BOLLI Welcomes Jim Nagle

By Joyce Lazarus

In January, BOLLI welcomed Jim Nagle to Turner Street as part-time program coordinator. Jim assists Megan Curtis in ensuring that all courses and lunchtime lectures run smoothly. He helps with registration, answers questions from students and SGLs, and deals with any problems arising from audio-visual equipment. “I got my feet wet in January, at the time of the winter seminars,” Jim confides. “This prepared me well for the big spring registration.”

Jim retired from his full-time career of nearly 20 years, selling IT research and advisory services to companies for International Data Corporation. He had a short previous career as a lawyer.

BOLLI seems like a big professional change for Jim. It is, in fact, exactly the change he had hoped for. He wanted to make a switch to education after working in business for decades. So, when a friend sent him a job description for the position at BOLLI, he jumped at the opportunity. He feels inspired by the intellectual stimulation of courses and lectures at BOLLI. “I love the learning environment here and have met so many interesting people.” Jim appreciates the warm welcome he has received from Avi, Megan, Lily, and BOLLI members.

“Retirement can be an exciting time,” Jim says, “when people are enthusiastic and have a love for learning. We are fortunate to live in an intellectually rich area. And it is great to see Brandeis graduate students in their 20s, like Study Group Leader Will Grogan, engaging older people in discussion. Younger people can appreciate the wisdom and world experiences of older students.”

Jim glows with pride when he talks about his family. He has been married for 31 years to Cheryl, “the greatest person I ever met.” Cheryl’s career, like Jim’s own, has taken many twists and turns. Originally trained as a nurse, she went to George Washington University and earned her MBA. She is currently a senior business analyst at Optum and loves it.

The Nagles have three children: Julia, 28, with a master’s degree in public health, has just accepted an offer at Bluebird Bio, a biotechnology firm in Cambridge; Erica, 25, works at Vericode, a security computer software company in Burlington; and Ben, 20, is a sophomore at Gettysburg College. (Continued on page 7)
Scholarly SGL Kathryn Bloom

By Tamara Chernow

What is the next step after retiring from a career as a public relations executive in the biopharmaceutical industry? For Kathryn Bloom, the answer was not relaxing or taking up a new hobby. It was time to go back to school to earn a Masters Degree in Jewish Liberal Studies at Hebrew College and a Ph.D. in literature from Northeastern University. During this time, she was leading courses at BOLLI and traveling to far-off places like China, Israel, Poland, Lithuania, and Cuba. When not traveling abroad, she divides her time among Boston, Manhattan, and Toronto.

Kathryn's academic specialty at Northeastern was American Middlebrow Literature, works by often neglected writers who nonetheless had a lot to say. She cites as one of her favorites, Stephen Vincent Benet, a poet and fiction writer active in the 1920s and 30s, best known for his epic poem, John Brown's Body. In May 2018, Kathryn's dissertation, Arguing Their World: The Representation of Major Social and Cultural Issues in Edna Ferber's and Fanny Hurst's Fiction, 1920-1935, was accepted, and she officially became Dr. Bloom. Her class at BOLLI that semester celebrated with her, providing a big cake with the message, “Congratulations, Doc!”

In addition to Kathryn’s myriad accomplishments mentioned above, she has published scholarly articles as well as op-eds and columns in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, and other publications. And, keeping up with the changing times, she has been blogging for Lilith Magazine, a Jewish feminist journal, and The Public Humanist, where she has published articles on middlebrow literature. (To read some of her articles, Google The Public Humanist and enter Kathryn Ruth Bloom in the search box.)

Kathryn loves teaching at BOLLI, where, for the past six years, she has led classes in discovering the riches of 20th century literature. She is impressed by BOLLI class members, with their extraordinary and diverse backgrounds as well as their enthusiasm for sharing their ideas and experiences. She values the fact that many have become good friends.

Kathryn’s courses have focused on Jewish fiction, World War I fiction, literature of the American South, “Jersey,” and Canada as well as portrayals of men in American fiction. BOLLI participants eagerly await her next venture.

Kathryn’s most recent article, on Stephen Vincent Benet, ends with the admonition: “Do not forget this writer.” Her many class members will certainly not forget this SGL and her intellectually challenging and exciting classes.

Popular BOLLI Study Group Leader, Kathryn (“Doc”) Bloom, loves guiding participants through a wide range of literary works.
A small, unassuming building on the campus of Regis College in Weston bears the name Spellman Philatelic Museum, one of only two museums in the United States dedicated entirely to stamps and postal history. The other is the Smithsonian National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.

Entering through the basement door of the museum, my husband Sam and I went through a long hallway lined with boxes upon boxes of stamps, stamp collections, and stamped envelopes, representing an international cornucopia of items waiting to be sifted and categorized.

