Professional Profile

Norm Abelson

There are riches you can dig from your deep memory mine

As Norm Abelson puts it, “Memory is like a duffle bag, not a file cabinet, from which you can pull out your most lively stories.”

That’s the basis of his OLLI course “Keeping Memory Alive,” which challenges students to write down events from their lives, read them in class, discuss them, and come back with more written work next week.

A dropout from Northeastern University—he didn’t care for college—he was working for the Boston Ice Company when, at a bar, his father mentioned to an Associate Press employee that Norm liked to write. That led to a job as copyboy at the AP in Boston, then senior copyboy, and then obituary writer.

Norm’s first reporting job was in the AP bureau in Augusta when the Legislature was meeting in 1953. There he had two demanding task masters, Bill Langzetttel and Bob Crocker. That led to a permanent job at the AP’s Concord, N.H., bureau.

Then Washington called, first in the person of Sen. Thomas McIntyre, who hired Norm as his speech writer. This was the period of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, and Norm soon joined the staff of Sargent Shriver’s War on Poverty. Later, he worked in various staff positions that concentrated on low-cost housing and the Small Business Administration.

Norm’s stay in Washington ended with Nixon’s election in 1968, “and since I was on the lower end of his enemies list, I decided to head back to Concord.” Here his experience with SBA led to setting up a small business consulting firm, which he ran for 18 years.

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Happy spring! By the time you read this, the OLLI spring term will be in full swing. Though classes are pretty well set, we have spaces still available in several of the Saturday workshops and mini-courses. Call the OLLI office at 780-4406 to register with a credit card.

There is also still space available in every SAGE lecture except May 10th. Due to the popularity of SAGE this spring, eight of the nine lectures will be held in Hannaford Hall in the Abromson Building.

The growth of the SAGE program is one of the great success stories of OLLI. SAGE was started 27 years ago as part of the USM Extension Division, to make a community connection with the older population.

When OLLI was established in 2000, it became the new home of SAGE. One of the first programs I attended when I was hired by OLLI almost 10 years ago was a SAGE lecture being held in Room 1 of Payson Smith. There were 11 attendees, and the organizer was very pleased to have such a nice turnout for the speaker.

SAGE has been moved around during its 27 years. First it was located at 68 High St.; then it moved to campus and met in Room 1 of Payson Smith. When classes needed Room 1, SAGE was shifted to the multi-purpose room in the Campus Center.

Within a couple of years, the multi-purpose room was transformed into University office space, and SAGE was held in Luther Bonney lecture hall. Again, USM needed the space for classes, so SAGE went to Hannaford Hall. We were all very happy when we moved into the Wishcamper Center. Room 102 could hold 150 people! SAGE had rarely exceeded 100. We thought SAGE had a home for the foreseeable future.

During the Fall term this year, several SAGE lectures were full, but they never exceeded the room’s capacity. Within two weeks of mailing the SAGE Spring brochures, we exceeded the 150 seating maximum, and registrations kept coming in!

We’ve shifted SAGE to Hannaford Hall, which holds 500! There will be plenty of room this term. Be sure to invite your friends to join you.

—Susan Morrow, Assistant Director for Program

**NOTES FROM SUSAN**

OLLI Creative Arts will participate in one grand Ninth Week, Friday, May 20

This very special Ninth Week will include chorus, OLLI Players, writers…plus a free lunch honoring OLLI volunteers and members.

An art exhibit will be held on the second floor. Our work will be on display for the full day. We invite all of you OLLI artists, craftspeople, quilters, and photographers to join us with your work on this wonderful occasion.

Information and application forms have been e-mailed and will be again. They also are available in the OLLI office.

If you have questions, call or e-mail one of the following people:

Nancy Payne: 781-3668; e-mail npayne@maine.rr.com
John Sutherland: 442-9694; jfern2003@yahoo.com
Edith Yonan: 878-5950; edithyonan@gmail.com
Sidney Lincoln: 781-7309; linck7s@myfairpoint.net

—The OLLI Creative Arts Committee
Something old is new again

May is nearly here, and we’re approaching Ninth Week once again, but this year we’re trying on a new spring outfit. Friday, May 20, will be Volunteer Recognition and Membership Celebration Day, combined with traditional Ninth Week events.

Presentations in the morning and afternoon will feature the accomplishments of OLLI members in classes and interest groups. David Murray is in charge of scheduling the performances of music, poetry, and prose writing classes. Creative Arts will have a day-long exhibit. We strongly encourage everybody to support each and every one of the participating groups.

