Profile
Steve Piker

Steve shares with OLLI his 44 years as anthropologist

Steve Piker taught in the field of anthropology at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania for 44 years. Now he’s sharing his knowledge with OLLI students.

A native of Cincinnati, Ohio (he still sports a Reds cap), he attended Reed College in Portland (the other one) and the University of Washington, where he earned his doctorate. He admits, “I stumbled into the field of anthropology, and it opened my eyes.”

According to Steve, anthropology is defined by anthropologists; in his case, it was the field of cultural anthropology. His field work for his doctorate was in a farming village in the central plains of Thailand, where he and his wife studied child care, Theravada Buddhism (the popular religion there), and the village’s social history going back two centuries. Four years later they returned for further work.

Later on he began to study religious conversion — for example, why one might turn from Methodism to the Unification Church.

Steve went to Swarthmore after two years at Carleton College in Minnesota. He was just 28 when he joined the Department of Sociology and Anthropology as its first anthropology professor. As he told an interviewer at his retirement, “I grew up with the department and was fortunate to have a hand in its early development.”

He served as department chair for 11 years and also played a major role in developing and advising the college’s Foreign Service Program, which arranged for students to study abroad. In all, 2,000 Swarthmore students traveled abroad during his tenure.

When retirement loomed in 2009, Steve joined his youngest son, Tobin, and his daughter-in-law, Jill (who has longtime Maine ties)
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in Yarmouth, which he describes as “the stereotypical New England town that you find in a Norman Rockwell painting.”

As he sought future educational opportunities, Steve became actively involved with the Boys and Girls Club of Southern Maine. He is a fulltime volunteer — and Volunteer of the Year — at the clubhouse at the Riverton Park public housing development, just five minutes from Riverton Elementary School in Portland. He works afternoons with 50 to 60 immigrant students, providing a menu of activities as a tutor in the Power Hour after-school program.

Steve learned about OLLI a couple of years ago: “I submitted an application to Rob (Rob Hyssong, OLLI program coordinator) about teaching a course that fits in with my life research, and I taught the first one last winter.”

His background studying the clash of cultures was the basis for the second course, “The Searchers: Indian/White in American History.” The Searchers is a John Ford-John Wayne film about the rescue of a white woman who was captured by Comanches and had lived most of her life with them. Steve says, “The film was based upon a 1954 book that moved the story from the 1840s to the post-Civil War period, with a happy ending. However, the woman [on whom the novel and movie were based], who had become part of the Indian world, died miserably several years after her rescue. In fact, her son was the last Comanche leader.”

Steve is enjoying his classes with OLLI. “The students have their own experiences to add to the class. And the fact that I try to limit the class to about 20 lets there be plenty of opportunities for all to take part in the discussion.”

—Don King

NOTES FROM SUSAN

I can’t believe I’m writing for the December Newsletter. Where did the fall go? We have just wrapped up the largest term in OLLI’s history, both in enrollments and class offerings. Wishcamper was filled with OLLI students five days a week. Thursday evening classes were attended by over 80 people this term.

The OLLI/Muskie political lecture series, “Politics Then and Now, In Maine and the Nation,” was very well received by OLLI students. SAGE filled room 102 every Tuesday morning. The 13th edition of Reflections was published. Special Interest Groups are thriving, and several shared their interests by offering special performances at the end of the term.

The OLLI library is now a lending library thanks to a lot of work by a small committee. The Book Sale and Raffle raised significant money to support OLLI scholarships, as well as technology for our classrooms.

Forty-five OLLI members enjoyed an 11-day tour of Turkey. I guess the old adage is true: time flies when you’re having fun!...and what a fun fall term this has been.

—Susan Morrow, Assistant Director for Program
OLLI Advisory Board

OLLI has just completed its most successful fall term, thanks to our great volunteer faculty and all of you who took classes, both during the day and on Thursday evening.

The Education Committee has put together an excellent winter schedule of classes, and I encourage you to consider one of the offerings. We are still seeking faculty for our classes. If you have enjoyed your classes and have topics to offer as a faculty member (or know of a potential faculty member), please contact the OLLI office or a member of the Education Committee.

Additional successes this fall have been the OLLI Raffle and the Book Sale. The two activities conducted by the Marketing and Resource Development Committee raised over $2,000 to help provide scholarships for OLLI members and support special programming and equipment needs. Thanks to all who volunteered, donated, and made purchases.

The turnout for the book sale was a bit less than in previous years, but those who came got some great bargains.

—Dick Sturgeon, Chair
Dicksturg13@gmail.com; 773-3174

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow
(Well, maybe not!)

With winter weather coming upon us, there may be times when OLLI is closed. When? Whenever USM is closed.

Do not rely on TV or radio listings, which can be incomplete. Instead, call the USM Storm Line at this number: (207) 780-4800.

You might want to jot the number down or program it into your phone. Why not do it right now while you’re thinking of it?

