Osher and CMU: A Promising Meeting of Minds

By Joe Shirk

For the first time, Osher has participated in Meeting of the Minds (MOM), the annual undergraduate research symposium, described on CMU’s website as “a university-wide celebration of undergraduate research. All Carnegie Mellon undergrads engaged in research and creative projects are encouraged to apply!”

This year, our Osher program offered awards to undergraduates who developed products, approaches, and solutions to a variety of issues that can make life easier and better for senior members of our society.

Held on May 4 in the University Center, MOM featured hundreds of presentations and demonstrations on a variety of scientific research projects and artistic proposals. Twenty-five entrants competed for the Osher awards. Two projects won: in first place, a project dealing with improvements to the immune system in the elderly; in second place, a project helping to manage the timing for taking multiple medications.

The top Osher Award, for $500, went to Daniel Evans and Kathryn Hanson (pictured above), who were advised by A. Javier Lopez of the Department of Biological Sciences. Their project, "Role of Alternative Isoforms F1-ATPase of the Epsilon Subunit in Aging and Oxidative Stress," successfully produced and isolated two forms of an enzyme involved in oxidative stress: one that is benign toward and one that is implicated in the aging process. This work opens the way to further studies that may show how to modify this enzyme and thereby slow the aging process.

The second Osher Award, for $250, went to Kristina Wagner and Yeon Soo Kim, advised by Anind Day from the Human Computer Interaction Institute, for their project, "Can We Develop New Technology to Be Used by Older Adults?" This case study evaluated an "intelligent yet unintimidating watch to remind older adults to take pills and other medication." The Osher judges were particularly impressed with how Wagner and Kim carefully evaluated the responses of seniors to their prototype, recognized its inherent limitations, and proposed an alternative approach that seemed more promising.

This year an Osher panel of John Olmsted, Raja Sooriamurthi, Joe Shirk, Alice Chen, and Executive Director Lyn Decker acted as judges in evaluating the entries submitted for the Osher Award competition.

In total, hundreds of MOM presentations filled the second floor of the University Center. As the Osher Award is now established as an annual award, we anticipate a significant increase in research affecting issues facing the elderly.

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From The President

By John Olmsted

I am honored to have been elected president of the Osher at CMU board and look forward to an exciting year leading up to our celebration of 25 years of the Lifelong Learning program at CMU. Our Osher program is in the top tier of the 119 programs in the country, and I hope that we will maintain that enviable position during my tenure. You probably are well aware of our robust curriculum, which is the core of our program. But we offer other activities that I would like to highlight.

Socializing with fellow Osher members can be as invigorating as learning from our courses, and we offer several opportunities throughout the year for such socializing. First up is the annual Back-to-School Picnic, on August 30. Mark your calendar and plan to attend. Watch for the holiday party in December. When April rolls around, plan to attend our Annual Meeting, at which we hope to have CMU President Subra Suresh address us to kick off our anniversary celebrations.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are forums where members socialize with others who share common interests, in less-formal settings than for regular Osher courses. They are coordinated by Osher members. A year ago, our only SIG was a dining out group. Now we have seven, and I hear expressions of interest for several more. We lag behind some other Osher programs in this area. For example, UNC Asheville, which is comparable in size to us, has 24 SIGs ranging from beer tasting to conversations in French.

Our other SIGs are Dining Out, Genealogy, Weekday Bridge, Saturday Bridge, Drawing Workshop, and Patrons of the Arts. If you are interested in joining any of these SIGs or would like to establish a new SIG, contact the Osher office for more information.

As an alumus of Carnegie Tech, I am particularly interested in the symbiosis between us and our host institution. This spring we sponsored an Osher award at the annual CMU undergraduate research symposium, Meeting of the Minds. This activity, which is the subject of an article on page 1 in this newsletter, exemplifies how we can interact with the CMU community in beneficial ways.

Osher at CMU is a volunteer-driven organization whose highly competent staff ensures that the programs operate smoothly but whose success depends on our volunteers, from study leaders to committee members to office volunteers. Each of the components that I've highlighted owes its existence and success to dedicated volunteers. Watch the Weekly Essentials electronic newsletter in your email for upcoming volunteer opportunities.
Ram Kossowsky: A Well-Traveled Study Leader
By Joan Morse Gordon

Arriving on a gray New York day in 1960, Hanita Kossowsky, clutching her 24-month-old son, Nir, with thoughts of a bright and sunny Tel Aviv behind, said to her husband, Ram, “Let’s go home!” But the family was en route to Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania, where Ram had acquired a scholarship for a degree in material science, a program unavailable back in Israel.

