The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Connecticut is an academic cooperative that provides older adults with opportunities for intellectual development, cultural stimulation, and social interaction.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN...

America stands on the brink of losing its greatness. We have become a nation increasingly divided over politics, religion, ideals, and almost every other aspect of society. Nobody listens to anybody else except to excoriate them. This is no way to run a democracy. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson in 1950 said "It is not the function of our government to keep the citizens from falling into error; it is the function of the citizen to keep the government from falling into error." The American historian, Clinton Rossiter, wrote, "Science and its philosophical corollaries, were perhaps the most important intellectual forces shaping the destiny of 18th century America – Benjamin Franklin was only one other number of forward looking colonists who recognized the kinship of scientific method and democratic procedure. Free inquiry, free exchange of information, optimism, self-criticism, pragmatism, objectivity – all these ingredients of the coming Republic were already active in the Republic of science that flourished in the 18th century." Have we lost the recipe for our success?

Democracy is hard to maintain. I was re-reading Carl Sagan’s book, The Demon-haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark, recently, and thought some passages might be apropos to the present situation. "Thomas Jefferson stressed, passionately and repeatedly, that it was essential for the people to understand the risks and benefits of government, educate themselves, and to involve themselves in the political process. Without that, he said, the wolves will take over. Here's how he put it in Notes on Virginia, stressing how the powerful and unscrupulous find zones of vulnerability they can exploit:

"In every government on earth is some trace of human weakness, some germ of corruption and degeneracy, which cunning will discover and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate and improve. Every government degenerates when entrusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves, therefore, are its only safe repositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved ..."

"New ideas, invention, and creativity in general, always spearhead a kind of freedom – a breaking out from hobbling constraints. Freedom is a prerequisite for continuing the delicate experiment of science... At the same time, science – or rather its delicate mix of openness and skepticism, and its encouragement of diversity and debate – is a prerequisite for continuing the delicate experiment of freedom in an industrial and highly technological society."

"Science – or rather its delicate mix of openness and skepticism, and its encouragement of diversity and debate..." seems to be among the missing in our present society. We scream from the extremes and drown out the middle. We have forgotten what makes democracy work – compromise!

RJG
Olli Book Club

2018 Book Selections

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Olli Book Club meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, 1:00 p.m. in room 102D, UConn/Waterbury

Jonathan "Jon" Draper, former interim director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UConn, has begun a new career in municipal government. Jon was sworn in as assistant city clerk for the city of Torrington on February 12. "He’s got a lot of energy and enthusiasm," City Clerk Carol Anderson commented at the swearing in ceremony, according to the Waterbury Republican-American. A very outgoing man, Jon was known for those qualities at OLLI. Jon is a graduate of the University of Connecticut, where he majored in psychology and also urban and community studies. He is pursuing a master’s degree in communication with the focus on organizational communication at Central Connecticut State University.

Cat Facts by Julie Rodriguez

Does Your Cat Eat Plants? Or Chew on Random Inedible Objects?

The good news is that eating grass is totally normal for cats — but excessive consumption can give your cat an upset stomach and work as a laxative. Cats may eat grass to provide fiber and help clear hairballs from the stomach, so unless your cat is regularly eating enough grass to the point of vomiting, you probably shouldn’t worry. Just make sure your plant-eating cat doesn’t have access to any common decorative or houseplants that could be toxic. Unfortunately, for some cats, this behavior extends to inedible objects like plastic bags or electrical cords. This behavior, called “pica,” can potentially be dangerous. Try keeping objects out of the cat’s reach or treating these items with a substance that tastes bad to cats. What you shouldn’t do is yell at or try to punish your cat when you catch him in the act — this only teaches him to chew on objects when you aren’t around.

Does Your Cat Like to Head-Butt You?

The technical term for this behavior is “bunting.” While head-butting may seem like a simple display of affection for their owners, it gets a little more complicated when you realize that cats just as likely to rub their faces on household objects and furniture.

