilyn Sullivan, planned retirement after many years of service running the Bethlehem Haven, a Downtown shelter for homeless women. A nurse as well as the director of this community agency, she should be a potential study leader, suggests her friend Mary Cay Burke-Hamill.

A heart-warming front-page story in June really was an eye catcher. It was about the rescue by two CMU campus police officers of seven baby ducks who fell through the grate of a campus sewer. The officers struggled in the mud for an hour while “the agitated mother mallard watched.” What a story. You can’t buy publicity like that. (The photo at right of the reunited duck family was taken by CMU undergraduate Shusaku Uesugi and appeared in the Post-Gazette.)

A.L.L. member Esther J. Tucker is a free-lance columnist and feature writer whose writings often appear in national publications. A recent one—“Who Am I? (And No, I’m Not Having a Senior Moment)”—was given a prominent spot on a page of the Washington Post. A May letter to the editor in the P-G by Julian Eligator commented (positively) on a Forum page article by CMU professor and fellow A.L.L. member Lincoln Wolfenstein. Bingo—a two-for-one!

As we all know, belonging to A.L.L. adds to our lists of friends and acquaintances, which can lead to a very pleasant occasion. For me, it happened while walking around the City Theater one sunny day before a matinee performance. I bumped into a smiling Madeline Clements. She and her late husband, Ace Conner, were active at A.L.L. until they moved to an assisted living facility and transferred to that group’s lifelong-learning classes; Ace is fondly remembered.

The hustle and bustle of a big city airport was a little less of a hassle for Mary Lane Salsbury and Martha Malinzak when they spied each other in the crowded Dulles Airport May 8. Both were in transit: Mary Lane on her way to see her daughter in San Francisco, and Martha returning from a vacation in Italy. They both remarked on how good it was to see a familiar face in a crowd of travelers. Since many A.L.L. folks are big travelers, the chances of bumping into someone are pretty possible.

A.L.L. is looking for a web master. If you have the skills and can help us develop and maintain our web site, please call the office at 412 268-2131.

Add your brags and reflections to “Ad Lib.” It’s A.L.L. Talk welcomes member contributions. Send material for the newsletter to the A.L.L. office at CMU, 4909 Frew Street-Hunt Library, Pittsburgh, PA 14213-3890.
What's in a Number? Looking Back and Looking Ahead as A.L.L. Grows
By Gerry Smith

Take, for instance the proverbially luckless 13. In multiples of 100, we're seeing some coincidental parallels between current A.L.L. membership (1300) and the stock market (upwards of 1,300 at this writing). Both still counting.

Just kidding—but we do appreciate A.L.L.'s improving financial status brought about by the generous 2006 grant from the Osher Foundation.

What's in a number? Let's look now at 40—the number attending our charter meeting of A.L.L. away back in 1992, on a casual summer Sunday afternoon, outdoors on CMU’s (preconstruction) campus. Alumni Director Steve Calvert explained what it was all about. Originating at the New School, this adult education concept was adopted by Dartmouth when he was on staff there. Would Pittsburgh be interested? Could we find 200 retired lovers of learning to get involved?

Numbers, numbers! Two hundred more senior learners seemed pie-in-the-sky (as we munched on pastries and a sumptuous tray of watermelon, honeydew, pineapple, and cheeses)—but okay, most of us hesitantly agreed, let's give it the old college try.

The first class I attended was led by Clarke Thomas, one of the first dozen stalwart study leaders. A classmate was Lotti Falk, a founding leader of A.L.L. She was accompanied by a guest, former Pittsburgh TV newscaster Marie Torre, who had since moved to New York but remained a beloved local icon.

At the end of the six-week series, Clarke inspired two class members, Sylvia Sachs and Gerry Smith, to start a current events series. This spawned “Hot Topics,” co-led by the two former journalists for several years—leading to yet another class, “News and Views,” spun off by Gerry Smith for the next eight years, while Sylvia continued to arrange the ever-popular Hot Topics.

Thanks to curriculum chair Bob Frumerman and his successor Ms. Sachs, the range of motion continued to expand to an astounding almost 100 courses, with the Curriculum committee chaired now by Sally Cohen and co-chair Bea Jones.

