Lewis Mifsud, Ph.D. –
A Lifetime of Learning

by Catherine Beath

If there was ever a contest for the most passionate learner, Dr. Mifsud would surely be in the Final Four. He has undergraduate and graduate degrees, multiple examination-based licenses and certifications and has had at least three distinct careers during his lifetime: engineer, teacher and expert witness. Although semi-retired, he continues to teach at OLLI, still consults with attorneys in civil lawsuits, enjoys attending his local Socrates Café for discussion and debate and, although he is Catholic-educated, has belonged to a Torah study group for the past few years -- all this despite dropping out of school at the tender age of sixteen.

Dr. Mifsud was born on the island of Malta, a small, now independent island, about 60 miles south of Sicily. Malta was a stopping off point for mariners between Europe and N. Africa, and so it has a very long and complicated history with everyone from the Phoenicians to the British and French governing it at some point in its history. The 90 square mile island, with its Semitic-rooted language, has very few resources or jobs and its main export is people, OLLI’s Dr. Mifsud being one of those exports.

After leaving school, he worked in Malta as an apprentice for an electrical & plumbing company and later for a broadcasting company. He finally listened to his father to “knuckle down” and went to London to continue his scholastic education, obtaining multiple degrees in physics and engineering. He always had a love of math, science, and “fixing things”, and still remembers a sci-fi movie that fascinated him as a child and the scene in which a ship fires a beam of light and knocks a plane out of the sky. While working on his Ph.D. thesis in experimental/practical physics, he was recruited to join RCA to work on several NASA projects as a design engineer. The company obtained a preferential visa for him and, paying all his expenses, flew him with his wife and children to Newark airport and then helicoptered them to Princeton to stay at the Nassau Inn until they could find a house -- very heady stuff for a young man from a small Mediterranean island. Following 4 years with RCA, he had the good fortune to share a cup of coffee with a colleague who informed him of an Assistant Professor position at the Abington, PA campus of the Pennsylvania State University.

That fortuitous meeting led Dr. Mifsud to teach undergraduate physics at Penn State for the next eighteen years, earning tenure and a prized “certificate” from the Student Government in recognition of his teaching and advising.

While teaching at Penn State, a registered Professional Engineer visited the campus seeking help regarding a problem involving lightning damage. A township municipal building had been hit twice by lightning resulting in expensive damage to their telecommunications system. Dr. Mifsud was asked to investigate and wrote a report outlining the problem and the fix -- at no charge. A few months later, Dr. Mifsud
received a call from the same township's insurance attorney requesting Dr. Mifsud to investigate an underground transformer explosion in Edison, NJ. That was the beginning of Dr. Mifsud's career as an expert witness, a career that spanned over thirty years with forensic investigations in over 650 personal injury, product liability and negligence cases. One of those cases was the Meridian Building fire in Philadelphia, a fire in a building a block from Temple OLLI that resulted in the deaths of three firemen. An individual, who had been responsible for testing the water pressure in the fire extinguishing system a few months prior to the fire, was facing potential criminal negligence charges. Through his investigation, Dr. Mifsud discovered and proved that the building water system pressures were inspected and pressures were adjusted properly to the appropriate engineering and National Fire Protection Association standards. The case was settled in civil court.

He joined TARP, now OLLI, fourteen years ago and has been teaching courses here ever since. He enjoys teaching esoteric subject such as calculus, forensics and relativity because they challenge clear teaching. He buys books, his largest personal expenditure, on whatever subjects his legal cases or his teaching require. He then utilizes his own approach toward explaining his understanding and opinions to a class or jury, a challenge that keeps "his neurons firing and healthy".

Like his OLLI students, Dr. Mifsud is aware that social and intellectual stimulation is important as we all age and, now that he is retired, finds OLLI a unique place that combines the two. He also finds that dual stimulation at his local Socrates Cafe and his local synagogue. He was raised in a strict faith where the religious tenets were taught with little to no discussion. While viewing an art exhibit at a local synagogue he became aware of a group that meets to study the Torah. Fascinated by the opportunity to learn something new, he called the rabbi to make sure that he could join the group and was told "You will always be welcome". He has been participating in the group every Saturday for the past five years.

Finally, his advice to OLLI members – keep your brain alive and active through exercising curiosity, asking questions and pursuing their answers. For him, it all started with that beam of light and the curiosity to question how it could bring down a plane. A fulfilling lifetime of curiosity and a passion for learning has followed.