We were greeted by museum director Joseph Mullin, a genial man with expressive gestures and a wicked sense of humor. Mullin’s bona fides include roles in the Carter and Clinton administrations, co-owner of Maynard Mills (the former Digital headquarters), and delegate to numerous State Democratic Conventions. Mullin is actually on his second round as director of the museum. In 2017, after spending five years as a docent at the World War Two Museum in Natick, he was re-appointed director of the Spellman.

Mullin told us that, when Massachusetts native Francis Spellman decided to enter the priesthood, he was sent to Rome to study. When traveling the country on weekends, he bought postage stamps wherever he went, and so began his collection. During World War II, he became Catholic Vicar of the U.S. Army. Knowing about his stamp collecting, people sent him stamps from all over the world. With no place to keep his burgeoning collection, Spellman asked his Newton friend and teacher, Sister Fidelma of the Sisters of St. Joseph, to store his stamps for him.

After the war, Spellman was appointed Cardinal of the New York Archdiocese, and Sister Fidelma informed him that his large collection needed a new home. He asked the Sisters of St. Joseph to donate an acre of land on the Regis College campus, which they consented to do. With the land secured, the Cardinal then enlisted the help of his stamp dealers, and this group of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish friends raised $100,000. It was enough to build the museum. But the Sisters initially opposed this group’s presence on the Catholic college campus. Spellman was able to assuage their concerns, though, by inviting Sister Fidelma to serve as the museum’s first director and asking three nuns to sit on its board. The museum opened in 1963. To this day, the Regis College president and three nuns serve on its board.

In an introductory video, museum curator George Norton tells visitors that “mail and postal markings have played a huge role in human history.” Director (Continued on page 7)
Welcome Back Brunch

It was another spirited gathering of BOLLI members at this term’s “Welcome Back Brunch” held on Friday, March 1.

George Model greets new member Lee Jacobs; newcomers Gerrie Stewart and Myra Cohen meet Maryann Civitello. Carole Grossman and Harris Traiger take time out from photography (Photos by Lydia Bogar, and Leslie Fishman)

Art enthusiast Judith Sharenow and artist Nancy Alimansky are glad to be back at BOLLI as are photographer Arthur Sharenow and opera aficionado Phil Radoff. (Photos by Carole Grossman)

Lily Gardner and Megan Curtis make sure all runs smoothly. Susan Schmidt poses for a picture as David and Ellen Moskowitz take a moment to smile for the camera as well. (Photos by Marty Kafka and Harris Traiger)
Long time members Charlie Raskin, Bonnie Alpert, and Arlene Bernstein catch up as newcomer Ann Stern meets Leueen Laing. (Photos by Wurster and Traiger)

Susan Erdos and Avi Bernstein reconnect as new member Jim DiNatale settles in at BOLLI. Marty Kafka and Jerry Baum share their usual good humor. (Photos by Traiger and Wurster)

Elaine Dohan and Marilyn Brooks catch up while Andy Urban surveys the Gathering Space. (Photos by Leslie Fishman and Dennis Greene)

And Making a Very Small World Connection

Diane Winkelman says that she and new member Roberta Gianfortoni started their conversation with the usual “where are you from?”...from Brooklyn...oh, really? where?...the same neighborhood...what schools?...the same high school (Abraham Lincoln)...the same elementary school (PS 225)...what street?...just a few streets away. Amazing!
Howardena Pindell: What Remains to be Seen

By Caitlin Julia Rubin, Assistant Curator, Rose Art Museum

Howardena Pindell’s artworks reward the patient viewer. First glimpsed from across the gallery and within her sprawling, fifty-year retrospective, is the creamy hue of Untitled #18—her 1977 painting from the Rose Art Museum’s collection—which sets it apart from the crisp white of the wall behind.

Stepping closer, the viewer notices the shadows, dark slices that cut beneath yellowed warmth, echoing the painting’s rippled edges. Thin nails ring the imperfectly square perimeter. Rather than stretched around the boxy frame of a wooden, rectangular stretcher, the canvas of Untitled #18 is tacked directly into the surface on which it hangs.

Trained as a painter at Boston University and, later, at Yale, where she received her MFA, Pindell abandoned the stretcher—painting’s traditional structural support—in the mid-1970s. She has since linked this embrace of unstretched canvas to the influence of African textiles, which she encountered through a 1972 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where she then worked, and in her own travels to Africa the following year.

Standing directly in front of this painting, Untitled #18, the viewer sees a textured surface punctuated by confetti-like clusters of small, colored circles. Multicolored and obscured to differing degrees by acrylic paint, these circles are remnants of Pindell’s earlier works, which she made by spraying paint through templates constructed from hole-punched manila folders. A simple technique made from ordinary supplies, Pindell’s inventive use of these templates pushed the boundaries of what painting—and its process, divorced from the hand-held brush—might be, while also leaving her with a growing supply of circular punched paper chads. Alongside glitter, thread, and even perfume, these circles eventually made their way to the surface of Pindell’s paintings, furthering her quiet rebellion against the parameters within which “fine art,” and the work of a black female artist, was expected to conform.