You may have heard that cats do this to “mark their territory” with their scent, and that’s definitely part of the answer. But cats will also rub against each other to indicate their friendly intentions — so when your cat head-butts you or demands to be scratched behind the ears, it’s not just a move to mark you as his property.

Does Your Cat Seem to Turn on You?

While some cats have a higher tolerance for petting than others, many cats will get excited by the attention and bite or scratch you while you pet them. Cats aren’t doing this to be mean, or trick you into a fight. A gentle — or not-so-gentle — nip is your cat’s way of letting you know she’s had enough for now.

The repetitive physical contact can become uncomfortable for the cat over time, sometimes even building up static electricity. If you have a cat who often lashes out during petting, there are a few things you can do. First, let the cat come to you when she wants to be petted. Keep an eye out for signs that your cat is getting overwhelmed during petting: her ears might flatten, her tail might start twitching or she might show other signs of tension. You can even build up your cat’s tolerance for petting by offering treats when you snuggle. Some cats who don’t tolerate being stroked on the back may appreciate scratches on the chin and behind the ears.

Does Your Cat Love to Tear Furniture to Shreds?

Cats aren’t just scratching furniture for fun — they need to regularly scratch to keep their claws sharp and healthy. While many people respond to cat scratching by declawing their cats, animal welfare organizations like the ASPCA discourage the practice. In fact, in some areas, declawing surgery is illegal because it actually involves amputating part of the cat’s toes.

Looking for a more humane solution? Providing a scratching post is an obvious place to start, although it may take your cat some time to get used to it. Discourage your cat from scratching furniture by moving desirable objects, covering up your furniture or even placing double-sided tape or sandpaper on the floor where the cat normally stands while scratching.
There were many reasons immigrants left their homeland and came to our country. One major lure was the strong possibility of finding a job for the head of the household and his sons. Boys were permitted to work in the hard coal mines and many did.

You may be thinking, well, my dad, grandfather or even great grandfather never endured a tough life as a coal miner. There are strong similarities between life in a mine 300 feet below ground and what immigrants endured in the early industries in our state.

Yes, coal mining was a difficult job but the coal industry helped feed a fast growing industrial economy in our country.

OLLI’s Travel Committee invites you to travel with them to the coal mining country around Scranton, PA. The trip leaves the Chase Parkway commuter lot June 11, 2018 at 8:30 am. It returns on Tuesday, June 12th.

Cost of the trip, including admission fees and a hotel room is $297 per person for a double or triple room. Non-members are welcome to climb aboard the luxurious motor bus, too. There is a $20 surcharge for non-members. Cost of a single room is $367.

The trip includes dinner at the Isabella Restaurant and breakfast at the Holiday Inn-Wilkes-Barre. This trip features a stop at the Steam Engine Museum which is home to enormous steam trains and a round house.

While the trip is scheduled for early June, you will be joined by a guide and travel 300 feet below ground in a miner’s car. The temperature will be between 50 and 55 degrees and you are asked to dress for the temperature.

Are you thinking that there were once steam engines and a roundhouse used to re-route the trains bringing raw materials and taking finished products from Waterbury-based manufacturers? Today the Waterbury steam trains are just a ghost of a memory. But at Steam Town you might even get to ride on a steam train.

Your deposit of $100 is due March 5th and can be mailed to Friendship Tours, Overnight Dept. 705 Bloomfield Ave, Bloomfield, CT 06002. Final payment is due April 23rd. For reservations, questions and any special dietary needs call Friendship Tours, at 1-800-243-1630.

Trip Advisor gives the Anthracite Coal Heritage Museum and Coal Mine Tour a 4.5 rating out of a possible 5 point.