University City
An Entity Within The City

by Barbrab Newman

There's a hidden jewel in downtown Philadelphia known as University City; which is an entity completely of its own. University City is a destination for eclectic food, great retail, diverse arts and cultural organizations. It also houses numerous performance spaces of all sizes in museums and galleries, hosting artists, festivals and much more. Whether you are visiting for a short stay, or are attending one of the universities located within the neighborhood, there is plenty to do and many great ways to get around. The neighborhood also boasts excellent public transit, plenty of bike lanes and bike share locations. With a Walk Score of 90, it's one of the most walkable neighborhoods in Philadelphia. Here are several of the features.

The Annenberg Center is one of the nation's foremost urban performing arts centers on a major university campus. Serving as a cultural destination in Philadelphia and connecting regional audiences with the University through a broad range of programs in theatre, music and dance. In fulfillment of its mission, the Annenberg Center engages world-renowned and emerging artists who express adventure-some perspectives on contemporary issues and timeless ideas; promoting the Annenberg Center's commitment to artistic and intellectual excellence, diversity and education for adults, students and family audiences.

International House Philadelphia is the region's center for international arts, culture, educational and residential
The Penn Museum

activities. It has a critical three-fold mission to maintain a diverse and welcoming community for students, scholars and interns from around the world, while introducing them to the American experience; to broaden the horizons of its residents and the Greater Philadelphia community through high-quality international arts and humanities programs, encouraging understanding, respect and cooperation among people of all nations.

The University Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology founded in 1887, has always been one of the world's great archaeology and anthropology research museums, and the largest university museum in the United States. With roughly one million objects in their care, the Penn Museum encapsulates and illustrates the human story who we are and where we came from.

Numerous restaurants in UC host a variety of dining options to satisfy numerous diverse palates. Situated throughout the area are African, Asian, American, Cuban, Greek, Indian, Italian, Mexican restaurants and more. University City's Dining days is an annual event and is home to some of the most innovative and diverse dining options in the region.

The LUCY Shuttle is a dedicated transportation service that loops through UC; consisting of the Green and the Gold Loops. Weekday transportation loop stops at key locations in the University City neighborhood, including 30th Street Station, University of Pennsylvania, University City Science Center, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center, Drexel University and more. The shuttle leaves 30th Street Station frequently.

Coming Soon –
The “New” OLLI Newsletter

by Catherine Beath and Nancy Kendrick

Everybody needs a little change now and then and then the OLLI newsletter is no exception. It is about to get a facelift. Changes are being made in response to feedback obtained from last year's OLLI Notebook online survey. There will be new graphics, a slightly larger font, and shorter articles. Last year's survey also revealed the kind of information that members want in their newsletter. Every edition will feature at least one article in each of the five categories that have greatest member interest. We'll also send out a “teaser” a week or two before each quarterly newsletter edition to heighten awareness of the newsletter, and to let members know what to look forward to.

The newsletter will also have a new name and OLLI members will be involved in choosing the new name through a naming contest. Here's how the contest is going to work. In late September, members will be asked to submit suggestions for a new newsletter name. There will be a drop box in the fifth floor lobby and slips of paper asking for the suggested new newsletter name, and the suggestor's name and contact info. The OLLI Newsletter Committee will then select the three best names from the pool of suggestions during their October committee meeting, and post them in BUZZ and on the fifth floor lobby bulletin board. Shortly after, all OLLI members will be asked to vote for their favorite newsletter name among the three “finalists” using the voting box in the fifth floor lobby. The winning name will be revealed in the November edition and used for all future editions of the OLLI newsletter. The OLLI member who originally suggested the name will be highlighted in that edition as well, unless, of course, they wish to remain anonymous.

The contest should be lots of fun and help increase awareness of the newsletter. Stay tuned and watch the fifth floor bulletin board for further announcements.
The Osher National Conference 2017

by Adam Brunner

This year OLLI at Temple sent three representatives to the National Osher Conference in Irving, TX: our Director, Adam Brunner, our President, Donna Satir, and the Assistant Vice Provost of University College, Nicole Westrick. For those who don’t know, University College is OLLI’s host within Temple’s administrative structure.

It is always exciting for us to meet with Directors and volunteer leaders from other OLLIs around the country. A total of 250 people attended the conference. The following are the key takeaways from the workshops and keynote presentations.

Volunteerism Across the Generations

OLLI’s are becoming populated with people from distinct generations who have different needs, interests and mindsets. Therefore, as you seek to engage people from different generations in volunteerism, it is helpful to know the unique characteristics that tend to be common to people in these different generations.

