It May Have Been a Cold Winter, But It’s Warm in A.L.L.
By Patricia Swedlow
President, A.L.L.

I’m writing this, my last letter as president of A.L.L., as I watch a snow and ice storm outside my window. I’m looking forward to April and our Annual Meeting! This year we’re going to have a lunch immediately following the business meeting; the lunch will be partially subsidized by A.L.L. It will be at the Pittsburgh Golf Club, where we’ve had such wonderful holiday party lunches recently. The last few years we kept providing more and more hors d’oeuvres after the meeting. Clearly, you were hungry, so we’ve decided to feed you! Look for more details elsewhere in this newsletter.

The last few years have been very productive. We’ve built two classrooms, with some new furnishings and new audio-visual equipment. We have added 200 to our membership and plan in the summer to remodel the Orringer Conference Room and our office. We have done this while continuing to provide our members with stimulating classes, lectures, and special events. All it takes to keep A.L.L. such a plus in our lives is our wonderful corps of volunteers. We have many ways you can help, from answering phones once a month, to joining committees, to serving on the Board of Directors.

The two years of my presidency have been very rewarding in a difficult time. I had too many hospitalizations, and I lost my beloved Tom, yet the A.L.L. board and Joe Scorpion picked up the slack when I wasn’t available. The moral of the story is that a person shouldn’t hesitate to volunteer. We’re all getting older and have health issues, and our members help each other and fill in when needed. Of course, the blessing is the friendships I have made in A.L.L. You have eased me gently into widowhood, and I can’t thank you enough. So I will stay involved, volunteer, spend three more years on the board, take classes, and above all enjoy the camaraderie with members of A.L.L.

Joe Scorpion: A Perfect Fit
By Sylvia Sachs

It was a case of serendipity that only two weeks after Joe Scorpion retired as deputy director of the Bureau of Medical Services of the Allegheny County Health Department in December 1992, he received a call from his friend and former assistant, Chuck Vukotich. Chuck knew that an active, take-charge kind of guy like Joe was not going to be happy for long without something to take charge of. He had just learned of a place where his former boss’s experience and personality would provide a perfect fit. Continued on page 2
Joe Scorpion

continued from page 1

Vukotich, a CMU graduate whose mother-in-law, the late Rita Emory, was an early member of A.L.L., had just received a phone call from CMU’s Director of Alumni Relations, Steve Calvert. Calvert was looking for someone with administrative experience to join a recently organized noncredit volunteer program called the Academy for Lifelong Learning at Carnegie Mellon University.

Joe, a native of Waterbury, Connecticut, (“the brass center of the world!”) had a B.A. in biology from Fairfield University, a Master of Public Health from Yale, and several years of public service in Waterbury before accepting a job at the Allegheny County Health Department at age 29. He and his wife, Maureen, and three sons, Mark, Jerry, and Steve (now deceased), arrived here in August 1958. His daughter, Elisa, who was born here, is the only one recognized as a “real” Pittsburgher,” Joe says in amused disbelief.

At the Health Department Joe started as a supervisor in the Milk and Food Division and eventually became deputy director of the Bureau of Medical Service in November 1981, continuing in that capacity until retirement. At the time he retired, he supervised up to 450 staff and a $13-million budget.

In January 1993 when Joe met with Calvert, Gretchen Lankford, Lucian Caste, Jack Feeney, and others, it was kismet. He obviously had the administrative experience and was willing to volunteer his service to an organization that fit in with his interests. Very quickly he and a committee planned the administrative structure of A.L.L., which evolved and expanded through the 15-plus years of the organization’s amazing existence.

Joe served in most of the leadership jobs at A.L.L. — treasurer, secretary, vice-president, and then president from 1998 to 2000. From 2000 to 2006 he was administrative director, stationed in the Hunt Library office full time. Over the years, he got to know most A.L.L. members and everyone else on the CMU campus who might be of help to the activities. He became a kind of roving ambassador of goodwill between the two entities.

Along with other A.L.L. leaders, Joe attended and participated in four national conferences with other lifelong learning programs. He is particularly proud of initiating the first Signatures publication.

