



Five College Learning In Retirement

Peer-led Life Long Learning in the Pioneer Valley

Amherst College - Smith College - Hampshire College - UMASS Amherst - Mount Holyoke College

November Newsletter

Inside this issue: Bracing for the flu season, Spring preview, More Encore presentations, Council Corner, Member spotlight on Betsy Siersma, Writing to Remember participant describes her experience with hearing loss, Letter from LIR President Francie Borden.

Bracing for the Flu Season

For those attending in-person seminars, please stay home if you feel at all sick. Not only is Covid still a risk, experts are predicting a worse-than-usual flu season this winter.

Preview of Spring Semester on Zoom in Early December

The preview of upcoming seminars and workshops in the spring semester will be held this year on Sunday afternoon, December 4. As in recent years, the preview will be on Zoom. While we won't have the social aspect of earlier previews, the Zoom format allows for participants to hear from every moderator and for members beyond the Pioneer Valley to join in.

The catalogue of course offerings will be posted online a few days before the preview. Copies will also be mailed to all members.

Encore Presentations Continue

Members have an opportunity to hear some of the best presentations of the spring semester, recommended by the moderators and selected by the Encore Committee. The presentations will continue for three more weeks in November. The programs are on Zoom. Registration will also be posted on the LIR website.

November 4

10 am. Nancy Eddy, Harry Hopkins: FCR's Confidant and Implementer, in the seminar on Roosevelt's Inner Circle

11 am. Elisa Campbell, East Broad Top Railroad, in Museums: A World of Wonders

November 11

10 am. Jamie Elkin, Geometric Art in the Arab World, in Golden Age of Arabs

11 am. Diana Liebert, The Shelburne Museum, in Museums: A World of Wonders

November 18

10 am. Richard Nicholl, Growing Up in the UK in the 1950s and 60s, in Food Matters

11 am. Rick Parrish, Plastics: How They are Made and the Petrochemical Industry, in Plastics

Council Corner

The October 13 Council meeting was attended by 23 members.

First order of business was the announcement that Gene Fisher had resigned as treasurer, and Roger Webb has stepped up to fill that post.

Francie formally announced Kristin Langevin as our new Office Manager. We are pleased to have Kristin on board.

Roger explained that our fiscal year ending June 30, 2022, was financially difficult, for many reasons, but we look forward to a brighter financial picture in fiscal 2022-2023. Our investment fund gives us a nice cushion.

After a few weeks of training, Kristin dove right into various aspects of her role. She is able to track how many of our members read the newsletter: the answer is 81%, which indicates a strong commitment by members to the organization. We currently have 229 members and continue to find ways to grow that number.

Larry Ambs suggested more involvement by LIR in local Arts events, such as Art Walks, Pioneer Valley Theater, and Pioneer Valley Jazz Shares. Our participation, and perhaps sponsorship, could draw new membership from groups that may or may not be aware of LIR. There was enthusiasm for the idea, and we hope to have volunteers stepping up to make it happen.

Council voted to reward Darcy's hard work as temporary office manager with a stipend.

Several appointments were announced. Richard Stonberg (Stoney) will replace Pam Daniels as co-chair of the Outreach Committee. Sara Wright continues as official historian, and Kathy Campbell is now our digital archivist. Roger Lowen was appointed chairman of the Extracurricular Committee.

Stoney and Kevin Foley put forth the idea of changing the name of the Outreach Committee to the Communications Committee, to more accurately reflect the true functions of the committee. This was approved. The committee has some great ideas on how to make ourselves more visible (presentations at senior centers and retirement communities, advertising on New England Public Media, etc.), but we need people to implement those ideas. Please consider volunteering to help this important endeavor.

Tom Jones reported for the Curriculum Committee. Submission date for course proposals has been extended to October 28. The preview is scheduled for Sunday, December 4. There will be a fourth Writing to Remember section. LIR needs 4 or 5 more course proposals to fill the roster, so please consider moderating a course.