Traditionalists – volunteer out of loyalty. As volunteers they are consistent, enjoy the status and prestige of volunteerism, and are respectful of authority.

Boomers – the first generation that moved from job to job, marriage to marriage, etc. They tend not to stay in the same volunteer role for very long. Don’t want to fit into a prefabricated slot. Want to create their own role; want to do what they want to do, not necessarily what you need them to do.

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Boomers don’t like committees. They prefer short-term commitments to long term committee involvement.

Best approach: “what are the skills and talents you could share with us if we can make it possible?” Goal is to create a fertile environment for volunteer engagement.

Diversity in Your OLLI

Main point:

Instead of focusing on diversity, focus on inclusion. Instead of putting your efforts into recruiting a more colorful, economically diverse, gender diverse, religious and politically diverse membership, etc., develop a membership that practices inclusive behaviors -- members who live more diverse lives (where they go, who they talk to) and who are conscious of how they talk to people who are different, etc.

OLLI needs to challenge its members to live more diverse lives and practice more inclusive behaviors.

Reconceiving Aging; Doing vs. Being

American culture makes a fetish out of doing.

Doing is entering the physical work and changing things in it. Being is entering a relationship with the invisible and being changed by it. You can love, be a friend, but these things are not physical and can’t be touched. Recent longitudinal research from Harvard has shown that the one overarching ingredient to a happy, fulfilled and even longer life is not money, status, success, etc., but the quality of the close relationships in our lives.

If we feel positively about the close relationships in our lives, then we are happy, healthier and even live longer.

As a young child, we cannot do much. But we are able to be a lot. We are part of a family.

As we get older, we have an opportunity to focus more on being and less on doing.

Random but Interesting Ideas

Create bios of volunteers and bios of staff, for all to see. Helps make them more human to each other.

Meet with different university departments to invite professors to do guest lectures at OLLI

Instead of just seeking new instructors, seek out volunteer coordinators of courses, who put together a series of professional speakers

Offer a leadership development course at OLLI to foster new leadership

Eighty (80%) of OLLI members experience some hearing loss. It is not just a problem for a few people. Many OLLI’s use technology to assist people with hearing loss. Examples include: (1) special amplification; (2) links between a microphone worn by the instructor and a hearing piece worn by people with hearing loss; (3) loops installed in classroom ceilings that direct sound to hearing aids with blue tooth capability.

In conclusion, the National Osher Conference offers a wonderful opportunity for program staff and volunteers from around the country to share their best practices and get new ideas from their peers. Since our program will be engaging in strategic planning over the next year, we will have a wonderful opportunity to reevaluate how we do business and seek lots of input from the larger Osher network.

PICK-UP-STIX

by Mike Cohen

The game that taught you:

the delicate balances upon which so much depends,

how profoundly chance influences the way things fall for you,

that one wrong decision can ruin a great effort,

the importance of finesse,

that your success is as much a matter

of your opponent’s ineptness as it is of your skill.

The game taught you just about everything except how to spell sticks.
Vera Vogue

by Susan Stevens

To her friends and customers in Carmel, she was Vera Vogue, an expert glove-maker who usually costumed herself in red from her hat to her shoes. Most people did not realize that Vera Gutmann, the woman with the charming accent and the lilt in her voice, was a holocaust survivor, a “U-BOAT.”

Vera never used the term “U-boat.” She referred to her time during the holocaust as “going underground.” She never used the term “holocaust” either. She would say, “When Hitler came to power.”

But the years she spent underground brought out her strength, resourcefulness and character. Throughout her ordeal, she did not lose her sense of humor or ability to be gracious and kind. She survived in Berlin throughout the war, along with her mother, Lotte Friedman, and immigrated to the United States in May, 1946.

Vera had learned to make gloves in an effort to be allowed to emigrate as a craftsperson. The effort did not work, but Vera was able to apply her skills and create a hand-stitched glove business in the United States, first in Chicago and then in Carmel California.