Obviously, Joe has spent a lot of time and effort as an A.L.L. administrator, but he also has a busy life outside the Hunt Library office. He has important duties as lector/commentator at Mass at St. Peter Parish on the North Side and serves at funeral Masses throughout the year.

Professionally, Joe serves on several boards, including as a member and past president of the Emergency Medical Services Council of Allegheny County, a group that developed the structure for present-day ambulance services. He is a board member of the Community Health Challenge of Southwestern Pennsylvania, a group dedicated to reducing cardiovascular risks. He is also active with the Allegheny County Retirees Association.

And then there’s the lighter side. He’s a big sports fan—an avid follower of open-wheel racing and has gone to the Indianapolis 500 with a group of friends for over 40 years. He is, of course, a Steeler season-ticket holder. And he and his seven-year-old-granddaughter, Julianna, regularly attend Penguins games. She has become a real fan and expert on hockey and the Penguins, brags her proud granddad.

Of the many recognitions Joe has had, he’s very proud of being presented with the Chairman’s Award for Outstanding Public Health Service by the Allegheny County Board of Health in 1988; receiving the Medallion of Honor from the Italian Heritage Society of America in October 1999; and in October 2001 being made an Honorary Alumnus of Carnegie Mellon University, in recognition of his work in connection with A.L.L. This impressive ceremony took place at CMU Homecoming in 2001.

And to complete the picture of this many-sided man, for a couple of years in the ‘90s he appeared in a TV commercial promoting Don Allen Chevrolet. Some viewers thought at first he was the “Hawaii Five-O” hero, Jack Lord.

“That was a long time ago, my 15 minutes of fame,” says Joe. “Didn’t Andy Warhol say we all get 15 minutes of fame?”
Viva Barcelona!  

By Ed Fisher, Jr.

Paris gathered budding moderns and is identified with many of the most famous and popular twentieth-century experimenters, but other European centers, such as Glasgow, Berlin, Vienna, and Barcelona developed groups of significant painters, architects, crafts persons, playwrights, authors, poets, and composers.

At 7:30 a.m. on November 11, 2006, nearly 100 A.L.L. enthusiasts boarded two luxury buses at CMU for the partially closed and vividly under-construction Cleveland Museum of Art to see “Barcelona!—an exhibit of 360 pieces clarifying Barcelona and Catalan modern art movements and political history of just 100 years ago, with fine works by Picasso, Miró, and Dali done in Catalan villages as well as Barcelona.

There was a rich variety of paintings, sculpture, furniture, fabrics, wrought iron, and elegant architectural models (the German Pavilion of 1929 by Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, the still-cherished Musica Catalan, in a greatly detailed cross-section model). Every effort was made for two years by the curators to present a fully rounded impression of that formative modernist period.

In addition to early paintings by Picasso, Evening at the Four Cats Café, cubist village buildings, and Miró’s The Farm, we saw iron gates by Gaudi, plus full-size duplicates of his fanciful chimneys, as well as period photographs of his many rhythmic facades.

Throughout the exhibits we encountered many less-familiar artists who produced remarkable works contributing to the whole modernist movement. Elegant shaped and sculptured Barcelona wood furniture predated other art nouveau works elsewhere.

A few exhibit highlights were Dali’s masterpiece from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, Soft Construction With Boiled Beans, 1936; the Cleveland Museum’s La Vie of the Picasso blue period; Miró’s The Farm; and an inventive computer graphics future fly-over of Gaudi’s Expiatory Temple of la Sagrada Familia, 1882-?.

A late lunch at Corky’s and Lenny’s found us on our cozy way home through the endless rain. We look forward to “Monet in Normandy” in Cleveland March 24.

Editor’s note: Ed Fisher wrote this shortly before he died January 13. He was a pillar of A.L.L. and a vital contributor to this newsletter.

Weather-Related Closings

On bad-weather days, watch local television stations (KDKA, WTAE, or WPXI) for the Academy of Lifelong Learning at CMU in the list of storm closings. Some radio stations also broadcast school closings. On extremely cold or heavy snow days, A.L.L. will cancel classes as follows:

1. If Carnegie Mellon is closed, we are closed (this usually doesn’t happen).
2. If the Pittsburgh Public Schools are closed, we are closed.
3. There may be occasions when CMU and the Pittsburgh Public Schools are open, but A.L.L. may decide it is in our best interests to cancel classes. Watch for the Academy of Lifelong Learning at CMU on the television screen listings before you leave home.
4. If individual study leaders decide to cancel a class for any reason, the study leader must call the assistant and activate the telephone tree to alert students in that class not to attend.