The Strategic Planning Committee, led by Tyll, has proposed a name change for LIR. There was vigorous discussion about this idea, and if the idea gains traction, it will require a vote at the annual meeting. More on this to come.

There was discussion on how to incentivize members to join committees. There are

numerous ideas, but no conclusions were reached. This is an ongoing discussion, and once various proposals are solidified, they will be presented to the entire LIR membership.

Bob Cohen

Member Spotlight: Betsy Siersma

Betsy Siersma is at her dining room table talking about art, how much it means to her, and how it defines her life.

Behind her, in the dining room, is a large, framed photograph that has leapt off the pages of a book to become a reference point as we talk. It started life as a two-inch square plate in a book.



But on her wall it has blossomed into a much larger piece, hair completely overtaking the subject's head in a massive transformation that blots out all other facial features.

"It's called Sagebrush," Betsy said. "It's very bizarre."

Betsy's not a newcomer to Five College Learning in Retirement. She's been an LIR member since 2008, moderating or co-moderating close to a dozen art-related seminars. She has been chair of the curriculum committee for two three-year terms. "I am very lucky to find something that interests me," she said. What keeps her involved is artwork to examine, analyze and discuss.

"Even as a kid I've been interested in art," she said. "My father would draw funny characters. My mother had a dollhouse from her grandmother that was built in 1895. My parents built furniture for it, and now it will go to my great-niece."

In 1975, UMass opened the Fine Arts Center and its University Gallery. Betsy was hired as its registrar, where she learned the depths of the collection. "Registrars are the caretakers of the collection," she said. "I pulled artwork out to show to classes. The largest piece was by Alice Aycock, which was sent to Washington, D.C. for Vice President Walter Mondale's home, and I accompanied it there for the reception."

After retiring from UMass in 2004 as director of the University Gallery, she was hired as interim director of the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College. Betsy has given numerous lectures and presentations at colleges around the area and in 2008 was recognized with a national award from Americans for the Arts.

Throughout it all, Betsy's association with Five College Learning in Retirement has bolstered her interests.

"I was always interested in the arts as a kid, and that has sustained me – even in retirement," she said, adding that she continues to paint small botanicals of flower collections.

But a dominant force in Betsy's life is her daughter. "I brought up a very engaging

and smart person,” she said of daughter Jess with a mother’s sense of pride.

Betsy is a member of the American Association of Museums, served on the Amherst and Northampton public arts committees and on the Northampton Housing Partnership where she advocated for affordable housing.

David Whitney

Did You Say I look Chic or Cheap?

(This is a condensed version of an essay Carmen Lee recently wrote for the blue group of Writing to Remember. This is her second year in the seminar.)

“Pardon me?” The brows go up and an intense questioning look comes over my face. This facial gesture and the “pardon me (s)” are used several times a day in my life as a hearing-impaired person. It’s automatic, and, hopefully, the second time around, I’ll be able to comprehend what’s being said without forcing the issue for a third time. It then becomes irritating and frustrating to myself and to the person trying to convey the message.

Fifty percent of mild to moderate hearing losses are in people in their “productive” years. And with their gradual declining hearing, most will likely lip-read, although probably unaware of their new skill. Notice that ever-so-slight- shifting of the eyes while conversing. Eye contact is very important, as we have to see the lips to differentiate the ‘Ts from the D’s,’ the ‘beach from bleach,’ ‘chic from cheap.’

An annoyed feeling came over me one day while conversing with a man whose mustache extended over his top lip. I realized I was straining to hear him without being able to see his lips. “Gentlemen, please expose yourselves. Let me see your upper lip. Communication hinges on that charming line.”

When I was in my forties, finally needing glasses, I realized I can hear better when I wear my glasses and I can see better with my hearing aid on!

Beside mustaches, it’s almost impossible to read the lips of a person speaking English with a foreign accent. Their lips do not enunciate English words in the same way as a native-born English-speaking person. With some accents, I’m virtually lost and keep nodding my head, hoping I’m responding appropriately and intelligently.