After 3 years, with a PhD in hand, and daughter Tamar one year old, Ram went to work for Curtiss-Wright in a laboratory where he was directed to “do what you want” to develop engines for supersonic airplanes. After another 3 years, with the program discarded, he moved on to the Westinghouse Research Laboratory in Pittsburgh, where he stayed for 20 years doing research in material science. By this time the family was increased by one, son Yuval.

Pittsburgh was now his home base, and he commuted for 6 years to Penn State with a dual faculty appointment; at the same time he also commuted to Los Alamos on consulting assignments. Since 1992 Ram has been an independent consultant and “expert witness” dealing with projects like “what makes some medical implants fail?”

For over 25 years the Kossowskys have been taking intensive archeological tours to India, Egypt, Central America, Europe, and many of the “istans” (Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, etc.) And naturally, every year back to family in Israel.

With an energetic flourish, Ram has been giving skilled Keynote presentations to Osher classes with many detailed maps and pictures on the Bible, ancient codes of law, Israeli history, archaeology and culture, and political history of the Middle East. One of his classes was filmed, and he used it as a resume when applying for a job as a lecturer on cruise ships. Who could be better qualified?

Certainly he has his work cut out for him to research and prepare for this November’s 28-day Mediterranean cruise from Rome to Istanbul to Abu Dhabi, where his 16 lectures will be recorded and broadcast to between 600 and 1,000 passengers. There’ll be pictures and maps and a few words, he says. Ram admits that he has a bit of boning up to do on Abu Dhabi and “the footsteps of Saint Paul.”

On shipboard he and Hanita will be expected to dress appropriately (casual country club wear), and be available to talk at dinner, preferably at a table for many. On his return, should we be expecting an Osher class on cruise lecturing?
Meeting of Minds
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President John Olmsted stated, “What impressed me the most was the large number of undergraduates whose projects had some potential to improve the lives of senior citizens. This was exemplified by a project that examined whether an intelligent yet unintimidating watch could be developed to remind older adults to take their medications. One of the presenters told us that she developed this project after observing the difficulties her 95-year-old grandmother had with both technology and remembering.”

Not only will our presence at this annual competition enhance the potential for advancements in research for the elderly, our participation with other groups or companies giving awards, such as Boeing, CIT, Alcoa, Johnson & Johnson, etc., increases our visibility and value to the Carnegie Mellon community.

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Award Criteria:
The goal of the Osher Award is to recognize undergraduate research projects that address issues facing the elderly.

The Osher Award is open to enrolled undergraduates at CMU who have developed products, approaches, and solutions to a variety of issues that can make life easier and better for senior members of our society and address their quality of life and health issues. We welcome all majors and projects that cross a range of disciplines.

A panel of judges will rate the projects according to the following criteria:
---Quality and originality of work
---Significance of work
---Visual presentation quality
---Responses to questions

The first place winner or team will receive $500. Additional prizes may be awarded.

At the Meeting of the Minds: left, Yeon Soo Kim shows the “intelligent yet unintimidating watch”; above, right, at MOM, Osher President John Olmsted views an exhibit.
America's Diplomats
By Filomena Conti

Here's a history trivia question for you: Who was the first official diplomat of the United States of America?

If you attended the Osher Lecture at the McConomy Auditorium in the University Center at CMU on May 25, you would have learned that it was Benjamin Franklin, around 1775-76, who traveled to Paris to get the support of France when the U.S. was at war with England. You would also have learned another detail of history—that the Louisiana Purchase was negotiated by U.S. diplomats. It cost the equivalent of $15 million and doubled the size of the United States in 1803.

Marcia Frumerman, an Osher founding member and study leader of "Great Decisions in American Foreign Policy," a course covering current world political affairs, presented America's Diplomats, a film produced by the Foreign Policy Association and narrated by Kathleen Turner.

The film explored the roles of Foreign Service officials from the 18th century to the present time. We know how busy Secretary of State Kerry is just from current news reports. Well, the Foreign Service touches on 180 states throughout the world. Some of us remember Pearl Mesta and Shirley Temple as ambassadors. But seeing the video, we learned that 25,000 Americans throughout the world represent us in the Foreign Service. You might call them our peace keepers, most of them unsung heroes.

Benjamin Franklin

The Louisiana Purchase

Ambassador Shirley Temple Black seated in her office in Czechoslovakia in 1989
Speaking of Books
By Helen-Faye Rosenblum

Heat and Light,
by Jennifer Haigh

In a brief prologue to her artfully woven novel Heat and Light, Jennifer Haigh informs her readers that, "More than most places, Pennsylvania is what lies beneath." On one literal level, she is talking about the geological underpinnings that fuel the co-dependencies that define and challenge so much of our planet: the coal, the oil, the gas; their by-products, their implications, their consequences, intended and unintended.