What's in a number? A.L.L. is still counting, with a membership exceeding 1,300, and more than half again as many on a wait list. “Too many,” some may say. They raise questions: How to nail one’s first choice of class? How to improve attendance? Where to park? Which-and-when special events?

Volunteer, anyone? If you’re a member, you’re a number. Make yours count! Get involved. Our higher numbers should strengthen A.L.L.’s excellence.

About That Waiting List
By Joan Gaul

There were 510 members when Rita Zecher joined A.L.L. There was no waiting list. Now—as of late May—there were 1,290 members, and the wait list stood at 715. In August, 200 to 300 of the waitlisted will receive invitations to join A.L.L. in January 2008. Where will we put them?

The breadth and quality of courses—97 offered in the fall, 54 to 60, spring and summer; and A.L.L.’s reasonable fees—dues $40 a year, $50 for unlimited courses in each of the three 12-week terms—lead to a waiting list. Popularity is good. Fortunately, there’s no shortage of talented study leaders, but space is a problem.

Unlikely as it seems, to some of us, not everyone who joins ALL takes courses. Some join for the tours, the luncheons, the lectures; some for library access; and some for admission to CMU’s music programs on campus and at the Carnegie Music Hall. This slightly

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Waiting List

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alleviates the crunch. Happily, however, most do take classes. CMU has been generous with its space, and A.L.L. tries to accommodate increased numbers. Classes now begin as early as 9:30 a.m. and end as late as 6:00 p.m. Where possible, they are given in larger classrooms. Off-campus space, in addition to subject-specific space such as the Dance Alloy and the Glass Center, has been explored. Don’t be surprised if your next class is at the Friends Meeting House, Rodef Shalom Temple, Imperial House, or even, thanks to a wily bridge class leader, in the back room at Panera’s in Squirrel Hill.

Trust. The board, membership chair, Sue Gibbon, and her committee, Ellen Katzen and Teresa Siwicki, are doing their best to chip away at that waiting list and make more welcome.

A.L.L. Deadlines Really Matter

By Millie Lynch
Administrative Coordinator

Reviewing the definition and historical meaning of the word “deadline” in the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary shows that the historical definition is quite harsh:

1868  B.J. LOSSING Hist.Div. War U.S. III. 600
Seventeen feet from the inner stockade was the ‘dead-line’, over which no man could pass and live.

1888  Contemp. Review Mar. 449
Should he some day escape alive across the dead-line of Winchesters, he will be hunted with bloodhounds....

Though we’re not talking about life and death, deadlines are important for the efficient operation of the A.L.L. office. Many times you have read one of the following statements on an A.L.L. flyer:

- Lecture reservations are due by . . . .
- Lunch reservations must be received by the office by . . . .
- Registration checks must be received no later than . . . .
- Trip reservation and payment are due by . . . .
- We work on a very tight schedule, and need your material no later than . . . .

Whether we are working with members or study leaders, deadlines are constant, unending, and inescapable. This is the nature of the world we live in.

Yet some members ignore deadlines. And deadlines have a practical meaning for the office staff. Recording checks, maintaining lists and reservations, entering registration materials in a timely fashion, printing name tags before events, and keeping caterers happy all depend on receiving documentation on time. Deadlines help us to stay organize—but only if they are observed.

Have you noticed that recent lectures were disturbed by chairs being brought into the Connan Room after the lecture started? This happened because some people sent their registrations late, or didn’t register at all, assuming that there would be enough seats. As A.L.L. grows—and our growth is our strength—that assumption has become risky.

When A.L.L. was smaller, it was easier to handle last-minute reservations, changes, cancellations, and, let’s face it, procrastination. Understandably, sometimes travel or illness prevents timely return of forms to the office. However, A.L.L. is expanding and is almost at a point where it must draw a “dead-line” in the sand and say, “No More!”

