Profile

Georgia Koch

Thanks to the kindness of many, her story has a happy ending.

Georgia Koch has come a long way, literally and figuratively, from her early childhood in New Jersey. She grew up in a struggling family, her survival in jeopardy from a congenital heart defect that medical science did not yet know how to fix.

But now, a hardy Mainer for going on 40 years, Georgia likes nothing better than to be outside in the hills and on the water. Her physical vigor is matched by a love of people and community engagement.

Georgia began taking OLLI courses more than a decade ago. Recently elected to the OLLI Advisory Board, she has been on the Nominating Committee for years and is now its chairperson. She loves the SAGE lecture series, which she considers “a gem.”

Georgia is intensely aware of her good fortune, and she feels that her life story could easily be entitled “The Kindness of Strangers.” She has been helped, even rescued, by generous others at many turns along the way. “My life has not just been enhanced by these folks, it’s been made possible by them,” she says.

When she was eight, medical advancements finally reached the point where Georgia’s ventricular septal defect could be repaired.

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Georgia Koch  
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At age nine, she became just the 12th child in the world to undergo the innovative procedure — at the hands of the surgeon who had pioneered it.

This required 18 “walk-in donors” — blood donors who could be on-site during the operation itself. As fate would have it, her half-sister, then in the Marine Corps, was able to obtain assistance through her commanding officer and a nearby naval base. Eighteen sailors stood by. The surgery succeeded, and the rest is history.

After moving to Florida when she was 11, Georgia went on to attend Florida State University (FSU), where she majored in therapeutic recreation. She knew a young man who was a vocational rehabilitation counselor and who steered her toward available funding (for those with a disability, which her heart condition qualified as); this made it financially feasible for her to attend college.

Along the way, a sympathetic professor paid for a new engine after her car died. A roommate’s father gave her $500 when her bank account was empty. When senior year rolled around and she did not have enough money for tuition, her older sister and her brother-in-law helped out financially.

Georgia finds ways to pay it forward. In addition to her seat on the OLLI Advisory Board, Georgia is on the board of directors of the Trinity Jubilee Center in Lewiston. The center’s multiple programs address the needs of the underserved in the Lewiston-Auburn area. Georgia has devoted herself to Trinity for 25 years.

Georgia did graduate work in outdoor recreation at both FSU and Penn State University. For one year she directed a new camp for the developmentally disabled in Iowa. Then in 1978 she became director of Camp Bishopswood in Hope, Maine. Bishopswood is an Episcopal co-ed summer camp, but Georgia worked year-round, until 2012.

She loved community building and influenced hundreds if not thousands of campers over the years. In many instances, campers-become-parents sent their own children to Bishopswood. Georgia still hears from those parents, who sometimes exclaim along the lines of “I swear, Georgia, I open my mouth and your words come out!”

“I tried to be a collaborative leader. I wanted to help the kids become good citizens, and guide the staff to become caring adults,” she says. “But I ran a tight ship, always had my mind on safety and respect.”

During her tenure, Georgia ran a camp for people affected by AIDS. She started inviting kids from inner-city Atlanta to Bishopswood at the time of the child murders there in the 1980s, and that program is still going. She served as an American Camp Association accreditation visitor for more than 30 camps in Maine. For her many contributions, Georgia received The Halsey Gulick Award for Distinguished Service to organized youth camping in Maine, in 2009.

Georgia does a fair amount of camping herself, throughout Maine and in Canada. Adventure travel is her thrill. She has been to the Galapagos several times, on safari in Africa twice, and on eight deep-sea fishing trips in the Sea of Cortez. She doesn’t fish, but she gets off the boat to snorkel, kayak, and beachcomb. This summer she spent three weeks in Alaska. “I’d go back there in a minute,” is her verdict.

Her other interests include music and theater. Georgia lives in Portland with her partner of 26 years and their dog, Annie, and cats, Jack and Quinn. All five are veterans of Camp Bishopswood.
Advisory Board

Looking back over old pictures recently, I was struck by their ability to freeze the moment…my sister making the funny face in the restaurant, my nephew curled up with the dog on the couch, the beautiful sunset over the mountains with the snow. Everyone is always younger, people pictured have not yet passed, and the gardens are forever fixed in full bloom.

Maybe this is somewhat what OLLI is all about as well, giving us the opportunity to give our attention to something, focus on it, capture it, and make it something indicative of a certain place or time.

I hear OLLI members in the hallways reminiscing about particular moments from past classes — “Remember in Denney’s class when she showed those beautiful pictures of cathedral stained-glass windows?” “Remember when Bob engaged us the entire two hours explaining the first few micro-seconds of the universe, and we got it?” The ones that make it into the photo albums of our lives — actual and in memory — remind us, delight us, and may even make us sad, as we move beyond them to create new ones. We are better for it.

Happy New Year.

—Janet Stebbins, Board Chair
jjstebbi@gmail.com

Passages

Mary Lynch passed away September 28, 2017. She was a familiar face in OLLI classes, and her memoir pieces were published in Reflections. One in particular recounted her experiences as an ESL teacher in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Her obituary appeared in the Portland Press Herald: https://tinyurl.com/MLynch-Obit.

Steve Shapiro passed away December 3, 2017. He was an active member of OLLI and led several rides for the Bike & Nosh Special Interest Group. He was active in the community as a docent for the Portland Museum of Art. He also helped community members file their taxes through AARP’s Tax-Aide Program. His obituary appeared in the Portland Press Herald: https://tinyurl.com/SShapiro-Obit.
Wrinkle in Time — World War II — March 6 & 7, 2018

Wrinkle in Time is a biennial education program that explores an important point in time that has consequences for the future. The Second World War was a conflict that spanned the world, involved nearly every nation on earth, ushered in the atomic age, and could be termed the most monumental geopolitical event in our nation’s history.