In any event, use your own discretion about attending classes in bad weather. Put your safety first!
Lunching Well with A.L.L.

By Elyane Rosen, Chair, Luncheon Committee

This has been a good year for A.L.L. lunches. Thirty members attended the luncheon at the Original Pancake House on Wednesday, September 13, 2006. The food was so good and plentiful that enthusiastic members applauded the gourmet food at meal’s end. We hope to repeat this luncheon next season so that more members will have a chance to enjoy this heavenly food.

Our next luncheon was the Holiday Party on Friday, December 15, 2006, at the Pittsburgh Golf Club. Eighty-two people attended. The food and fellowship was wonderful, and everyone asked that this luncheon be an annual affair. Our own Bob Runzo supplied delightful background music at the piano, and Michael Gold was our great photographer. Thanks also to Sibby McCrady for sponsoring us at her club and to co-chair Carole Wolsh, and committee members Marlene Gelman, Dee Davis, Bobbie Recht, and Jayne Keffer. Since we had to limit the attendance due to the size of the Grill Room (we actually received 103 reservations), we have already booked two rooms at the Golf Club for Friday, December 14, 2007. We hope this will enable us to include all who want to come.

Our third luncheon took place at the Silk Elephant restaurant in Squirrel Hill on Sunday, February 4. Forty-nine members braved the single-digit temperature to attend. In addition to the best Asian food and the most beautiful Asian restaurant in Pittsburgh, the group enjoyed the very interesting demonstration of Thai spices and their use in Thai food. This was a great success.

Our fourth and fifth luncheons will take place at the Duquesne Club for lunch and the “Art of the American West” show. Each luncheon will be limited to 30 A.L.L. members. You will be receiving a flyer soon.

Our grand finale for the year takes place in June at the first A.L.L. membership barbeque on our CMU campus. Look for this flyer in late April or May.

That’s it for now. Bon appetit!

Please Note

The sentiments and beliefs of a few speakers and study leaders may, on occasion, be controversial or divisive. To ensure the inherent rights of free speech and freedom of expression, the Academy for Lifelong Learning will not censure or limit any materials or opinions expressed by persons involved in our courses or lectures. It should be noted, however, that those opinions do not reflect the philosophical perspective of A.L.L.

Talent Wanted

A.L.L. members have many interests and talents. If you’re a guitarist or violinist who could play at our barbeque, or a musician, comedian, or actor who might entertain at an A.L.L. event, we would like to hear from you. Please call the office at 412 268-7489 and make yourself known.
A.L.L. is planning exciting trips for 2007. Watch for flyers detailing these upcoming excursions!

One-Day Trip

Saturday, March 24

Multi-Day Trips

Individual flyers including trip details and reservation information will be mailed. For further information, contact Rose Marie DeRiso at 412 821-0201.

Tuesday, July 24, to Friday July 27, 2007
Shaw Festival, Niagara on the Lake, Ontario. Four performances and lodging at the Prince of Wales Hotel. Note: Full payment is due April 15.

Wednesday, August 8, to Sunday, August 13, 2007
Tanglewood and Jacob’s Pillow, “summer stock” in the Berkshires, Western Massachusetts, including Norman Rockwell Museum, Francine and Art Clark Museum, Edith Wharton’s “The Mount,” and much more.

Monday, August 20, to Friday, August 24, 2007
Chautauqua Institute, Chautauqua, New York. Subject is “Healing and Healthy Aging: A Heart/Mind Connection.”

Sunday, September 30, to Tuesday, October 2, 2007
Greenbrier Resort with a visit to “Tamarack,” the Showcase of the State of West Virginia.

Tuesday, October 16, to Friday, October 19, 2007
Autumn in New York City at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Jewish Museum, the Guggenheim, the Morgan Museum, and the NYC Opera.

Saturday, October 27, to Sunday, October 28, 2007
Columbus, Ohio, Museum of Art Monet exhibit, Indianapolis Museum of Art exhibit of Roman art from the Louvre.