Please help the office. Send in your registration and reservation forms on time. Thank You!
Renovations Transforming Offices and Conference Room  

By Joe Scorpion

If all goes according to schedule, the renovated A.L.L. offices and conference room will be ready for the fall session, and it should be quite a transformation. All the furnishings will be new. The office clutter will be concealed in wall cabinets and bulk storage closets. The flooring will be replaced with sound-deadening cork, a green product, and there will be some new lighting. Millie’s office will be smaller to allow for a kitchenette and semi-private desk area between her space and the workroom. All walls will be painted, some with bold colors to dispel the cave-like feeling of these underground rooms. There may even be few surprises.

A.L.L. is indebted to a grant from the Bernard Osher Foundation and a legacy from Martha Orringer for funding the remodeling and redecoration of our offices and conference room.

*Scenes at the construction site: left, the office workroom emptied and awaiting renovation; right, Phyllis Davidson (left) and Millie Lynch (far right) busy in the temporary office in the conference room*

October Opportunity

We will be looking for A.L.L. members to assist at the CMU Homecoming Weekend in mid-October. A.L.L. has been involved with Homecoming for many years, and our efforts are truly appreciated by the Alumni Relations Office. Our members serve as greeters in the Alumni Hospitality Suite, assisting and orienting alumni.

*Joe Scorpion*

November Needs

We will again be assisting with the Annual Carnegie Mellon Food Drive in early November. Food-collection containers will be placed in both classrooms in Wean Hall and in the A.L.L. office. Our members have generously contributed to this community effort over the years, and hopefully we will surpass last year’s total. Stay posted!

*Joe Scorpion*

Parking News

As many A.L.L. members know, the parking debit card system was discontinued June 15 because CMU did not find it economically feasible to offer it to members. However, the Parking Office is offering a discounted parking lease to A.L.L. members for $600 a year. The yearly amount can be paid in full or at the rate of $150 every three months. If you are interested in buying a lease, stop in the Parking Office in the lower level of the University Center. Please bring your A.L.L. membership card with you.

*Joe Scorpion*
Speaking of Books:

By Helen-Faye Rosenblum

The Yiddish Policemen’s Union
By Michael Chabon

A Thousand Splendid Suns
By Khaled Hosseini

On one hand, comparing these novels is far too great a stretch, something one of my sons would call “another of Mother’s labored metaphors in the arts.” On the other hand, contrasting them is almost too easy: different ethnicities; oceanically different voices; an imagined, fabulistic universe (Chabon’s) versus one all too brutally real (Hosseini’s); an ironic, mostly ignoble but very funny male protagonist (Chabon’s) versus two tragic and heroic women (Hosseini’s), who break a reader’s heart time and again without reverting to bathos. Differences abound.

Reading these books in tandem requires a giant leap between emotional time zones and climates. Why stretch a point? And yet . . . Michael Chabon and Khaled Hosseini, strange review-fellows though they might be, share in their respective current novels a set of dominant questions, and ultimate convictions, about homeland and identity, about survival amid persecution, about bigotry and injustice, and about the redemptive human values that nurture tendrils of hope and dignity in the most fallow environments, frozen in one case or parched in the other.

Michael Chabon has taken plenty of criticism already for The Yiddish Policemen’s Union (although he and Hosseini both reside comfortably on the New York Times Best-Seller List as this review is written). Chabon’s premise in this detective-romance-political-satirical, yearning novel is that Berlin was atom-bombed after the Holocaust, but that the State of Israel actually collapsed in 1948. The exiled Jews, not among the few fortunate enough to have found shelter elsewhere, have been given a 60-year lease on the peninsula of Sitka, Alaska, where they have somehow survived, and now face the prospect of expulsion, i. e., Reversion, to parts unknown. In Sitka they have found a modus vivendi, which includes, as every society must, its achievers and its underbelly.

Our protagonist, Meyer Landsman, has a foot in both camps, with the bulk of the weight going to Side B, the seedy. He is a divorced, depressed, alcoholic detective. His colleagues, his suspects, his neighbors, the victims in his cases—very nearly all the denizens in Sitka—in fact, are Jewish. When an unidentified corpse who seems to be a heroin addict and the victim of a mob hit turns up in a room in the fleabag hotel where Landsman has lived since his regrettable divorce, the corpse is, naturally, Jewish. And probably Orthodox. Thus Chabon establishes his novel.