Evelyn Marshak
March 2
Connecticut Civilian Conservation Corps: History, Memories, And Legacy | Martin Podskoch

Martin Podskoch will discuss his book, *Connecticut Civilian Conservation Corps Camps: Their History, Memories And Legacy*. The CCC was a public works program that operated from 1933 – 1942 as part of FDR's new deal. Podskoch's book describes the history and projects of the 21 CCC camps located in Connecticut. Interviews and photos of camp life capture the vitality of the young men who worked to improve forest, which had been ravaged by fires, lumbering, and storms. Their labors created the Woodlands and state parks that we continue to enjoy today.

March 9
300 Years Of Connecticut's Remarkable Women | Tina Carlson

A lawyer defending a man accused of burglary tried this creative defense:

"My client merely inserted his arm into the window and removed a few trifling articles. His arm is not himself, and I fail to see how you can punish the whole individual for an offense committed by his limb."

"Well put," the judge replied. "Using your logic, I sentence the defendant's arm to one year’s imprisonment. He can accompany it or not, as he chooses."

The defendant smiled.

With his lawyer's assistance he detached his artificial limb, laid it on the bench, and walked out.

The guy phones a law firm and says, "I want to speak to my lawyer." The receptionist says, "I'm sorry, but your lawyer died last week."

Next day the same guy phones the law firm and says, "I want to speak to my lawyer." Once again the receptionist replies, "I'm sorry, but your lawyer died last week."

The next day the guy makes his regular call to the law firm and says, "I want to speak to my lawyer."

"Excuse me, sir," the receptionist says, "but this is the third time I've had to tell you that your lawyer died last week why do you keep calling?"

The guy replies, "Because I love hearing it!"

If a man says something in the woods and there is no woman to hear him...Is he still wrong?
Some of you may know that I am a big fan of the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra. That fabulous group is celebrating its 80th anniversary this season. Last fall saw performances of Dvorak’s Carnival Overture and the delightful Enigma Variations by Elgar, and a really fun Halloween screening of Lon Cheney’s Phantom of the Opera accompanied by music selected by Maestro Leif Bjaland. The Christmas concert featured fairy tales and a dramatic performance of Peter and the Wolf!

The spring lineup promises to be just as entertaining. Next Sunday, March 11, WSO will host pianist Garrick Ohlsson, who, according to WSO Executive Director Robert Cinnante “is one of the pre-eminent pianists of our time.” His upcoming performance just happens to coincide with my favorite day of the entire year, the return of Daylight Savings Time! Cinnante feels that this concert and Ohlsson’s participation is “a testament to the great artists that the WSO has helped to draw to the region in its 80 year history.” Ohlsson’s performance will feature one of the most beloved virtuosic works in the classical piano concerto repertoire, Brahms Piano Concerto No 2. The WSO will also perform Haydn’s Symphony No. 100. Join them at 3 pm at Naugatuck Valley Community College’s Fine Arts Center -- it promises to be very special. A pre-concert lecture will be given at 2 pm by Dr. Vincent DeLuise, WSO Cultural Ambassador.

Recently the WSO instituted a new program entitled “Music in Great Spaces” in an effort to reach out to more segments of the community. Last fall a concert was held at Mark Twain House in Hartford. Continuing in that vein, an evening entitled “Bourbon and Bach” will take place at Litchfield Distillery, 569 Bantan Road, Litchfield, on Saturday, March 24 at 6:30 p.m. featuring Doug Perry, percussionist/improviser, who will actually use one of the whisky stills as an instrument! According to Cinnante, Great Spaces serves not only current patrons of the WSO, but draws in others who are intrigued with the unusual settings. This sounds like such a fun event. Tickets are selling very well, so a word to the wise if this is up your alley.

WSO is also maintaining its commitment to bringing the arts to younger community members. As part of the “Creating Musical Readers” series, percussionist Lee Caron and members of the WSO will perform to beloved children’s author Mercer Meyer’s book “Just A Little Music.” This will take place at Waterbury’s Silas Bronson Library on Tuesday, March 27 at 10 am and is intended for children age six and under. Free! Fun event to take the grands (or great-grands!) Children will even get to try out the instruments after the performance!

