A Return Visit with President Liebowitz

by Phil Radoff and Jack Curley

A little more than a year after our initial meeting with him (see the March 2017 Banner), and still contending with the fallout from personnel actions he took to address “racially biased harassment” on the men's basketball team, Brandeis President Ron Liebowitz met with us over lunch to share his perspective of the past year's highlights. Joining us was Ira Jackson, now executive vice president for communications and external relations (see the October 2017 Banner).

Among the president's proudest accomplishments is the increasing openness with which he has insisted the university's business be conducted: faculty and students are kept fully apprised of all significant executive actions and decisions, and minutes of governance-related meetings are now available to the public. Another source of pride, much appreciated by undergraduates, is their ability to have direct contact with graduate students and faculty in the conduct of scientific research. The Brandeis model is quite a departure from that prevailing in many sister schools, where undergrads typically find themselves isolated from the people carrying on cutting-edge research. Liebowitz believes there is a special learning environment in Brandeis's Division of Science, where students are deeply involved and pursue unique research. He would like to see similar opportunities extended to undergraduates in the humanities as well.

Of course, both Liebowitz and Jackson share in the pride felt by the entire Brandeis community at the announcement of the award of the 2017 Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine to Prof. Michael Rosbash and Prof. Emeritus Jeffrey C. Hall. Liebowitz is pleased to note that a rising sophomore is doing work directly with Rosbash.

Brandeis's tradition of scientific excellence is also seen in its establishment and administration of the prestigious Lewis S. Rosenstiel Award, given annually for “recent discoveries of particular originality and importance to basic medical research.” This year's winner is cancer researcher Titia de Lange of The Rockefeller University. Remarkably, in the last 47 years, 35 Rosenstiel winners have gone on to receive Nobel Prizes.

Somewhat closer to home, Liebowitz was pleased to learn that Brandeis faculty and graduate students continue to offer courses and give "Lunch and Learn" presentations to BOLLI members; indeed, he would be happy to see an increased interaction of BOLLI with the larger Brandeis community. In that regard, he encourages BOLLI members to take advantage of campus offerings (Continued on p. 7)
A Note from the Managing Editor: Changing of the Guard

By Phil Radoff

It’s been three years--doesn’t seem that long--since I took on the position of managing editor of the Banner with a very able staff of Banner newbies. In these three years, we have made a number of changes in the Banner, some of which were significant, if not exactly profound: we now print our editions in living color; we permit our authors to exceed the traditional limit of one page per article and spill onto a second page if appropriate; we have increased the number of photos per issue; and we happily feature the occasional cartoon.

We have also spent time thinking about how to differentiate the Banner’s content from that of those upstart publications, the Bulletin and the BOLLI Matters blog. Once they appeared on the BOLLI scene, we worked with their publishers to develop an informal protocol that seems to be satisfactory to all.

Have our efforts to keep the Banner relevant and interesting to the majority of BOLLI members been successful? I like to think that they have been, at least in large part. I believe, as well, that our writing, editing, and article selection during the past three years have measured up to both the high standards set in place by our able predecessors and the expectations of the BOLLI membership.

I’ve been on the staff of the Banner in different capacities for a lot longer than just three years, and I’m not leaving…yet. I promised my friend and successor, Jack Curley, that I would stay on to share the chore of editing articles for at least a while longer. It’s in the blood, after all.

I have very much appreciated the opportunity to serve as the Banner’s managing editor, but it’s time to move on, or, as General MacArthur might have put it after knocking back a few too many MacArthur cocktails: Managing editors don’t say goodbye; they just edit away.

Celebrating Our Creativity on May 16!

The 2017-2018 BOLLI Journal, a biennial collection of literary and artistic works, has arrived! The volume includes works of fiction, poetry, memoir, photography, drawing and painting, printing, crewel, mosaic, and wood carving by 40 BOLLI members. Join the committee for a publication celebration at Lunch & Learn time on Wednesday, May 16 when a group of this year’s writers and artists will present their work. Cake will be served. Purchase your Journal copy from Lily for $10.

The BOLLI BANNER is published by The Banner Committee: Phil Radoff, Managing Editor/Articles Co-Editor

Na’ama Ansell, Secretary
Sam Ansell, Cartoonist
Jack Curley, Articles Co-Editor

Ellen Moskowitz, Archivist
Sue Wurster, Production Editor

BANNER ARCHIVE: www.brandeis.edu/bolli/publications/banner/index.html

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Waltham's "Mouth of Hell"

By Sue Wurster

“Do you realize we are standing in the mouth of Hell?” asked Marie Daly, a member of BOLLI’s newly-forming Waltham Matters group and a well-known local historian. She went on to provide some historical background.

60 Turner Street is located at the edge of an area of Waltham that was once called “Hell’s Mouth.” Marie suggests that it may have been named by early settlers for either England’s steep Cornwall cliffs or a chasm in Portugal—or perhaps even for both. According to Marie, “the topography around the Stony Brook Reservoir, Turner Street, and the railroad line shows a 100-foot decline in elevation along with a number of steep slopes.”