The Manchurian Crisis, a series of disputes between China and Japan in 1931, could be pointed to as the beginning of the war in the Asia-Pacific region. Many historians debate whether the 1936 civil war in Spain was the start in Europe. Others assert that the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, which in turn led Britain and France to declare war on Hitler’s Nazi state, was the beginning. All agree, however, that World War II ended on September 2, 1945, when the Japanese formally surrendered on the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

Though the exact number of people who died in this conflagration will never be truly known, it has been estimated to be about 55 million, with another 60 million refugees. The war was fought on almost every continent and on nearly every sea across the globe. It has left its mark on our world in almost every imaginable way.

A team of OLLI faculty volunteers is putting together a series of presentations to refresh your memory of this time and give you new ways to think about events that shaped today’s world. We will be delving into the impact of the war on our politics, technology, art, music, literature, psychology, family, children, and relationships between the sexes. Come join us and bring your insights and memories as we learn together about this amazing time in our history.

Watch for registration details in the next newsletter!
The OLLI Book Group’s New Year

Here are the selections for January to June of 2018

*Lab Girl*, a memoir by Hope Jahren  
*Our Souls at Night*, a novel by Kent Haruf  
*A Gentleman in Moscow*, a novel by Amor Towles  
*Between the World and Me*, nonfiction by Ta-Nehisi Coates  
*My Son’s Story*, a novel by Nadine Gordimer  
*Angle of Repose*, a novel by Wallace Stegner

We meet on the third Thursday at 3:15 to discuss group-chosen quality fiction, some contemporary classics, and a variety of nonfiction.

If you wish to join us, please contact the new lead coordinator, Karen Day (kday0718@gmail.com); Elsa van Bergen assists (ejvanbergen2@gmail.com).
January 2018

OLLI Runs on Volunteers ● OLLI Runs on Volunteers ● OLLI Runs on Volunteers ● OLLI Runs on Volunteers

WANTED!

. . . volumes that left the OLLI Library quite a long time ago. OLLI members are encouraged to borrow up to two books for up to two months, but some books that have been checked out are way past due. And so they cannot be available for other would-be OLLI borrowers.

Kindly check your shelves and try to get overdue books back to Wishcamper. Books from the library have a stamp on the first page and have a catalog number on the spine. The library team will be grateful to see more books in our “Returns” box in the corner of the first-floor OLLI library. We’ll take care of checking them in and reshelving. A great way to start the new year!

Thanks in advance for your help. If you have questions or difficulty getting books back to OLLI, please contact the team leader, Elsa van Bergen (ejvanbergen2@gmail.com).

Let It Snow???

*Last month’s notice is worth repeating, in case you missed it.*

It’s a simple rule: If USM’s Portland campus is closed, or if the campus opens late or closes early, the same thing applies to OLLI.

USM has its very own dedicated storm information phone number: 207-780-4800. **This is a much more reliable and up-to-the-minute source of information than TV or radio announcements.**

You can get more information about USM’s weather delays and cancellation policies here: [usm.maine.edu/finance/weather-delays-and-cancellations-0](http://usm.maine.edu/finance/weather-delays-and-cancellations-0)

You can learn about how to get text notifications on your phone here: [https://usm.maine.edu/usmalert/](https://usm.maine.edu/usmalert/)

Note that conditions may change during the day. USM may be open in the morning, for instance, but it might close during the day because of worsening conditions. If you have an afternoon class, it’s a good idea to check before you leave home.

Even if USM and OLLI don’t close, please stay home if you’re not comfortable traveling.
**Walking Club Lists Plans**

We begin our winter season with a snowshoe outing at Wolfe’s Neck Woods State Park in Freeport on Wednesday, Jan. 10. If the snow is minimal, we can still walk on the trails with good boots, but the trails are too narrow for cross-country skiing. We will eat at Bow Street Market. You can bring your lunch or buy some of their offerings.

We will meet at 9:50 a.m. at the Information Center (far end) at Exit 17 in Yarmouth to carpool. Or you can meet us in the parking area at Wolfe’s Neck if you drive by yourself. If you are a new walker or have questions, call Rae Garcelon at 846-3304.

On Monday, Jan. 22, we have our annual meeting in Room 103 at Wishcamper. This is your opportunity to share your opinions of the past walks and to suggest new walks. If you have a suggestion, please bring directions from Back Cove to the trailhead.

There will be a discussion about changing the walk day from Tuesday to Monday. Don’t miss the slide show of all the year’s walks.

Weather permitting, we may take a neighborhood walk in the area.

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**January Lunch a Mideast Feast**

Join us in January for lunch at a members’ favorite, Babylon Restaurant. Conveniently located on Forest Avenue, this is a treasure chest of Middle East and Iraqi specialities. Family owned, Babylon is one of the few places in town which uses Halal meat, has vegetarian options, is alcohol free, and is very authentic.

See the large number of selections online at [www.babylonportland.com](http://www.babylonportland.com). Parking is available on nearby Bishop Street.

We welcome you to enjoy with us.

**When:** Monday, January 15, (school holiday MLK Day) at 12:30 pm

**Where:** Babylon, 1192 Forest Ave. Portland 04103, 797-2740

**Reservations:** By noon, Sunday, January 14. Call or write: Barbara Bardack (865-2009; lascala2@comcast.net)