OPTIMAL AGING
by Sharon Sokoloff

Brandeis is home to the Lifespan Initiative on Healthy Aging (LIHA) in which more than 30 Brandeis scholars are involved in research or teaching related to aging well. On April 3rd, the LIHA presented its inaugural event, a half-day conference entitled Living Long, Living Well. BOLLI was well-represented by an estimated 25 program members within the diverse audience of 300+ individuals. The purpose of the conference was to showcase the scope of the aging-related work on campus. In the 2 1/2 hours of program time, twelve Brandeis faculty presented samples of their work and findings in three broad categories:

- **Healthy Body:** Cells, Molecules, and Wellness
- **Healthy Mind:** Cognition, Memory, and Adaptive Functioning
- **Healthy Society:** Care, Culture, and Social Policy

Broadly, the mission of the LIHA is to increase the quantity and quality of life; that is, to maximize the number of “good” years lived, through interdisciplinary, multicultural, and integrative research and scholarship. LIHA embraces a comprehensive developmental approach drawing scholars from biology, chemistry, medicine, neuroscience, social policy, psychology, sociology, economics, business, anthropology, history, human factors engineering, nutrition, art, and literature.

Increasingly, the evidence indicates that how we age and the markers of the course of aging emerge in the middle years of life or even earlier. The decisions and choices we make in midlife have implications for our futures. The lifespan perspective adopted at Brandeis represents a challenging, proactive approach to maximize healthy aging, in comparison to the conventional strategies, which rely on treatment of problems after they arise. Even then, it is often “not too late” to make a difference and it is “never too soon” to begin thinking about how to age successfully.

Optimal aging depends on a two-pronged approach of reducing disability and its impact, while maximizing function on all levels, from the molecular to the social. Brandeis researchers are focusing on advancing knowledge that will prevent and treat neurologic diseases and cellular damage, enhance memory function, reduce stress, encourage supportive friendships and family relationships, optimize work settings, ease economic burdens, and provide quality care in later life.

I hope you will join me in watching the evolution of this multifaceted research over the coming years. For detailed information, including links to PowerPoint presentations from the conference, go to [www.brandeis.edu/lifespaninitiative/index.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/lifespaninitiative/index.html)

I wonder how our researchers will test Gertrude Stein’s hypothesis: *We are always the same age inside.*
Working in the world of development is a difficult job in the best of times; trying to raise money in a period of extreme recession must be even more daunting. Yet Myles Weisenberg, Vice-President of Development for Brandeis, seems amazingly well-suited to the task. He was a Brandeis undergraduate, and he has an MBA from Columbia. His entire professional life has been devoted to development for non-profits in the Jewish sector, such as Israel Bonds, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Miriam Hospital. This son of a rabbi was raised in the small seaside community of Hull. He is affable, engaging, and as interested in the interviewer as he is in talking about himself—all necessary qualities if you are involved in the work of raising money. His philosophy is to create a mutually beneficial situation for the donor and the University whenever possible, and he has been very successful in that endeavor.

An institution like Brandeis cannot survive, grow, and prosper using only the funds generated from tuition and research grants. Universities exist in perpetuity and must take a long view of how they operate over decades. They must be managed with an eye toward balancing the current requirements of scholars and students with the needs of those who will walk the same pathways and hallways in the future. To do that, it is essential that a university have a significant endowment. From these funds, only the earnings can be used to support the work of the institution and its faculty and students.

Similarly, BOLLI cannot function on tuition and fees alone; it also needs to have a significant endowment fund to survive. Weisenberg said that fortunately Brandeis—and by extension, BOLLI—did not have any funds invested with Bernard Madoff, and even though several high profile benefactors were affected by that scandal, they have vowed to make good on their pledges. It is undeniable that in the same way our personal investments have shrunk, so have the University’s. Several alumni and anonymous donors who have not been as adversely affected by the economic downturn have stepped up to help with the shortfall.

Myles was moved during last year’s parlor meetings by members expressing appreciation for how BOLLI has enriched their lives and provides intellectual stimulation and new friends. Mr. Weisenberg thinks that BOLLI participants who have benefited from the program should help ensure that it will be there for future generations. He sees Brandeis as a national treasure, and the lifelong learning program is included in that assessment. His vision is to see the program even more fully integrated into Brandeis life.