Remembering Ed Fisher

by Bob Dickman

Our friendship began at A.L.L. almost ten years ago. My special interest was taking classes. Ed was always a study leader, committee chair, board member, and all-around problem solver. Somehow we were drafted into serving on the Special Events Committee to plan “one-day” events. Most of the ideas emanated from Ed’s fertile brain (and most of the details were left to me).

We were a great team. Ed never lacked for trip suggestions throughout Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. He even completed maps on how to get there. We have enough ideas for the rest of the century. We had fun planning and sometimes would do dry runs to see if the places were as interesting as they sounded and if there were other points of interest nearby. Once we settled on a destination, Ed would prepare those provocative flyers, and we never lacked for A.L.L. enrollees. Frequently we were oversubscribed.

I was always in awe of Ed’s many talents—his graphic artistry is legend for the flyers announcing the events, but his writing was equally creative when he described the event and when he would write about the happening afterwards.

And so, sadly, a number of A.L.L. members joined his family, friends, and church members at his memorial service on Saturday, January 27, at First Church of Christ, Scientist in Wilkinsburg. There we saw the abundant display of his paintings in the Reading Room and the whimsical, colorful ones in the nursery.

While losing him was sad, his legacy of paintings, graphics, and memories reflect his droll humor and the many acts of kindness for which he’ll be remembered. Goodbye, old friend. If anyone deserves an honored place in heaven, you do.
A.L.L.’s Shining Curriculum

By Sally Cohen, Curriculum Committee Chair

The A.L.L. curriculum shines because A.L.L. members have shown an increased interest in its content and development. They bring ideas, critiques, suggestions for study leaders, and study leaders themselves to the Curriculum Committee. They write us notes. They call us. (As I write this, a call has just come in!) They want to meet with us. Some come into the office to ask if they can teach a particular course. Others send us articles about topics or people we should consider. All these comments and suggestions help the Curriculum Committee create worthwhile programs and interesting catalogs year-round.

Although the process is exciting, it can be stressful, and the committee always is faced with these questions: Will we get enough study leaders? Will these courses present a variety of topics and formats that will appeal to A.L.L. members? But we now know that the A.L.L. membership has joined our mission and that it is the contributions from all of us that have led to our successful programming.

Once our programs take shape, A.L.L. members continue to share their thoughts and experiences in the classroom. Frequently study leaders tell us they are awed by their students. The students come to class so eager to listen and learn. They also enrich discussions by sharing valuable professional and personal knowledge about the topics at hand, and they may introduce questions or thoughts that stimulate study leaders to think further or differently about a subject. Instructors have recognized that our adult students may bring to an issue unexpected and enlightening points of view that are based on lifelong living experiences. Often the “new” knowledge then becomes part of a college course or workshop presentation.

The time that study leaders share with A.L.L. members is quite significant. Although teaching generally takes them away from ongoing jobs and important responsibilities, many find the A.L.L. experience so stimulating that they are eager to come back for more. We are most grateful for this! As a result of their interest, the basic list of study leaders—the main resource for curriculum planning—continues to grow.

A.L.L. and the CMU Community

By Joe Scorpion

New Rules for Faculty Dining Room

Among the pleasures of membership in A.L.L. is our access to wonderful CMU facilities, for example, the library, the bookstore, and the Schatz Dining Room (the Faculty Dining Room on the second floor of the University Center). Effective February 1, there are new requirements for using the Schatz Dining Room.

To use the Schatz Dining Room, an A.L.L. member must become a member of the Faculty Club. First obtain a CMU photo ID by visiting the HUB in the basement of Warner Hall and present your A.L.L. membership card plus another photo identification. They will take your photograph (on the spot) and issue you a CMU photo ID card. There is a one-time charge of $5.00 for the photo ID. Then present your photo ID to a staff member at the Shatz Dining Room and complete an application form for membership in the Faculty Club. There is a $5.00 charge for club membership. Your membership is valid until August 2007, at which time you must renew membership for another year.

Please note, however, that an A.L.L. member who does not join the Faculty Club may have lunch at the Shatz Dining Room as a guest if accompanying a current, valid member.