In 1750, the Poor House was one of the few residences to be found in Hell’s Mouth. And, in those days, farmers carried their corn across the old bridle path to the reservoir where the only mill that existed for miles around was situated. There are stories of slaves being bought and sold in Hell’s Mouth. But there are also stories of abolitionist activity in the area.

In 1780, many Massachusetts towns struggled to supply their quota of soldiers for the Revolutionary War. So, former slaves like Waltham resident Felix Cuff were permitted to enlist in the Continental Army.

But Edward Garfield, also of Waltham, seized Cuff, claiming that the man was his property. Cuff was able to escape, though, and hid in the “Devil’s Den,” a cave located along Stony Brook. Eventually, with the support of several influential townsmen, Cuff won his case and was allowed to return to the battlefield to fight for his country.

In an 1857 article in the Waltham Sentinel, a woman describes her first impression of the area, which she experienced on a pleasant walk with her father and her uncle. “It was a lovely sunny day when...we stopped on the brink of a chasm, which, to my childish eyes, was great and terrible, the black ragged rocks looking as if torn apart in some long past convolutions of nature, the little stream gurgling along at the bottom, the tall trees growing at the very edge and deepening, with their shadows, the darkness of the rocks below.”

Who would have thought that the building BOLLI members now take for granted was at the center of such fascinating history? On the fourth Friday of each month, the new Waltham Matters SIG will be providing opportunities for members to explore the city’s colorful past, present, and future.

1852 map; letter arguing Cuff’s case on Garfield’s behalf; local historian Marie Daly (facing camera, in blue) with BOLLI members interested in joining the Waltham Matters SIG. The group is sponsoring monthly talks, trips, and more.
Welcome Back Brunch

We certainly did not welcome the snowstorms that postponed our traditional beginning-of-term brunch and the beginning of several classes, but, as always, BOLLI members rallied with enthusiasm.

New member Alan Webber waves hello as Carl Lazarus and Paula Corman sample brunch items; Martha Berardino greets an acquaintance. (Photos by Joanne Fortunato, Harris Traiger, and Ellen Moskowitz)

Ron and Sandi Levy catch up with Natalie Taub; Becky Meyers and Rosalie Fink prepare for another “dramatic” term in Scene-iors; and Marty Kafka enjoys a chat with George Model. (Photos by Harris Traiger and Sue Wurster)

The group gathers for plenty of conversation (photo by Joanne Fortunato); Joanne Fortunato and Nancy Blanchard compare notes on upcoming activities (photo by Marty Kafka).
Better Late than Never!

It may have been cold outside, but the Gathering Space was filled with warmth as the group enjoyed meeting, re-meeting, and eating at this term's kick-off event.

Charlie Raskin arrives at the Welcome Table; Arlene Bernstein and Susan Erdoes gear up for the term while David and Ellen Moskowitz pose with Charlie Marz. (Photos by Harris Traiger)

Director Avi Bernstein addresses the group; Abby Pinard and Betsy Campbell wax poetic while Megan Curtis and Susan Bradford (right) make sure all goes smoothly. (Photos by Ellen Moskowitz and Sue Wurster.)

The Gathering Space hummed as the BOLLI community welcomed both newcomers and returning members who were all looking forward to another excellent term of courses, lectures, and activities. (Photos by Joanne Fortunato)
Felman is a performance not to be missed. That’s Jyl Lynn Felman: playwright, performance artist, professor, lawyer, and, for the last two years, an SGL at BOLLI. Her courses on Tony Kushner and Black Women Playwrights feature a pedagogical style rooted in theater and calculated to engage class participants in a drama. “When the stage is set, the classroom is alive,” says Jyl.

Born in Dayton, Ohio to an observant Jewish family, Jyl went to public school but also attended Hebrew school and Sunday school. When she was 16, she was lucky to join a group of Jewish-American students on a trip to Israel to meet Golda Meir. She was so impressed that, when she finished high school, she went off to Israel where she settled on a kibbutz near the Lebanese border. Because she was fluent in Hebrew, Jyl landed a job teaching kindergarten, which she loved. In fact she loved everything about communal kibbutz living, and yet, she left after barely a year. “I had come out as a lesbian,” she said, “which wasn’t accepted on the kibbutz where gender roles were deeply entrenched.” She came back to the U.S. for college but kept going back and forth to Israel until her increasing awareness of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians put an end to her frequent visits.

Back in the U.S., Jyl went to Syracuse University, studied creative writing, continued her Hebrew studies, and graduated with a degree in English. She then received a fellowship at UMass Amherst where she acquired an MFA.

Jyl's teaching career began at the University of New Hampshire where she taught English and advanced prose writing. There she met her partner, Lynne Brandon, who was Chief Financial Officer of Victory Programs, a nonprofit AIDS support program. Lynne now has an MFA in playwriting and is a full-time playwright. She and Jyl, who have been together for 20 years, critique each other’s work.

Jyl then went on to UMass Amherst as an instructor in the English department and then moved into a research associate position in women’s studies. From there, it was on to Brandeis and an adjunct professorship in the Undergraduate Women’s Studies Program. She pioneered courses in “Gender Studies and Sexuality” and “Blacks and Jews.” Her emphasis was on “ways to bridge the divide between race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and gender.” Felman’s approach to these subjects was regarded by some as radical. She left Brandeis and obtained a dual appointment in Judaic Studies and at the Honors College at UMass Amherst.