Rooted in her early artistic process, the circle has become a defining motif of Pindell’s practice, an element that she appreciates for its symbolism and personal significance, drawn from an early memory of traveling through a then-segregated United States. As Pindell explains:

“When I was a child of eight or nine, my parents often took me on trips in the car. Once, when we drove through northern Kentucky, we stopped at a restaurant where they served us mugs of root beer with red circles on the bottoms. These circles marked the silverware and glassware reserved for nonwhites. My fascination with the circle comes from that day. Abstraction is like that: it doesn’t have a concrete meaning but can relate back to signification in the world, like that experience of turning over the cup and seeing the circle, of being marked.”

Untitled #18 is but one example: with Howardena Pindell, there is always more that remains to be seen.

(Howardena Pindell: What Remains to Be Seen is on view at the Rose through May 19, 2019.)
History through the Prism of Stamps

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Mullin adds that, despite censorship, “neither tyrants nor dictators have stopped people from writing to each other.”

A heart-rending example was depicted in a former exhibit of Holocaust postal artifacts collected by Henry Schwab of Newton, who fled Germany in 1936. “It was the mail—where it was sent from, where it was censored, and where it was canceled—that told the story,” Schwab said. Mullin adds, “In essence, those stamps and letters tell us about an entire chapter in history.”

The museum is full of fascinating exhibits that detail events, places, and people from around the world. A current display features the Hindenburg, the German dirigible that ferried not only passengers but also mail across the Atlantic before it burst into flames. A charred letter to Canada survived and is on display. During the 1940s, Theodore Steinway collected music-related stamps. His collection is annotated with musical excerpts and includes a letter from Liszt recommending that a pupil buy a Steinway piano. One particularly delightful set of items is the dress and purse made out of 7,000 canceled stamps.

A sheet of the first stamps printed in England in 1840 is also on display. Depicting young Queen instructions around the edges on how to use them. America’s first stamps were printed soon after in 1847.

Today, social media and computers have taken a toll on stamp collecting, but the museum engages young and old alike in stamp-related activities. Changing exhibits offer fascinating glimpses into both current and historical events. Scout troops come to the museum to learn about collecting to help them earn merit badges. Teachers come to find hands-on classroom activities for use in their social studies, geography, and history lessons. Older adults, after busy lives, might ponder the words of stamp collector Franklin Roosevelt, who looked at philately as “an ocean of calm—a contemplative and cerebral activity.”

For hours and information, call 781-768-8367 or email info@spellman.org.
Current and Upcoming Campus Events
Compiled by Ellen Moskowitz

SLOSBERG MUSIC CENTER

Love and Death, Part III: Lydian String Quartet. Sat. May 11, 8-9:30 p.m. From its beginning in 1980, the Lydian String Quartet has been acclaimed by audiences and critics across the USA and abroad for embracing the full range of the string quartet repertory with curiosity, virtuosity, and dedication to the highest artistic ideals of music making. Available at www.brandeis.edu/tickets, 781-736-3400, or the Shapiro Campus Center Box Office, tickets are $20 for the general public; $15 for the Brandeis Community and seniors (55+); and $5 for students.

OTHER CAMPUS VENUES

THE WOMEN’S STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER, KNIZNICK GALLERY. “One Foot Planted,” Ayelet Carmi and Meirav Heiman. Through Friday, June 28, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Israeli artists Carmi and Heiman create ambitious video works that explore the impact that politics and conflict have on Israeli women in times of crisis. In their work, Israel is redefined as a mythical and post-apocalyptic world, which feminine bodies must ritually traverse through extreme physical acts. Free and open to the public.

SPINGOLD CENTER. “This Place/Displaced,” Thursday, May 2, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. Also Friday and Saturday, May 3 and 4, 8:00 - 10 p.m. Directed by Josh Glenn-Kayden, Artistic Associate and Casting Director at Company One Theatre, “This Place/Displaced” is a timely reflection of Boston’s need to prioritize equity and justice for all its residents. ATB brings this production to Brandeis, accompanied by conversations with anti-displacement activists, playwrights, and company members. Free and open to the Brandeis community.

AN INVITATION TO ALL BOLLI MEMBERS

The BOLLI Journal is now accepting submissions for our 2020 showcase of work by BOLLI writers, photographers, painters, potters, printmakers, carpenters, textile and mosaic artists as well as other crafts specialists. Details regarding the submissions process can be found on the BOLLI website home page.

The deadline for submission is September 30, 2019. We hope to include your work in this very special volume.