Thanks for Helping

Our thanks to those members who so generously contributed to the thirteenth Annual Carnegie Mellon Food Drive in November.

Our deepest appreciation to the following members who assisted at the CMU Homecoming Weekend from October 12-14: Filomena Conti, Art Daravanis, Bea Jones, Joe Scorpion, Dolores Stowell, Chuck Stowell, and Rita Zecher. Once again members served as greeters in the Alumni Hospitality Suite, assisting and orienting alumni.
Celebrating Joe Scorpion
By Lester Berkowitz

On February 19, 2007, 168 A.L.L. members and distinguished guests celebrated Joe Scorpion’s wonderful career at A.L.L. at a reception in Carnegie Mellon’s Rangos Room. For many of us and for the Carnegie Mellon community at large, Joe has been A.L.L.: he has done every job, held every office, been our administrative director, was made an honorary alumnus of CMU, and has been an integral part of our efforts to get A.L.L.’s members involved as volunteers in making it one of the finest institutes for learning in retirement.

A.L.L.’s president, Pat Swedlow, recognized Joe’s accomplishment; introduced his wife, Maureen, his sons and grandson, and his adorable granddaughter, Julianna; thanked Jared Cohon, CMU’s president, and Mark Kamlet, CMU’s provost, for being part of our celebration; and presented our gift of a personal computer to be installed in Joe’s home.

Pat noted that Joe’s office responsibilities have been turned over to Millicent Lynch, our new administrative coordinator. Joe will continue to be a member of A.L.L., take classes, attend lectures, serve on committees, and be the model for how members can contribute to A.L.L.’s success. Although he has retired once again, we are grateful that he will still be a vital part of A.L.L.’s future.

A.L.L. Is Proud of Signatures
By Sylvia Sachs

Last December A.L.L. members received a copy of Signatures 2006. The short stories and poems and the excellent photos gave readers a glimpse into the hearts and minds of the members contributing to the publication that rarely would have occurred in normal day-to-day contacts.

“We publish the voice of the writer,” says Helen Faye Rosenblum, speaking for the seven-member board that has nurtured and produced this and the two previous issues of Signatures. “We have been absolutely amazed and delighted by the quality of the work given to us.”

The first Signatures was published in the fall of 2001 after five A.L.L. executives—Joe Scorpion, Gretchen Lankford, Lester Berkowitz, Audrey Catrow, and Helen-Faye—saw similar publications at the 1996 Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference of the Elderhostel Institute Network. They knew that good material was available here, just waiting to be discovered. That first effort was designed by member Pat Silva, a talented artist, and contained 110 pages of work done mostly in the various writing classes.

As word got around, the editors had a wealth of good submissions, so it was an easy decision to begin work on the second Signatures, published in the summer of 2003, and then the current Signatures 2006. No date has been set for the next publication, but the Signatures slot in the Hunt Library office is already bulging.

“The work is a sheer delight for all of us,” says Helen-Faye. “We love meeting and reading what people have written. The first time, a piece is read without the writer’s name on it; then it will be read three or four times more, sometimes aloud by different people. We don’t edit looking for grammar or other errors. We may talk to the author and make suggestions for a little tweaking here or there, but we want the author’s own voice to be heard.”

The editorial board deserves the deepest gratitude from readers and writers. And the Signatures box in the A.L.L. office gladly welcomes new submissions.
Are the members of A.L.L. a hardy and dedicated lot or what? Ask Mary Lou Ende, who lines up the people to staff the reception desk at the A.L.L. office in the Hunt Library. She reports that during all the sub-zero “wind chills” of February, not one of the people who signed up for the job canceled because of the weather. Tell that to all those scaredy-cat TV weather persons.

Those who attended the party honoring Joe Scorpion on February 19 got to meet his handsome young grandson, Steve Scorpion. Steve starred in basketball at Franklin Regional High School and at Pitt Johnstown and is now back at his high school alma mater serving as an assistant junior varsity and assistant varsity basketball coach.

Fans of the CMU Drama Department’s wonderful presentations are always amazed at the poise and talent of the young performers. Most of the time the singers and dancers are dazzling, and the audience members predict stardom for the leads. Unfortunately, because of the competition in theater world, most of their names don’t go up in lights on Broadway.