The BOLLI Banner is published by the Banner Editorial Committee:

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Banner archive: www.brandeis.edu/bolli/banner/index.html

Vol 9 Number 7 May 2009
Touring with Mozart

by Naomi Schmidt

One thing we all value about BOL-LI is the opportunity to share the passion that a fellow member has for a subject that we aren’t very familiar with. An example of this is the series of “guided tours” of Mozart operas (Marriage of Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così Fan Tutte) that Phil Radoff has been leading since Spring 2006. As a Study Group Leader, he enjoys the experience of sharing these works, which he ranks among the greatest music ever written. As students in his classes, we enjoy hearing someone who is well versed on the subject discuss the background, score, and libretto of a masterpiece that we may know only vaguely or possibly not at all.

Of course no music class would be complete without a listening experience; and Phil presents an entire opera, with occasional cuts, over the course of a five- or six-week class. Each session consists of about 35 minutes of music, interspersed with background information and commentary on the libretto and what to listen for in the music. Phil has done quite a bit of reading and research on the criticism and influence of these operas, and tries to summarize what he has learned in his lectures.

Students are required to have at home either a CD or DVD (but not the Peter Sellars version!) of the opera under discussion, as well as a copy of the libretto, so that they can prepare by listening and reading in order to get the most out of the in-class experience. The SGL sends out an email message before each class, to guide participants on how to prepare for the next session. In this way, each opera is studied in an intensive manner, and is not just treated to a broad overview.

Phil was trained first as a physicist and then as a lawyer, and he has worked in both professions in the years before retirement. He has had a deep love for music, and particularly for opera, ever since listening to the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera as a child. He picked up Italian by reading librettos and singing along with recordings by Cesare Siepi, and attended his first opera performances while traveling around Europe during his college years. He has been adding his baritone voice to community choruses since he was in his forties, and currently sings with the Heritage Chorale in the west suburban area.

As many SGLs have reported, the experience of teaching a BOLLI course is an opportunity to delve deeper into a topic, and Phil finds that he is still learning new things about these Mozart operas even though he has taught them before. He is contemplating offering a course on a Wagner opera in a future semester, once he has done more reading and listening to bring his knowledge up to the bar that he has already set for himself in his Mozart classes. We look forward to his adding new operas to his BOLLI repertoire.
On March 16th, 2009, with the cooperation of the Hiatt Career Center at Brandeis, three BOLLI members participated in a panel with Brandeis undergraduates. The topic was *Exciting Careers in Health*. On the panel were two recent graduates from Brandeis working in the field of health, one an audiologist, and the other working at the Dana Farber Hospital as an information specialist. The BOLLI panelists were Jeff Becker, who practiced as an orthodontist; Sandi Levy, who worked as a physical therapist and also as an addiction counselor; and Lyn Weiner, who directed the Fetal Alcohol Study at the Boston University School of Medicine. The panelists were inspiring and thought provoking.

All panelists stressed the need to remain flexible in making career choices and to keep an open mind to opportunities that may evolve.

Jeff Becker was the first BOLLI panelist, and his warm, friendly, and humorous comments put the students right at ease. Jeff spoke as someone who was once in the same place as the students, namely trying to figure out what to do with his life. His experience in deciding on dental school as a senior in college pointed out the role of chance in decisions. There are many options, some not obvious, in choosing a career.

Sandi Levy, unlike the other panelists, sat at the table rather than stand as did the first two panelists. With a hesitant voice, Sandi told the students she was too nervous to stand. This immediately brought a smile, and the students were with Sandi. She shared her lifetime of experiences in health care. Sandi’s words were comforting as she explained her travels through health care from being a physical therapist, moving on to having a family, then reentering school for a MSW as an addiction counselor, and now as a teacher of Yoga.

Lyn Weiner brought the message that there are many careers in the field of health care. One career might lead to another—keep the door open. The students really listened when Lyn referred to her granddaughter who at this time is going through the same soul searching for the “right” career choice. Lyn gave the students this great advice: “You don’t have to save a life. You just have to improve a life.” Powerful words.

BOLLI members are in a unique position to share their lifetime experiences with the undergraduates at Brandeis. The Mentoring Committee hopes to plan more events focused on talking with Brandeis students about different career choices.
Larry Climo was a senior clinical psychiatrist when he was unexpectedly notified that financial cutbacks would eliminate his position in just two weeks. He felt hurt, marginalized, disillusioned, and definitely not ready for retirement. To regain his own sense of worth and to recapture what he calls the “spark and mystique of healing,” Larry enrolled in a program called “locum tenens” (Latin for “holds a place”) and embarked on a series of assignments as an itinerant psychiatrist filling temporary placements across the country.