Landsman has one last crime to solve, only a few weeks in which to solve it, before the Sitka lease runs out and the Frozen Chosen are again scattered. To complicate matters, Landsman’s case-hardened former wife, Bina Gelbfish, also a detective, in the chaotic political circumstances of the impending Reversion, suddenly becomes his superior officer. The complexities among the relationships in this novel are as enigmatic as—the chess board found mid-game in the seedy room of that Orthodox Jewish junkie corpse.

Before it is all over, Landsman will have unearthed a plot developed by a large, well-armed contingent of the most unlikely suspects, to bring peace by doing violence, and to make the world safe for everyone again, especially for the Jews. Into the bargain, Landsman will solve the murder mystery, find a new lease, so to speak, on the future, and, yes—or maybe I won’t let on what happens with Bina. But don’t ever let anyone tell you that Michael Chabon isn’t a romantic down to his toes.

Also, more importantly, don’t ever let anyone tell you that Michael Chabon is an anti-Semitic Jew. Embedded in this brilliantly imagined, craftily structured, and dazzlingly written novel are three urgent realities. The first is that ethnic minorities (especially Jews, for writers like Bruno Schultz, Franz Kafka, Philip Roth, Nathan Englander, and Chabon, to begin a list) are always faced with the threat of non-being. The second

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Speaking of Books
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is that fiction, as an art, enables mortals, i.e., writers, to become godlike: to unveil unknown universes, in order to warn the reader against their perils, and to suggest ways to survive, indeed, prevail, in the worst of times. The third simple truth is that in order to create such universes, writers must be immersed in them to the core of their beings. Yes, Chabon writes of Jewish crooks, thugs, and losers, but his prose dances to their rhythms, his imagination is fired by the understanding that no reality is made up of just the good guys. As this novel races toward its redemptive end, we are meant to get the idea that in real life saving a people is a crapshoot. We’re not the ones who get to vote anyone off the island. Chabon embraces these Jews with a far more generous heart and hand than certain of his critics extend to him. If you really want an insight into Michael Chabon’s attitude vis-a-vis Jews, women, exiles, and the persistence of a culture he loves and understands, consider this paragraph:

“You have to look to Jews like Bina Gelbfish, Landsman thinks, to explain the wide range and persistence of the race. Jews who carry away their homes in an old cowhide bag, on the back of a camel, in the bubble of air at the center of their brains. Jews who land on their feet, hit the ground running, ride out the vicissitudes, and make the best of what falls to hand, from Egypt to Babylon, from Minsk Gubernya to the District of Sitka. Methodical, organized, persistent, resourceful, prepared. Berko is right: Bina would flourish in any precinct house in the world. A mere redrawing of borders, a change in governments, those things can never faze a Jewess with a good supply of handwipes in her bag.”

I rest my case.

Khaled Hosseini does not share the blessing of distance with Michael Chabon. Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, he came to the United States in 1980, became a physician, was named a U. S. envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency, and wrote the wildly, and deservedly, successful novel *The Kite Runner*, soon to be, as they say, a major motion picture. Where *The Kite Runner* concerned itself principally with the lives of men, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* enters the lives of Afghan women, women oppressed, women repressed, women suppressed, but women who will, in the end, also prevail, if only in spirit.

Mariam begins life as a *harami*, the illegitimate daughter-in-exile of Jalil, a wealthy businessman who keeps his assorted legitimate wives and children under his comfortable roof, near his many business enterprises, in the town of Herat. Mariam and her embittered mother, a former servant of Jalil, live in a location “removed, detached, where neighbors wouldn’t stare at her belly, point at her, snicker, or, worse yet, assault her with insincere kindnesses.” With her worldview skewed by her mother’s jaundiced perspectives, Mariam waits in vain for the acceptance she craves from her father and her half-siblings. Her yearnings are thwarted by misunderstandings of tragic proportions. Only at the occasion of her mother’s sudden horrifying death does the teenaged Mariam find herself absorbed into her father’s household—temporarily. In fact, Jalil’s family receives Mariam for the simple purpose of settling her down, cleaning her up, and marrying her off, to Rasheed, a brutal and dictatorial widower many years her elder. Together they move to Kabul, where Mariam, once merely isolated, is now desolate. One of Rasheed’s first marital acts is to explain to his new, young, shattered wife that she will henceforth don the burga and do his bidding.