On another level, she is introducing, or re-introducing to those readers who have been fortunate enough to enjoy her prior Bakerton novels and short stories, that small, fictional town, that Western Pennsylvania archetype, whose fortunes thus far have risen and fallen with the fossil fuel industries. It isn't Oil City. It isn't Petrolia. It isn't Oleantum. It isn't even Barnesboro, the actual town where Ms. Haigh was born. Bakerton exists in the universe of her mind, a locale as palpable and convincing as any created by the great American geographers and historians of places that never quite were: Updike, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Edith Pearlman.

On yet a more abstract level, she refers to the denizens of Bakerton, and those who ultimately interact with them, a society where every superficially classifiable character—the bartender, the town slut, the nurse, the minister, the inmate, to scratch the surface—conceals a past or a present of intricate and usually unexpected complexity. As we gradually encounter the variegated populations of the novel, "what lies beneath" each character and family propels us at page-turning speed through the transition of their physical and mental environments from chronically depressed coal patch relics to a complex and epic chapter in the history of the Marcellus Shale.

The novel begins with the arrival in Bakerton of one of the cheerful and elusive Harold Hills of the world of gas drilling, a seductive Texan who promises the residents that if they lease away their mineral rights, a sweet and simple perpendicular procedure will tap their valuable resources without complication, bringing vast advantage to the world at large, and riches to the one granting the leases. All that's left to do is to sit back and let the profits roll in. The first potential grantor we meet is one Rich Devlin.

Rich, a prison guard by profession, is a would-be farmer whose hereditary family acreage he has never been able to cultivate because he has never been able to assemble the wherewithal to underwrite the prohibitive startup costs of farming. Now, he believes, is his chance. How hard can it be, he believes, just to rake in the profits from clean drilling process? Never mind that his leasing contract compares unfavorably to those of some neighbors who knew how to drive at least something of a bargain. And never mind that the questions of chemical pollution, clear-cutting land to facilitate access roads, the noise pollution of heavy drilling equipment—none such questions ever did arise. It will be Rich Devlin's wife Shelby, eccentric, perhaps hypochondriacal, over-protective in her own right, who will be among the first to try to blow the whistle on the drilling process, but not quite effectively, and for reasons of her own that will not emerge until much later.

Patiently, Jennifer Haigh introduces a community of neighbors, outliers, and interlopers, all of whose lives will eventually intersect. Artfully she interlaces elements of contemporary society and culture that inflect the way we live now, and illuminate the interconnectedness of the smallest pocket of exhausted boomtown-gone-bust.

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to the heated, enticing corrupted, capitalistic world outside. Without judgment and without irony, Haigh inserts prison life, metamphetamine culture, political correctness, lesbian marriage, liberal activists, conservative philosophers, the complicated lives of clergy, male and female, into the mix. There is room in this pulsating entity of a universe for glimpses of the academic life, public protest, and the co-opting of pure science by vested scientific interests.

In brief retrospective segments of the novel, Three-Mile Island plays a significant role. On the one hand, a scientific disaster of that magnitude could simply act as a literary harbinger of the mishandling of resources that animates the entire novel. In the hands of a writer as adept as Jennifer Haigh, that catastrophe has tentacles that extend directly through the decades to Bakerton. Indirectly, they play out into the Great Beyond as well. The novel is, in the best way, its own universe.

Even Werner Erhard and EST make cameo appearances. In his case, as in so many others, Jennifer Haigh performs the breathtaking feat of helping the reader to understand why aspects of his persona, so repellent to some, were so irresistibly attractive to others. And that is exactly the miracle and the majesty of the novel. The author does not abjure the reader from drawing serious conclusions, from taking sides, or from reinforcing those sides already taken. What she does do is to craft a fair presentation of the circumstances, illuminating the reasons for joining one camp or the other.

So, it’s a throbbing novel. The central plot, the intended corruption-for-profit of a heartbroken community yearning to breathe the oxygen of success, is compelling and propulsive. The characters, even the most minor, are compellingly drawn in the way that a master craftsman suggests an entire personality with a single stroke of the charcoal. The environments, from farmhouse to jailhouse to boutique food purveyor in Pittsburgh to gilded executive suite all ring true. So do the relieved sighs of those who refuse successive disasters, and the lowered expectations of those who don’t.

And the language: Ms. Haigh is, in a word, an eloquent writer, one who can also nail the Western Pennsylvania colloquial effluvium as well as any practitioner we have. Her research is impressive. Her historical perspective is comprehensive and wise.