But here’s a pleasant exception: CMU graduate and Pittsburgh native (well, North Hills) Leo Ash Evens had the leading role in the musical comedy “Footloose,” at the Pittsburgh Musical Theater February 22 through March 4. His name is up in lights in his home town and a very handsome picture of him and his co-star, Emily Lynne Miller, appeared in the Post-Gazette theatrical section. This is not Leo’s first chance to show his talent in the professional theater: he toured nationally and in Russia in “42nd Street.” Leo is the son of Amy and Earl Evens and the nephew of A.L.L. members Bob and Ruth Schrag.

As A.L.L. remembers Ed Fisher’s artistry and creativity, Joe Scorpion also recalls Ed’s practical side. “When we moved into our present quarters, there was concern about the walls and soundproofing in our conference room,” says Joe. “Ed set about to look at the problem. He decided that cloth-covered plasterboard panels could be attached to the plaster walls to soundproof the room and double as a wrap-around bulletin board. Ed bought plasterboard sections, cut them to size, and covered them with gray cloth material. He needed a helper to install these heavy boards. This is where I came in. Ed served a chief carpenter, with me as his assistant. Ruler and hammer in hand, he began to gauge, measure, and install furring strips on the walls. With me doing the heavy lifting and juggling, Ed began to pound away, attaching and installing the 12 panels. To this day, whenever I tack something on the walls or gaze at the gray cloth-covered panels, I am reminded of Ed’s genius and ingenuity.”

The previous issue of this newsletter reported on the new Maggie Murph café in the Hunt Library. Of course, food is available elsewhere on the CMU campus. Can you believe 21 other places? Some are provided by the Housing and Dining Services; others are private concessions. Here’s the current listing of campus eating spots.

- Andy’s Eatery, University Center Lower Level—wraps, coffee, breakfast treats.
- Asiana, Newell-Simon Atrium—Pacific Rim entrees and soups to eat there or take out.
- Barista Café, University Center Upper Level—coffee, tea, and breakfast treats.
- Carnegie Mellon Café, Resnik House—variety of beverages from smoothies to Starbucks coffee, as well as soups and sandwiches. Fitness equipment on second-floor mezzanine.
- East Street Deli, University Center Upper Level—flavored cream cheeses and bagels, sandwiches, vegetarian and vegan items, baked potato bar.
- Foster Dining Room, University Center Upper Level—special dining program that requires groups arranged in advance.
- Ginger’s Deli: Baker Hall, Posner Hall, Purnell Center, Mellon Institute—sandwiches, salads, soups and hot entrees.
The A.L.L. Traveler

The Joys and Hazards of Travel

By Elaine Light

Arriving at the airport on the morning after the August 2006 bomb scare reported from London, I anticipated the worst. But at 7:30 a.m. there were no lines, and my friends and I sped through security. I missed my bottle of water, but I had carefully packed all other bottles, jars, and tubes in my carry-on and checked it through, trusting it would be there when I arrived in Hartford, Connecticut. We were so early we had time for a leisurely breakfast at the airport and, as it turned out, we also had time for lunch. Our plane was three hours late, which had nothing to do with security and everything to do with maintenance.

We were en route to Lenox, Massachusetts, home to Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony and a destination for music lovers everywhere. Lenox is a one-hour drive from Hartford or an 11-hour drive from Pittsburgh. My jars and bottles arrived intact, but missing was a favorite pair of shoes I had tucked into an outside zippered compartment at the last minute. The moral is to put only dirty clothes in easily reached parts of your luggage.

Lenox is an hour away from Williamstown, an especially charming place, which is known as the site of Williams College and the Williamstown Playhouse, where you may run into your favorite Broadway or TV star. Security was not a problem in Hartford either, and I found it strangely liberating not to lug a heavy carry-on or to watch people try to jam luggage the size of baby grand pianos into overhead bins.

A few weeks later, I was in Washington, DC, where a magnificent new 2,000-seat hall has been built at Strathmore, near Bethesda, Maryland. The Baltimore Symphony plays some of its concerts there, and it also offers a busy season of other musical events and personalities. The hall is on the property of the Strathmore estate. The 1900 Colonial Revival mansion is an art gallery where special exhibits are held. Afternoon tea is a popular event, served by reservation only, in the Music Room. Antique tea pots, tea cozies, and fancy cups are used by the volunteers who staff it. There is a charming gift shop where you can purchase all sorts of tea things. The price for the tea is $15.