At about noon, there will be a short ceremony honoring our volunteers for their contributions to OLLI’s success at USM. We all owe them our gratitude for their enthusiasm and their commitment over the years.

Following that ceremony, there will be a buffet-style “OLLI Lunch,” provided by the Advisory Board, bringing back memories of the old days. Informal seating will be the order of the day — perhaps problematic, but heck, it’s free. We can cope. One item is very important: You have to tell the OLLI office if you’re coming for lunch. A list will be drawn up, and your name has to be on it by May 13.

After lunch, the OLLI Singers and Senior Players will provide entertainment through the afternoon. Everyone will be working really hard to make this a joyful occasion, so remember: Put May 20, from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., on your calendar and keep the date. It will be a wonderful celebration of our times together.

—Judith Harris
for the OLLI Community Committee

Follies to be postponed

Several of the OLLI Follies performers have had to bow out of the spring lineup due to various health and family matters. Therefore, the OLLI Follies Committee has decided to postpone the Follies from its current show date in April to Saturday, Oct. 15.

We are extremely grateful to all the OLLI members who signed up to perform this spring. We hope that they will maintain their enthusiastic involvement with the Follies in the fall.

—Jack Lynch, for the Follies Committee
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But Norm didn’t cut his ties to politics. “When Shriver was running for president, he came running up the stairs, yelling, ‘Norm!’ and pulling along Maria with him.” Norm believes that Shriver would have been a great president; likewise Ed Muskie, for whose presidential campaign he served as New Hampshire communications director.

Norm’s activities included weekly commentaries for WBUR in Boston and WEVO in New Hampshire. All the while, Norm was writing Op Ed pieces, particularly some 60 to 75 for the Concord Monitor. These and other articles that recalled memories of the past formed the basis for his second work, “Right Place, Right Time”; the first was a book of his love poems from his younger days.

His concern for the homeless led to his chairing an effort in Concord to find a home that now shelters 40 homeless persons each night.

Norm commenced teaching memoir classes when he went with a family friend to Brandeis’s Adult Education Institute, where he took a course in Russian literature. The friend knew of his writing background and convinced him to start what became “Keeping Memory Alive.” The course drew 35 students. Norm conducted the class for several years until the 90-mile drive to Waltham proved too much of a drag. But he continued the course at the New Hampshire Historical Society and other organizations, both in New Hampshire and in Maine.

Norm and his wife came to Maine after extensive planning. They had been visiting the Wells area since 1970, and after the children left school and the house was put up for sale, they found a permanent home in the Moody section of Wells. Sadly, Norm’s wife had developed Parkinson’s disease and died after enjoying several years there. Two years later he met a “wonderful” woman, and they have lived happily since.

He’s not certain how he heard of OLLI, but when he offered to teach the course, “both Susan and Rob happily welcomed it.” And the results have been happy for both him and OLLI members. Although his spring course was omitted from the catalog, an e-mail notice gained a quick signup of enough students to hold the class. Norm welcomes any ideas on different writing courses, which can be e-mailed to him at naftali@maine.rr.com.

Norm’s background also includes painting—he’s held one-man shows and exhibited in the OLLI Art Shows. He also has a talent for jazz singing, which he hopes to display at the next OLLI Follies.

—Don King

OLLI Trip to Spain in September

Join fellow OLLI travelers Sept. 1–9 for a trip to Madrid and Barcelona. Experience the history and architecture of two of Spain’s great cities, plus much more.

The cost is $3138 per person with a credit card, ($3088 if paying by check) based on double occupancy. Taxes, fees, insurance and fuel surcharges are included.

The single supplement is $710.

Flyers with trip itinerary and details are available in the OLLI office.

We need a minimum of 30 people registered by April 29.

Full payment is due by June 17, 2011.
Spring faculty luncheon 2011

On Monday, March 7, in Room 102 of the Wishcamper Center, the Education Committee of the OLLI Board presented a successful program for veteran OLLI faculty and new instructors, all of whom will be teaching this spring semester.

After Lenore Fleming, Education Committee Chair, welcomed everyone to the well-attended luncheon, several OLLI instructors spoke on relevant educational topics.

Anne Cardale teaches at OLLI and is also the Director of Communications for the OLLI National Resource Center. Anne informed the audience about the National Resource Center and the Maine Senior College Network, housed in the Wishcamper Center.