Two feet of snow
Senior Moments

Jim Knox recently took a second place red ribbon in the Fryeburg Fair’s photography contest for his entry, “Blue Heron in the Fog.”

Jim Knox

Lenore Fleming debuted as a singer at Gingko Blue, a lounge in Portland. Accompanied by Terry Foster (an OLLI member and a regular performer at Gingko Blue), Lenore sang “Cry Me a River” to enthusiastic applause.

Lenore Fleming

David Murray will be appearing in a musical version of “The Gift of The Magi” at The Footlights Theater, 190 U. S. Route 1 in Falmouth. For dates and times, see the Footlights website at http://thefootlightsinfalmouth.com/holiday-shows.html or call the box office at 747-5434.

David Murray

Passages

Ralph D. Smith

Ralph Smith, husband of Betty Smith, died November 8 after battling Parkinson’s disease and cancer. His obituary in the Portland Press Herald (http://tinyurl.com/RalphSmith) includes the following: “To Ralph and his beloved wife of sixty-five years, family, integrity and authenticity were paramount. Nail by nail and panel by panel they brought their dream home to fruition on land nestled between the homes of both parents….In true Mainer fashion, Ralph opted for a pick axe and shovel in lieu of a bulldozer…. [A]s a member of Iron Workers Union 496 he helped to build Telstar, the first satellite station in the world…. For well over eighteen years, Betty and Ralph’s involvement in OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) at USM provided them with not only a link to the community, but a deep-rooted social network.”


Nancy Bills
Holiday lunch for the Walking Club

The Walking Club will return to Becky’s Diner at 390 Commercial St. for its annual holiday luncheon on Wednesday, Dec. 11th. We will meet at 11:30 a.m. and order from the menu.

If you have walked with us during the past year, you are welcome to attend. Our private room holds about 20; you are encouraged to make a reservation by calling Rae Garcelon at 846-3304.

If you have made a reservation and find you are unable to attend, please let Rae know so that someone else can take your place. We hope to see you there!

OLLI Runs on Volunteers

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News from the OLLI Wine Club

Twenty-two members of the OLLI Wine Club attended the third wine tasting, held at Caiola’s Restaurant at the beginning of November. As with the previous two tastings, the energy and conversation level were very high. Zara, Caiola’s wine guru, explained a bit about the six wines selected for that evening. The November tasting focused on the structure of red wine — namely, the wine’s tannin, acid, and oak. Abby, Caiola’s chef, made a special appetizer for us; this time it was a remarkable stuffed mushroom.

To receive notices of future wine tasting events, please e-mail Jack Lynch jlynch001@maine.rr.com

Ready to dine at the Diner?

What better way to get through a cold December day than with comfort food?

In December we will meet at Miss Portland Diner, Portland’s only landmark diner, on Tuesday, Dec. 10, at 12 noon. The address is 140 Marginal Way, and there is plenty of parking.

How enticing can comfort food be, like Chicken Pot Pie, Pot Roast, or Mac and Cheese? You can choose from a seafood platter, fried or broiled haddock and scallops; and, of course, any number of sandwiches.

See http://missportlanddiner.com to whet your appetite!

Please call or write with your reservation by Monday, Dec. 9. We always have a good time. I look forward to seeing you at the Diner.

—Barbara Bardack
OLLI Dining Out Coordinator
865-2009
lascala2@comcast.net

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Cross-Country Skiers, your group is up and running for the season. We have a great schedule for you. All outings meet at 9:45, for a prompt 10:00 departure, at the Marginal Way end of the Back Cove parking lot across from Hannaford in Portland. Please notify the coordinator for an outing if you plan to meet us at the ski area. Outings and coordinators are listed below.

Because of its distance, the trip to Bretton Woods will meet one hour earlier.

Please remember to sign a Release and Assumption of Risk Form and get it to the OLLI Office before your first outing. You can download it from the OLLI site: http://usm.maine.edu/olli/olli-ski-club

This year we will be dividing into half-day and full-day skiers on an outing-by-outing basis. If the driving distance is long or there is a fee for a trail pass, skiers may wish to stay all day.

Feel free to call any of the coordinators to join the group, or if you have additions, or if you want company skiing on a non-OLLI day. If we have a good snow year, let’s plan to hook up for a few outings at Riverside.

Coordinators: Bev Blair, 207-799-5043; Valerie Wisch, 207-650-2061; Susanne Maarten, 207-650-8433 (texts preferred)

Here is what we have planned:

1/15 – LL Bean Fogg House (Bev)
1/21 – Harris Farm (Susanne) http://www.harrisfarm.com/skiing.html
2/5 – Gull Crest, Spurwink, Cape Elizabeth (Bev)
2/18 – Pineland (Valerie) http://www.pinelandfarms.org/outdoor-recreation/skiing.html
3/5 – Bretton Woods, New Hampshire (Susanne) leave Back Cove at 9:00 a.m. http://brettonwoods.com/winter_sports/nordic/overview

Remember to pick up a CLYNK bag at the office for your deposit bottles and cans! Proceeds benefit OLLI.