His newly-published book, Psychiatrist on the Road: Encounters in Healing and Healthcare, emerged from the daily journal he kept over his five-year sojourn. Short vignettes describe interactions with patients, augmented by meditations on his own personal and professional growth as well as the state of the medical care system. Working in settings as diverse as an Indian Medical Center in New Mexico, a state hospital in New England and an inner city outpatient clinic in the south, he found that coming into situations with fresh eyes fostered creative approaches to problems. He sensed he had stepped onto an “exciting learning curve of discovery and insight” because, unburdened by excessive administrative tasks that had begun to mire him down, he could focus entirely on his patients.

Musing on the unexpected course of the final years of his career, Larry realized that, ironically, it was in traveling that his early interest in medicine had been piqued as a boy: he had often accompanied his physician father on rounds of house calls to patients.

But what caused him, just last year, to quit the road and, indeed, retire? “Grandchildren,” he acknowledged with a smile.
As soon as the yearly Brandeis Jewish film festival was announced, I purchased a J-Flix pass, which gave me entry to all eleven movies at the modest (senior) price of $50. I knew from other years that I could rely on Sharon Pucker Rivo, Executive Director of the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University, and her staff to select films that were educational or entertaining or moving or heart breaking or shocking or controversial or all of the above. Indeed, this film festival has become one of the enjoyable events in my post-retirement life.

The festival opened with a bang, a frightening bang, at that. Armageddon documents the beliefs and activities of apparently 50 million Evangelicals who are predicting and impatiently waiting for the second coming of Christ and the Armageddon which will accompany this hoped for event.

In Lady Kul El Arab, shown the following evening, the film-maker follows the fate of a lovely and ambitious young Druze woman who wants to compete in an Israeli beauty contest. While I am no admirer of beauty contests, the film allowed me to enter her very different world and to root for her success. The Arab Muslim film maker Ibtisam Mara’ana led a heartfelt discussion explaining her identification with the heroine.

Two films dealt with Israeli Sephardic families, one from Tunisia, taking place in Paris and played in French (Father’s Footsteps) and the other from Morocco, in Hebrew (The Seven Days). I am not sure whether these films aim to mirror, or satirize, or criticize Israeli family life. Both films depict wildly dysfunctional families. Curiously enough, Lost Islands, one of the most highly awarded and popular Israeli films, also deals with family conflicts, at least in its second half, the first half dealing with Israeli uncouth adolescent life, although here the tragedies of war and death enter the picture. I found the movie very engaging, although artistically somewhat flawed.

As an Austrian Jew I found the sophisticated Axel Corti movie A Woman’s Pale Blue Handwriting, made after a novel by Franz Werfel, very gripping. The film highlights, in an understated way, the subtle but vicious anti-Semitism of intellectual society in 1936 Vienna.

For me, the highlight of both weeks was unquestionably Forgotten Transports: to Estonia, another documentary about the transportation of young Czech women into Estonia as a first labor camp stop-over. The endearing film maker Lukas Pribyl told us how he spent 10 years searching out 5 of the 47 survivors of this group of 1000 Czech Jews, all over the world, begging them to tell their stories, which they eventually did, dryly and intelligently reporting astonishing details of their ordeal without sentimentality or self-pity. Most of them survived by some particular miracle, but also by the strong mutual supportive bonds they had formed. A not-to-be forgotten testimony to the human spirit.

As a non-jogger and uninterested in sports events, I was extremely astonished to be taken over by the closing-night film; Run for Your Life is a biography of Fred Lebow (Fischl Leibowitz), an immigrant from Transylvania, who created the New York City marathon. What an amazing life, what an amazing film, indeed a worthy ending to another great festival.
MEMBERS OPEN FORUM

by Naomi Schmidt

The discussion at the March Open Forum centered on two topics: the proposed new process for choosing Council members, and the state of finances at BOLLI given current economic conditions.

Len Aberbach, Council Chair, briefly reviewed the proposed new nominating procedure, which is to have the Nominating Committee present a slate of three names for member ratification rather than a slate of six for a full election. The Council will send email to the membership which will put forth both sides of the argument for the new process and will solicit a Yes/No response from each member. The Council will formally vote on this question at their next meeting. [Ed.: see page 6 for final decision]

As for finances, Len assured the meeting that the core programs at BOLLI are secure. However, in order to accommodate a reduced budget for the next few years, cuts will need to be made, including fewer paper mailings, decreased use of the van outside of regular hours, and curtailed replacement of equipment, including computers, projectors, and spare parts. The BOLLI Journal will only be published on-line in Spring 2010, but Joan Kleinman added that her committee is exploring whether a printed version could also be made available.