The title Heat and Light opens itself to a gracious plenty of interpretations. In the closing pages of the novel, Ms. Haigh explicitly reprises its central theme, the concept of “what lies beneath.” In no small measure, that’s what it is, heat and light, power, hope, durability. These are not only the megaphones that drive the engine, but the qualities that secure Jennifer Haigh’s position among the most significant novelists of our time.

Calling all Osher members who are passionate patrons of the arts, artists, musicians!

We are creating a special interest group just for you! We are looking to create opportunities for small events where we gather together and dialogue with one another about music, dance, art, and all types of creative expression in a stimulating environment. Come share your passion and expertise with like-minded artists and patrons! Sign up now and watch for upcoming events! To sign up, please send your name, phone number, email address, and area of interest/expertise to Marilyn Maiello at marilynmbmaicillo@hotmail.com
How We Learned All About Publishing

By Leslie Evans

For anyone who writes prose or poetry, "Publishing for Writers" is a must. Scott Bradley Smith answers all student questions, from "Is my memoir ready to submit?" to "Do I need to report anything on my taxes?" Do you need an intro? a query letter? a blurb? a bar code? an ISBN? time stamp? copyright? All these topics are covered by a published author and a small press editor in this Osher course.

One student wanted to know the cost of a professional editor. Mr. Smith discusses whether we need one and where to find a reliable one. He suggests ways to find markets for fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and short stories. He gives website addresses for information on hot topics and trends that sell well such as steampunk articles and sci-fi.

It was interesting to hear that New York City's "Big 5"—Penguin/Random House, Macmillan, HarperCollins, Hachette, Simon and Schuster—throw most of their marketing money behind their best writers and give considerably less to writers publishing for the first time. With more hands-on attention, smaller publishers may accept regional books or ones for specific audiences (see Kelev, page 9). As the editor at Brandt Street Press, a small local publishing house in Pittsburgh, this instructor knows all the advantages/disadvantages of small presses and answers questions about self-publishing.

His knowledge of the publishing world piqued more questions for this experienced writer and editor: Should I submit my writing to one or many publishers? Do I send them one submission or multiple submissions? electronic? paper? Do I need a query letter, and what are the elements of a query? In class we wrote pitches and bios that could be presented as a cover or query letter to a publisher.

And what about agents? Scott Smith says agents aren’t for everyone. But if you need one, research the reputation and fees of a prospective agent before approaching one.

And if your work is accepted, what then? What is a provisional acceptance? What do copy editors expect you to do before publication? Mr. Smith provides an example of a publishing contract and explains how the internet can help you spot red flags in contracts. Students in my class wanted to know how to protect their "intellectual property."

Scott Smith updates his students on how published writing gets marketed, promoted, and rated. In the past ten years, reviews and ratings have become a large part of selling books. He covers the role of Amazon, Goodreads, Smashwords and webinars. Did you know that Amazon checks to see if relatives and friends are trying to pump up the sale of a book? That webinars are live broadcasts on the internet? That you can sell your work as an ebook to a subscription service? How to use social media to build a fan base?

One of the most helpful ideas from this class was to use a spreadsheet to track the status of all submissions in column heads: story titles, content, dates sent to which publishers, dates of response, dates of publishing, pay scale, expenses, payments, future publishers, etc.

Mr. Smith has taught English at the University of Arizona and at Penn State and a similar publishing workshop at Chatham College. His creative work has appeared in a number of publications, and he is the author of five produced plays.

He is hoping to teach the publishing course again in the Summer 2017 session.
A Review of Kelev’s
Journey: A Jewish Dog
Wanders Home
By Leslie Evans

One of the students in the “Publishing for Writers” course in 2015 was David Hammerstein, a career investment advisor who, during retirement, turned his writing talents from financial analysis to humorous stories. In the last year he has published, via a small press in Pittsburgh, a children’s book, Kelev’s Journey: A Jewish Dog Wanders Home, illustrated by Ed Shems. On sale through Amazon Books, the book’s description reads:

“Kelev, a lively black Labrador retriever, lives with an orthodox Jewish family in Pittsburgh’s Squirrel Hill neighborhood. Kelev thinks about becoming a rabbi—a natural role because he already wears a black coat. He teaches the other neighborhood Jewish pets about their obligations to make the world a better place and invents the Yidometer to measure one’s fidelity to Judaism. Kelev ultimately abandons the Yidometer because he concludes that Judaism cannot be reduced to a single number. Kelev serves as a role model for humans who can learn to curtail their capacity for cruelty by observing dogs’ innocence.”