Finally, to conclude a very special season, on Sunday, April 22, Earth Day, at 3 pm the orchestra will present “Force of Nature” with Igor Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring.” An orchestral concert work, now beloved and considered to be one of the most influential musical works of the 20th century, it caused a sensation and a near riot in the Paris audience of 1913 because of the avant-garde nature of the music and choreography. The orchestra will also play Beethoven’s Symphony No. 6 “Pastoral.” Mr. Cinnante will deliver pre-concert insights at 2 pm.

Don’t forget: WSO offers a 20% discount to OLLI members on $35 and $55 seats! Call the box office!

Finally, on another musical note, I am looking forward to tomorrow’s sojourn to the Metropolitan Opera to see Madame Butterfly with my OLLI friends. A shout out to the OLLI Travel Committee for planning such great trips! I am always looking for suggestions regarding the arts for future columns, so if you know of any concerts, lectures, plays, museum exhibitions, etc., that you would like previewed or reviewed, please let me know at berryfitzp@gmail.com.
The young woman arriving for an appointment is stylishly but modestly dressed and has a big smile.

Unlike most of her University of Connecticut peers, however, she finds time each day to pray five times, for **Raghdaa Barmo** is a practicing Muslim who observes requirements of her religion.

Born in Damascus, Syria, Raghdaa is an American citizen who says she “enjoys sharing information about her religious traditions with others who often have misconceptions about her faith.” She teaches “Understanding Islam” at OLLI while completing her degree this semester in computer science.

The first five classes of the two-part course focus on understanding the Abrahamic tradition as observed by Muslims and importance of the prophets in Islam. The course also addresses feminist qualities of the religion in its early stages, according to the **OLLl Course Catalog**. The second series of five classes, beginning March 23, discusses structure and function of the *Qur’an*.

Raghdaa doesn’t wear the hijab, a veil traditionally work by Muslim women to hide their hair. But she says being a practicing Muslim is a “way of life.” It includes having patience, being kind to others, helping those who cannot help themselves as well as being modest in dress, a rule that applies both to men and women.

In some ways, she reflected, the daily life of a Muslim echoes the Serenity Prayer (by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr) that encourages people to accept the things they cannot change and to have the courage to change the things they can and the wisdom to know the difference.

She emphasizes that there is a difference between culture and religion. Not all Arabs are Muslim and not all Muslims are Arabs. When commenting on the issue of whether Islam condones or promotes terrorism, her answer is: “Absolutely not! Anyone who reads scripture and interprets (it) in violent ways is not a person of faith.”

Asked if it is difficult to find the time to pray in the Muslim tradition, Raghdaa said she finds it convenient to go to the mosque in Storrs, where she is a part-time student. At work people can pray when on a break. Muslims pray at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and dusk and may do so in a group or as an individual.

When asked how the faith deals with forgiveness for sins as compared with the Roman Catholic practice of Confession, Raghdaa responded that practicing Muslims ask God directly for forgiveness and “there are both major and minor sins” in Islam. She adds “OLLl members are encouraged to learn more about the concepts of sin and forgiveness in Islam by taking the course.”

“Muslims observe Halal dietary restrictions similar to kosher guidelines for practicing Jews. Muslims don’t consume pig products and refrain from drugs and intoxicants like alcohol.”

Raghdaa immigrated to the United States at the age of four with her family. Seeking a better life than that experienced in their homeland, the Barmos settled in Meriden.

Raghdaa, the oldest of five siblings, studied Arabic subjects at Islamic School in Berlin. She attended Meriden public schools and graduated ninth in her class at O.H. Platt High School that enrolls about 1,200 students in grades nine through 12. She herself speaks three languages: Arabic, English and Spanish.

Raghdaa finds teaching about Islam at OLLl is satisfying. “I love hearing OLLl participants say they learned something new about Islam or that this course allowed them the opportunity to ask questions.

“My goal is to foster an environment that is simultaneously respectful and conducive to learning and one where everyone discovers that we are more alike than we are different.” —*Mary Ann Martin*