Members who would like to contribute modest amounts to BOLLI at this time are urged to give to the Bernie Reisman Operating Fund. Although we cannot currently withdraw money from the Endowment Fund because it is under water, Committee Chair Ron Levy noted that the fund is still accepting donations, and his committee is focusing its efforts on contributions over $1000.

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

by Donna Carleton

The Resource Committee (RC) is pleased to report there was an 82% completion rate (595/793) of the fall final evaluation forms. The membership gave thoughtful and constructive feedback, which was well received by the SGLs. Everyone is to be thanked for this successful level of participation, and we hope to receive this same level of involvement at the end of this Spring term.

In February, the RC hosted an Orientation get-together for Study Group Leaders. The Orientation featured a panel format which addressed the topic of The SGL Experience: Expectation and Reality. The panelists included Nancy Rawson (literature), Peter Schmidt (math/science), Natalie Taub (history/social science), and Art Finstein (the arts). The topics discussed included:

- Structure of classes
- What to do if your presentation “goes over like a lead balloon”
- How to use BOLLI Scholars
- How to teach a group with diverse expertise in your subject
- The successful use of class presentations
- The evaluation process.

Panelists and audience had a lively interactive discussion on each subject. Summaries of this shared input were distributed to the SGLs.

In March, the RC and SGLs participated in an Air and Share meeting. This format allows SGLs to raise topics of interest and share ideas with other SGLs. Minutes from the Air and Share, as well as Orientation meetings, are posted on the Resource Committee section of the BOLLI website.

The RC provides opportunities for ongoing communication with the SGLs throughout the term.

Vol 9  Number 7  - 7 -   May 2009
Satisfying Mind and Body

by the Theater/Dinner Committee

BOLLI members are now attending theater parties together as a community in a welcome new addition to BOLLI programs. Following the success of two shows and a formidable response to a third, plans are to continue the BOLLI Theater/Dinner series into the 2009-2010 season.

The idea for this program was developed last year in a planning committee chaired by Robert Cohen. It led to the formation of a Theater/Dinner Committee, which brought the program into reality. The Committee decided to focus primarily on local theater offerings with matinee performances. While three Theater/Dinner events are planned in each semester, some of these events will be scheduled during the intersession periods.

The concept is to have a discussion of the play immediately after the performance in conjunction with the director and/or members of the cast. Afterwards, we would gather together at a nearby restaurant for dinner and a continuation of our dialogue on the play. The response has been overwhelming with over fifty people attending each of the first two performances.

The first event was held in January. We attended the New Rep Company production of *Cabaret* in Watertown, followed by a "talk back" discussion with their most informative assistant director. Subsequently, the attendees enjoyed dinner at the nearby Aegean Restaurant. The production was masterful with unique staging that gave it a new vitality.

In March, we were treated to a matinée performance of *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* at the Turtle Lane Theater in Auburndale. The cabaret-style seating was ideal for interaction among BOLLI attendees before and after the show as well as during the intermission. After the performance of this bawdy musical, the entire cast and crew, about 25 in all, sat on the stage and spoke to us about the intricacies associated with operating this type of community theater and their roles within it. A flurry of questions came from our audience before we sat down to a catered meal served buffet style at the theater.

*Grey Gardens* will be our final outing this spring, to be held at the Lyric Stage in Boston in May. This time, we will enjoy a luncheon together at Legal Seafoods before we gather for the show.

The response from the BOLLI community, as evidenced in their evaluations and enthusiasm for attending, has fueled the impetus to continue these events in the coming year.

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**Campus Calendar**

compiled by Charles Raskin

**Slosberg Music Center**

(Brandeis Tickets: 781-736-3400)

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jun. 6</td>
<td>8 P.M.</td>
<td>Lydian String Summer Concert</td>
<td>Program of Haydn, Fauré, and Mendelssohn</td>
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<td>$10 for BOLLI members with i.d., in advance</td>
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<td>$15, at the door</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jun. 13</td>
<td>8 P.M.</td>
<td>Lydian String Summer Concert</td>
<td>Birthday tribute to Yehudi Wyner</td>
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