I flew back to Pittsburgh. Again, security was not the problem. I arrived four hours late because the plane had a bad door lock and they had to find another plane. Such are the joys and the hazards of travel.

Speaking of Books

By Helen-Faye Rosenblum

The Emperor's Children

by Claire Messud,

With a grateful nod to This Is Not Chick Lit, edited by Elizabeth Merrick

A recently published short story anthology, This Is Not Chick Lit, edited by Elizabeth Merrick, is intended in both its defiant title and its clamorous pink-on-black cover design, to snag a reader's attention with the literary equivalent of curb appeal. Fortunately, after a reflective and useful editor's introduction, the book delivers on its promise. It brings together an outstanding collection of contemporary stories by women, writers established or rising, with voices traditional or experimental, invariably arresting and memorable. Thus does the book justify its brazen presentation.

"Embrace," by Roxana Robinson, a widely heralded literary writer who is not a talk-show darling or a middle-American household name, is a master—(or mistress)-ful piece of compression and compassion, enfolding 25 years in the lives of one couple into a terse and poetic economy of pages. It begins by telling us, "They're married, but not to each other." It follows their couple-dom through the changes. It ends in a moment by turns shocking, inevitable, and ultimately redemptive, as love and history are about to be engulfed by a loveless jumbo jet aircraft on a sun-drenched autumn morning.

In today's media, pundits and Hollywood gossip mavens keep asking whether "we" are yet "ready" for fresh renderings of September 11. In the arts, particularly the literary arts, such renderings are mandatory, inevitable, cathartic. Art is, among many things, the human way of processing the intolerable or the unfathomable. To fold the cosmic horror in some kind of artful way into the midst of ordinary human comedy, tragedy, grief, agita, celebration, dailiness—and I use the word “ordinary” advisedly—is to help to bring perspective and understanding, and even beauty, back to a world gone suddenly incomprehensible.

To bring quiet resolution to the moment before chaos, continued on page 10
Speaking of Books
Continued from page 9

as does Roxana Robinson in “Embrace,” does not satisfy
the reader because it exhausts the universe of possibil-
ity. What it does do is to illumine one moment of
possibility so cleanly, so elegantly, with such under-
standing of the lives involved, that it allows us at least
the universe of possibility. What it does do is to illumine one
moment of possibility so cleanly, so elegantly, with such
understanding of the lives involved, that it allows us at least
a temporary catharsis. And if that phrase is both oxymoron
and absurdity, it nevertheless reflects the plausible
aspiration of our times: a moment of peaceful and beautiful
comprehension before the next onslaught.

Which brings me to Claire Messud's brilliant new
novel, The Emperor's Children. The book has already met
with thoughtful praise and passionate enthusiasm from
reviewers and readers who have seen it as a contemporary
comedy of manners; a delicious social satire skewering the
New York Literary scene and a generation of 30-somethings
not-yet-achievers as well as other targets; a profound
examination of the brutal contradictions between appear-
ance and reality—private, social, institutional; an empathe-
tic and insightful character study of a number of people
whose lives intertwine, but whose souls and motifs are
fully individuated; a brilliantly structured action tale,
artfully interweaving the destinies of a number of its
characters through the coincidences that link them, the
events that envelop them, and the choices they ultimately
make. And the book is indeed all of these, wrapped in prose
as felicitous and compelling as any I know in the current
marketplace.

The plot centers upon three friends, two women and a
man, who braved the Ivy-League together and currently
occupy three rungs of the not-quite-there ladder in New
York. Danielle Minkoff, a television producer, enjoys a
certain kind of successful career, but neither the profess-
ional autonomy nor the personal fulfillment she
craves. Marina Thwaite, beautiful and brilliant, labors in
the shadow of her lionized father Murray, a left-leaning
intellectual-with-portfolio. Marina occupies her parents'
enviable Upper West Side apartment while she attempts to
finish writing her book, a study of the ways in which
children's clothes reflect the social history of our society.
Julius Clarke, half-Vietnamese, gay, and talented but
impoverished free-lance critic, completes the trio of
strongly bonded friends.