The most frustrating experience has been in the lovemaking department. In the romantic darkness of the night, my love whispers sweet nothings in my ear and that’s what comes through...nothing! We lay there speaking in affectionate monotone voices until we drift off into a peaceful satisfied sleep. These are precious moments, and I don’t want the mood to change by saying, “My darling, would you turn on the lights so I can read your lips,” or, “My darling, please hand me my hearing aid,” or, “SPEAK UP,” darling!” So, I struggle along, guessing, saying, “uh huh,” or, “me too, you.”

All of us awaken every morning with ‘X’ amount of energy. If I’m feeling relatively well, I use 50% of that daily energy straining to hear and lip-read. However, when there’s an important problem to solve, or when I have a cold, a pain, etc., that energy goes elsewhere. Suddenly, my hearing loss seems to have deteriorated

overnight.

After so many exhausting experiences, I decided it was time to be thoroughly tested, where upon I purchased my first hearing aid. Afterwards, while driving home on the Interstate, wearing my new hearing device, I put on my directional signal to change lanes. Suddenly I heard: “click...click...click,” and looked down to see the “clicks” were corresponding to a flashing green light on my dashboard, registering my turn. It was indeed an exciting experience!

When I arrived home that same day, I heard: “Chirp...chirp...tweet...tweet.” It was a bird! How long had it been since I’d heard a “chirp,” and children playing in the street? But with a gradual hearing loss, wonderful sounds just slowly slip away.

The worst, most unfavorable unpleasant situation I encounter is the exhilarating, enlivening, stimulating, and “fun” cocktail party. Bravely I enter the room with its clanking of glasses and the soft mumbled chattering of people’s voices, and I take a deep breath. Certainly, I wouldn’t want to be blind, but blindness is obvious. The hard of hearing, though, do not give any clues of their problem.

I attempt to find a “one on one” at a cocktail party, but it’s almost impossible. Usually, it’s a group conversation between three or four people. So, with a gentle smile I blend in, adjusting my expressions to fit those around me. If they laugh, I laugh. If they look serious, I look serious. My most frequently used comments are, “Really!” or “How interesting!” ...Not hearing a word they’re saying. Wearing a hearing aid at this type of function would only make it more difficult, as it would exaggerate the commotion and noises even more.

After a few cocktails, though, the visiting process becomes easier. In fact, at this point no one seems to be listening to anyone else anyway. The men are looking at some gorgeous blonde wearing a foxy black dress and the gals are glancing around at the latest fashions and hair-dos. So, I just wander about, hanging loose in a low profile, toasting with the best of them by raising my glass, saying, “Cheers...ears to you!”

Letter from the President

Dear Fellow Learners,

Halloween is supposed to be scary and spooky. LIR is not! In my seven years in LIR, there has always been an undercurrent of anxiety or even downright fear. Read you personal writing in front of strangers? Make a presentation to PhDs and other professionals!? Use a Power Point!? Use Zoom? Submit a proposal for a seminar? Moderate? Are you kidding? Maybe all you retired professors can, but I can’t.

Yes, you can! And here are some reasons why:

Guess what, LIR is full of folks without advanced degrees. The only requirements are that we are curious, enjoy learning new things, and like to share.

Not all seminars are “academic.” Broadway and movies, music and art, crafts and cooking are all areas we engage in by sharing, discussing, and simply enjoying together.

We at LIR are not judgmental. We have all experienced glitches, goofs, and disasters. We expect it of ourselves and others and forgive.

There is ALWAYS someone ready and willing to help out with whatever you need. Proposing a seminar, one-on-one tech assistance, how to Zoom... whatever your need, our website or Kristin in the office can put you in touch with someone who can help.

Join me in getting the word out: LIR isn't scary. The more you can participate, the more fun it is.

Warm regards,
Francie Borden

From the Look Park picnic...



Jim Scott (from left), Miriam Whitney, Rich Baker, Rebekah Anderson and Katy van Geel. New members, Rich and Rebekah recently moved from Minnesota to be closer to their children.



Ruth Kosiorek (from left), Faina Zilberberg, Wunderley Stauder, and Ken Borden.

(Photos by Kristin Langevin)

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