Kelev is lovable, inquisitive and compassionate. The Metzger family showered Kelev with affection and “select cuts of beef brisket.” They “also imposed restrictions—no pork, no car rides on the Sabbath, no meals without washing his paws. Kelev felt deprived. . . . Something was missing in his life, but he could not put his paw on it.” The book is the story of his search.

Children will like this book. When Kelev visits the Statue of Liberty, he wonders why the torch is thrust upward instead of downward to fill a bowl with dog food.

Kelev interacts with other dogs and animals—with kid-pleasing puns and silly punch lines:

Tom, a wild turkey: “I am trying to squash the stereotype that turkeys are stupid.”

Kelev: “Such fowl play. I bet those charges knock the stuffing out of you.”

Kelev: “So what’s your complaint?”

Freddy the Fox: “I have completed vocational training as a security guard. I am seeking a job guarding a hen house, but nobody will hire me. That’s discrimination.”

Kelev: “What’s the problem?”

Freddy: “The chickens are afraid of me.”

Kelev: “Maybe that’s why they are called chickens.”

But ultimately, Kelev’s Journey is for all ages. The satire and tongue-in-cheek characters will keep adults entertained on every page.

Kelev’s gossipy cousin loves to counsel other dogs about “interbreed continued on following page
Kelev
Continued from previous page

marriages, objections to leash laws, conditions at dog boarders under the Affordable Dog Care Act, and issues with commercial dog walkers.” Her clients include a dachshund who wants to marry a German shepherd and a boxer who has anger-management issues.

Inspired by late Mayor Sophie Masloff, Kelev enters politics. “Mayor Masloff had been a real Yiddishe mama who would never restrict a dog’s freedom.” He “plans to run a civil campaign. No rolling in the mud... stick to meat-and-potatoes issues... refrain from pork-barrel politics.”

“It takes a conversation with migrant squirrels before Kelev changes his view of them being “foreign and aggressive invaders” to “uprooted refugees seeking a connection with their homeland.”

Deciding to improve his spiritual life by saving souls and good deeds, Kelev fantasizes about the recognition he will receive. “Would he go on a book-signing tour?... Make the rounds of TV talk shows? Kelev marveled at his many virtues—the most notable being humility.”

At the end of his journey, Kelev’s final humble mitzvah is in the ordinary, but loving, arms of an elderly Metzger aunt.

Members’ Picnic
Tuesday, August 30
5:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Join us rain or shine to mingle with fellow members and enjoy great food and live music. Parking is free in East Campus Garage after 5 pm.

Members may bring guests.

Osher members $20
Guests $30

Reserve by Friday, August 26.
Payment is non-refundable.

Three ways to reserve
Remember to include guest’s name and if you need a vegetarian meal.

RSVP
• Register online for course ID 1668.
• Call the office with a credit card (412 268-7498).
• Mail a check payable to Osher at CMU, Hunt Library, 4909 Frew St, Pittsburgh, PA 15213.
CMU Parking Woes and Ways
By Gloriana St. Clair and Jim Reitz

Michelle Porter, CMU’s parking czar, informed the Mobility Committee members of the Osher Board that the new construction on campus has resulted in the loss of hundreds of parking spaces. She urged Osher members who want to attend classes reliably to try to use city busses, the campus shuttle (requires Osher ID card), and ride-sharing options whenever possible.

For those who must drive to campus, it is recommended you try parking in the Mehrabian CIC garage because spaces are almost always available, and the walk to classes in Wean is mostly indoors. Once in the CIC garage, you take the elevator to the ground level, walk out through the door of the building and in through the door of Newell-Simon, about 50 feet of walking on flat surfaces. Once in Newell-Simon, take the elevator up one floor and then go through the bridge between Newell-Simon and Wean and directly to the two Osher Wean classrooms. While this walk is about a block long, most of the distance is indoors.

The entry into the CIC garage is probably unfamiliar to most Osher members. To reach the CIC garage, turn off Fifth Avenue to Neville Street towards the CMU campus. Pass under Forbes Avenue and then go down to the entrance to the garage. CMU put a sign in front of the CIC garage, meant to show people how to go past that CIC garage to the Gates garage. The sign says “Gates Garage,” but bear left only slightly to drive into the CIC garage entrance for the pay parking there. Take a little time to drive and find how to get there. The second time will be easy.

The rates are about $6 for two hours or $8 for three, in line with the city fees to park on Frew Street. Handicapped spaces are near the elevator. No member needs any special permit from Osher to park there.

Note: The Mehrabian CIC building closes and locks at 5 p.m.

Look for more detailed information on the Osher website under Location and Parking.