Three long-time OLLI instructors demonstrated various ways of teaching classes. Jack Lynch modeled the discussion technique by asking questions of the group and directing the answers. Tan Larrabee showed how he uses art slides as the basis for lectures in the first part of his classes and then leads a discussion on the art for the second part of the class. Finally, David Morton amused attendees with his PowerPoint program, which included some very funny illustrations.

The committee had prepared three questions on challenging aspects of teaching at OLLI for the faculty to discuss during lunch. Instructors were seated at tables to facilitate conversation on these questions during the meal.

Rob Hyssong completed the meeting by presenting a new faculty handbook and conducted an orientation for new faculty members.

The committee hosting the faculty luncheon included its chair, Claire Knox, and Joy Larrabee, Denney Morton, Lenore Fleming, Nancy Payne, and Jack Lynch, ex officio.

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John Prendergast is coming to USM

John Prendergast, author, human rights activist, and co-founder of the Enough Project, will speak on “You and the Effort to End Genocide in Darfur: Turning Bystanders Into Upstanders.”

This very special lecture is a collaboration between many USM departments and several greater-Portland agencies. The program is free and open to the public. It will be held in Hannaford Hall in the Abromson Center on Monday, April 11, at 7 p.m. Free parking is available in the USM parking garage.

Because of our sponsorship, OLLI will be granted 50 preferred seats in Hannaford Hall. Simply identify yourself as an OLLI member at the door.
OLLI skiers wrap up a successful season

With the onset of spring, OLLI Ski Club members stow away their skis and winter gear and wistfully look ahead in hope of an early October blizzard!

If winter’s last gasps allow for an April outing, members will be informed via e-mail.

To join the OLLI Ski Club/Directory for next season, send an e-mail with your contact info to Steve Donahoe at stevedonahoe1@gmail.com.

Walking Club plans two April trips

The Walking Club plans its first walk of the month Wednesday, April 13, at Scarborough Beach.

The second walk will be on Tuesday, April 26, at Gull Crest and Town Center Trails in Cape Elizabeth.

Trekkers are urged to wear appropriate footwear for possible wet spring conditions.

On both days the club will meet at the parking lot at Back Cove (the end opposite Hannaford) at 10 a.m.

Contact person is Bev Blair: 799-5043.
SAGE lecture series off to a booming start

The spring SAGE lecture series began with a record-breaking crowd who came to see and hear Bill Nemitz, columnist for the Portland Press Herald and Maine Sunday Telegram. The topic was “His Beat Is Maine and the World.” Nemitz recounted his experiences as a reporter/columnist in Afghanistan and Haiti. In both assignments, he was sent without a cameraman, so he was not only operating his keyboard, he was taking still pictures and videos.

Nemitz kept the capacity audience spellbound with photographs of the Afghan countryside and military installations, and the group of sailors and volunteers who delivered relief supplies to an orphanage in Haiti. His commentary combined humor, reportorial accuracy, and deep compassion for his subjects.

The SAGE series continues into mid-May with lectures on Egypt, George Washington, end-of-life decision-making, the man (Robert Moody) behind the music, active imagination, the science of flowers, and the archaeology of the Gulf of Maine.

This year’s SAGE lectures have attracted large audiences; all presentations except The Science of Flowers will be held at Hannaford Hall. All of the lectures are still open for walk-in registration at $7.00 per person, except for The Science of Flowers, which is sold out.

Great Courses videos have been catalogued

The Great Courses videos, donated by Don King, have now been catalogued. They are available in the OLLI office for checking out. Some are in DVD format, but most are on VHS tape.

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Middle Eastern Cultural Festival

Friday, April 29th, 2011 from 3:00 to 7:30 PM
Wishcamper, USM Portland Campus

Join us for an afternoon of music, culture and cuisine as we celebrate Middle Eastern culture!

The afternoon will begin with a keynote lecture by USM President & Middle Eastern Scholar, Dr. Selma Botman. Other topics to be covered that day include:

- Women in the Middle East
- Arabic Language & Calligraphy
- Middle Eastern Cinema
- Plus Belly Dancing & Live Music

The event will include a tasting of Middle Eastern food.

To reserve your space for this event please register in advance by calling 207-780-4959 or send an e-mail to international@usm.maine.edu
COST: $8 in advance for OLLI students.