After seven years at Amherst, Jyl moved back to Boston, where, much to her surprise, she was asked to give a performance of one of her stories at Suffolk University. “I was amazed because I hadn’t known anyone in Boston.” She was then asked to teach a course in Women's Studies and continued at Suffolk as a lecturer in Women and Gender Studies until her recent retirement from academia.

Jyl’s roster of published works includes a book on teaching as theater, a collection of stories about her Jewish family and need for her mother’s attention,
as well as a series of short stories that explore what it means to be Jewish, female, and lesbian at the end of the 20th Century. Felman has performed segments of her written works on stage and on TV.

When asked how she came to BOLLI, Felman says, “I knew several women who were teaching here, and I thought I’d like to try it since there wouldn’t be any papers, grades, or requirements. The transition from teaching undergraduates has been challenging. Seniors are much more loquacious—everyone has an opinion.”

When it comes to selecting courses to teach at BOLLI, Jyl says, “I choose playwrights that I love and want to explore.” Also, she notes, there doesn’t seem to be “much diversity in ethnic literature at BOLLI,” so she tries to focus on playwrights with whom BOLLI members might not be familiar. So far, she’s taught a course on Tony Kushner, whom she calls “the Shakespeare of our generation,” and she has also given a course on five black women playwrights. You’ll be able to catch Jyl next semester when she’ll be teaching a course called “Wild Women Don’t Sing the Blues: Six Female Playwrights.”

If you’ve ever taken a class with Jyl, you know that her stimulating, theatrical teaching style will make any course she teaches exciting and rewarding.

A Return Visit... (continued from p. 1)

such as Lydian Quartet performances, Rose Gallery exhibitions, and Spingold Theater presentations.

As in past interviews, both Liebowitz and Jackson expressed the view that there is a thirst for continuing educational opportunities among seniors, specifically Brandeis alumni. To that end, they would welcome the development of technology that would permit streaming BOLLI courses to a larger community unable to be physically present on campus.

Liebowitz’s executive team is now largely in place. Since he came on board, he has added (in addition to Jackson) a chief diversity officer, a senior vice president for institutional advancement, an executive vice president for finance and administration, a chief financial officer, and the director of the Rose Museum (see the November 2017 Banner). He expects to add a chief of staff in the near future.

The university is by no means without its challenges. Liebowitz continues to believe that Brandeis is far too complex an organization to continue to be run in the “mom and pop” fashion that characterized its formative years. The university is simply stretched too thin to continue indefinitely the support of as diverse a set of programs and curricula as have developed over the years. A contraction of the scope of Brandeis’s activities will be painful and protracted, but it is, he believes, inevitable. Funding also remains a constant concern for Brandeis. Noting the increasing challenges of securing government funds for research, Liebowitz expressed the hope that the award of the Nobel Prize to two of our scholars might help to keep the spotlight on Brandeis as a recipient of future funding.

Brandeis also faces a unique challenge when measuring itself against peer institutions: how to give appropriate recognition to Brandeis’s Jewish roots and its support for Jewish ideals while continuing to hold itself out as a secular institution, a concept embodied in Brandeis’s charter since its founding in 1948.

All in all, the past 12 months have clearly been an eventful and productive period for Brandeis and President Liebowitz’s team. Given the many issues facing academia, there’s little doubt that the next 12 months will be equally challenging.
Upcoming Campus Events
Compiled by Ellen Moskowitz

THE ROSE ART MUSEUM

**Tony Lewis: Plunder.** Through June 10, 2018. For the Foster Stairwell, Chicago-based artist Tony Lewis has created a site-specific project that has grown out of his ongoing investigations of the relationships among language, memory, and race.

**Jennifer Packer: Tenderheaded.** Through July 8, 2018. Based on observation, improvisation, and memory, this selection of recent work by Jennifer Packer (b. 1984) presents intimate portraits and paintings of funerary bouquets. Pointing to possibilities both bodily and emotional, fragile and strong, her works exhibit a rigorous engagement with art history as well as a highly personal response to how black bodies navigate within the present political landscape.

**Blueprint for Counter Education.** Through July 8, 2018. Inaugurated during the volatile and transformative late 1960s, the unconventional publication "Blueprint for Counter Education" introduced the tools for a radical pedagogical model.

**Praying for Time.** Through July 8, 2018. This exhibit draws pieces from the Rose Art Museum’s permanent collection to reflect the diversity of voices and concerns in art produced during the pivotal period ranging from 1980 through the early 2000s.

WOMEN’S STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER, KNIZNICK GALLERY

**Tamar Paley: A Fringe of Her Own--A Collection of Ritual Objects for Women.** Through June 22, 2018. Recognizing the gap that exists between Jewish women and ritual objects and with a growing need to provide a feminine interpretation of patriarchal religious practice, Paley’s work offers a reshaping of traditional patriarchal forms from a female perspective using materials, text, and symbolism that acknowledge the physical and spiritual experiences of women in Judaism.