And if this foundation sounds like the basis for a Chick Lit novel—“girl in big city desperately searches for Mr.
Right in between dieting and shopping for shoes. Girl gets
dumped. . . . Girl finds Prince Charming,” let all assump-
tions disappear immediately. Early on, Murray Thwaite's
college-age nephew Frederick, known as Bootie, will enter
the picture, and quickly become assimilated into the
Thwaite household as Murray’s “amanuensis.” Almost
simultaneously, Ludovic Seely, an Australian journalist
with the financial backing to launch a revolutionary maga-
zine of transgressive ideas and cultural gravitas, arrives in
New York. Through Danielle, whom he has met in
Australia, he wangles introductions to both Marina and
Murray Thwaite. Openly contemptuous of Murray, Ludo is
nevertheless drawn to the cultural milieu Murray
represents.

Complications, of course, will arise in each set of
relationships. (For satire as delicious as anything Tom
Wolfe ever wrote, but with a far less obvious touch, read
the two dinner parties: the opening scene, when Danielle
meets Ludovic in Australia, and the awards banquet in New
York where Ludo expands his horizons.) Meanwhile
Danielle, long an intimate within her friend Marina's
family, will enter a new dimension. Everywhere havoc will
ensue or hover so close to the surface as makes no
difference.

While Roxane Robinson's pithy short story covers
twenty-five years, Ms. Messud's novel occupies nine
months. The seventh month is September. On that bright
morning, as the cliché has it, lives change forever. Where
Ms. Robinson's story gives us the truly oxymoronic ending,
a good death, Ms. Messud's novel gives us the greater
surprise: hope. No one in this novel is purified solely by
events. Each suffers, and must move beyond something
horrible. But it is far from coincidence that the last three
words of this are “Yes. He would.” Forward motion.

I have long believed that a land as various, complex,
and contradictory, and, in all senses, large as ours cannot
produce the Great American Novel. I do believe, however,
that there are Great American Novels. Claire Messud, even
though she is an internationalist creature with the old soul
of a wise European, has written one. Read it, and cherish.

Help Wanted
Do you like to work around people? Would you like to
meet other members? We are looking for new
volunteers to help with mailing (once a month), to help
with data entry during enrollment periods especially
if you are familiar with the Access database program, and
for other open volunteer positions. Please call the office
for more information at 412-268-7489.
The 10 Keys to Healthy Aging

(from the Center for Healthy Aging, University of Pittsburgh)

Scholarships Available
Don’t let finances stop you from participating in A.L.L. classes. Full and partial scholarships are available through a simple, friendly, and confidential process. Call 412-268-7489 for information.

Lost and Found
Several items including sweaters, gloves, umbrellas, glasses, and a cell phone have been left in the A.L.L. office. The cell phone is a Verizon Audiobox with phone numbers for GHF and Sue taped to the back. If you have left behind any of these items, please stop in at the A.L.L. office in Hunt Library to reclaim them.

Answers: Across: 1-stretch, 4-lung, 5-limbs, 8-increases, 12-exercise, 13-memory, 14-sad, 16-osteoporosis
Down: 2-colonoscopy, 3-sugar, 5-LDL, 6-bones, 7-less, 9-silent, 10-benefits, 11-decision, 15-job
A.L.L. gratefully acknowledges the following contributions:

In honor of the fiftieth wedding anniversary of Nancy and Arthur Lassman
   Gloria and Al Bodek

In memory of Frank Benke
   Bob and Betty Clark, Pittsburgh
   Linda and Richard Frank, Ballston Spa, NY
   William P. and Shirley McClary, Burnt Hills, NY
   Eaton Corp, Pittsburgh
   Roxanne and Al Lawrence, Albany, NY.

A.L.L. ANNUAL MEETING
Tuesday, April 24, 2007
12 Noon
Business Meeting & Election of Officers
1:00 p.m.
Reception & Luncheon
Entertainment
Kathy Soroka, Soprano
Accompanist, Natasha Snitkovsky

Watch your mail for your invitation to this gala Annual Meeting and Luncheon this year at the Pittsburgh Golf Club

The Academy for Lifelong Learning does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or veteran status.