Bitter, childless, and harrowing years pass. Through a set of circumstances made inevitable in a war-torn, politically topsy-turvy country, Laila enters the lives of Mariam and Rasheed. War and politics and self-imposed exile have torn Laila from her dearest childhood sweetheart, Tariq, her nurturing intellectual Continued on page 15
father, her disturbed but beloved mother. A refugee in
her own city, the beautiful Laila finds herself drawn
under Rasheed’s and Mariam’s roof, where she soon
becomes Rasheed’s next wife, his new child bride, the
fresh victim of his militant Islamic misogyny. But
soon, when Laila’s infant is born, the childless
Mariam falls in love for possibly the first time, with
the baby. Indeed, the two women in the household will
find their own ways of surviving together internally as
the external hardships imposed by wartime mount. But
the horrors of the successive brutal regimes outside the
door are rivaled by the violent outrages committed by
Rasheed himself, and his acts against his wives will be
avenged. Only one woman will survive, but, newly
partnered with her destiny, that woman will be able to
look to and work toward a new, progressive Afghan-
istan. That woman “will not be crippled by resent-
ment.” She “has moved on. Because in the end she
knows that’s all she can do. That and hope.”

So here they are, these two unforgettable novels. How
different: Chabon, tongue-in-cheek, off on a caper,
fabulistic, consorting with wild eccentrics and unlikely
protagonists, using language with playful, witty
abandon; and Hosseini, solemn, poetic, relentlessly
anchored in a world where institutional inhumanity
still drives public and private lives. With Chabon,
mostly you smile, and only then ponder the serious
motive of such a book. With Hosseini, mostly you
weep or cringe, and later smile at the courage,
creativity, grit.

But how alike: both extravagantly gifted writers,
concerned with what it means to be a person, to
survive as a nation with or without a homeland within
reach. You don’t have to be Jewish or Afghan. You
have only to be human to appreciate the ambition and
achievement of these two remarkable novels.

Paris or New York—or Both?
By Gerry K. Smith

If you can’t have Paris in the springtime, well, then,
how about New York in the fall? (Cheaper and easier,
the seasoned travelers will tell you—with no planes,
trains, and automobiles to complicate your itinerary.)

It’s first-class
busing all the way
for A.L.L.’s popular
annual autumn visit
to New York City,
scheduled this year
for October 16 -19
(Tuesday through Friday) by Rose Marie Tours.

Ah, autumn! What more restful prelude to the excite-
ment of New York than to follow the season’s colorful
tapestry of changing leaves, from highway to byway?
However—contrary to the awareness of some New
 Yorkers—the cultural highway extends west of the
Hudson as well: all the way to Indianapolis, Indi-
a! And all the way from Paris itself—where the
Louvre’s Roman collection will be showing at the
Indianapolis Museum of Art. An A.L.L. trip is planned
there for the weekend of October 27 and 28, including
a visit to the Monet Exhibit at the Columbus, Ohio,
Museum of Art. Detailed fliers will be sent to mem-
bers for all trips. (You can have it all—New York and
Paris!)

Shorter day trips are being planned by Chairman Bob
Dickman, while Jane Keffer will chair the luncheon
circuit. New chair of the fall/winter lecture series is
Roz Sherman, who welcomes ideas and contacts for
speakers. Special Events Chair Marty Brigham
welcomes suggestions also, through the A.L.L. office
(telephone 412 268-2131).

It’s A.L.L. Talk

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**In Memory of Ed. Fisher, Jr.**
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Sanford Baskin, Art Kelly
Helen and Don Berman, Lawrence Levine
Bob and Marcia Frumerman, Regis and Evelyn Murrin
Marcia Grodin and Anatalie Seewald, Seymour and Rhoda Sikov
Ralph Hartman, Dewayne and M. Evette Wivagg

**In Honor of Dick and Sally Cohen—25 Years of Joy**
Nellie Lou Slagle