Vera's life in the early days of Nazism

Kurt and Vera were very happy together but the political and economic instability in Germany loomed in the future. As Hitler became more and more powerful, Vera and Kurt thought the time would pass and went along with the increased restrictions. Some examples: They were told that Jewish people could not have pets, so Vera regrettably had her white Persian cat euthanized. Then they were told they had to each sew a yellow Jewish star on their coat, and wear it everywhere, identifying them as Jews. In defiance, Vera sewed the stars to a second piece of fabric, so she could place the star on and off her coat at will. She did the same for her mother and husband’s star. Eventually they were told they had to work in “slave labor” factories. If the factory was 2 miles or less from their home, they were not permitted to take public transportation and were expected to walk to and from the factories—after working 10+ hours a day. Vera sometimes did not wear the star so she could ride on the streetcar. Things got worse and worse. The factory used unsafe electric currents and one day, a high power line killed Kurt. The foreman, who was a tyrant, told Vera it was a heart attack. Vera believed it was murder and decided at that moment that she would “go underground.” She arranged to have her husband cremated and the ashes to be placed in a cemetery. Afraid of being caught, she told the cemetery she was in the hospital and could not attend the funeral, but hid somewhere nearby and saw the urn placed as she had requested.
Vera's years underground

She lived by her wits, moving from place to place throughout Berlin, sometimes sleeping in the woods, or spending days in spas where she could get a massage and then be led to a sleeping room where she would catch up on the sleep she lost walking the streets all night. She did not risk walking in full daylight. Spies eager to report seeing Jews were everywhere.

A Danish priest created a baptismal certificate for her with the name Hanne Nielsen. He knew that someone with that name had died so he transferred the paperwork to Vera. Soon after, he renamed her mother, Lotte as “Mrs. Muller.” The baptismal certificates in hand, Vera was able to persuade a Nazi police officer that she had lost all her papers in a house fire caused by the frequent bombing of Berlin, save the baptismal certificate. The police provided her with new papers. Then she escorted “Mrs. Muller” to a different police station, offering her own papers to identify herself, claiming that Mrs. Muller had lost her papers in a house fire. The story worked twice. With papers they were able to get ration cards for food.

Vera was also able to work for money. She owned a portable Hermes typewriter in a zippered green leather case with a shoulder strap. She secured typing positions, frequently for Nazis. She arrived with the typewriter around her neck; did the typing; and departed with her typewriter.

There were many harrowing moments. Unscrupulous people promised to help her escape but took her money and provided no escape route. Others were very kind and risked their own safety. People would unlock a basement door after dark, placing 2 cots along with food for her and her mother. But she could never stay in the same spot very long, for fear of being reported.

She had befriended a dear man named Axel; a homosexual. He lived in a grand house and allowed her to stay there – in the shadows. One evening, a Nazi soldier, also gay, visited Axel. She hid on the balcony above a 2-story living room. There she heard the soldier get drunk and brag about the atrocities in concentration camps. Until then she did not really know how bad things were. Axel was killed towards the end of the war from a bomb in his beautiful garden.

Once the war was over, Berlin remained in chaos for some time. Vera was lucky to be standing in the location in Berlin that became the “American sector.” People who were unlucky found themselves in the “Russian sector” and many of them were murdered by Russian soldiers as they entered Berlin.

Vera and her mother immigrated to Chicago because her brother Hans Freeman and his family had settled there. She was on the first ship to leave after the war: the Marine Flasher. It sailed on May 11, 1946 from Bremen and arrived in New York on May 20, 1946. It was filled with refugees, mostly from concentration camps. Vera said that the refugees were very noisy and promiscuous on board the ship. Freedom was a new experience for them and they were celebrating.

Vera Vogue Gloves

The gloves she made were so beautiful. Made of smooth kidskin or other fine leathers like doeskin and pigskin, they were hand stitched with tiny stitches. Operating in a tiny shop on Der Ling Lane right off of Ocean Avenue in Carmel, California, Vera traveled, making guest appearances at trunk shows in fine shops and department stores throughout the United States. Women would often bring in a favorite pair of shoes, a hat or even a coat to order matching Vera Vogue gloves. She would often trim the gloves with fur or jeweled embellishments, making them one-of-a-kind.

By now she was Vera Gutmann, having married John Gutmann who had also lost his spouse in the holocaust. They married in Chicago but soon moved to Carmel, California where she could grow roses and begonias. She made many friends and added to the charm and individuality of Carmel. She passed away at age 76, in 1986 after a brief illness.
“Behold the man.” So begins this wild ride of a novel. Mr. McGuire is a founder and director of the University of Manchester Center for New Writing in England. His area of expertise is American Realist Literature. Authors included in this group are Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, John Steinbeck and Jack London. Admirers of these writers will find some similarities in the faithful, unromantic, representation of everyday experiences of life aboard an English whaling vessel, as it plows toward doom in its last voyage.

The book transcends genre. It is a well-researched historical novel. It is a thriller. It is a philosophical examination of man at his worst, and of man seeking redemption. It is an adventure story set in the most hostile environment on Earth.

In the words of Hillary Mantel, “The North Water is brilliant, fast-paced, gripping. A tour-de-force of narrative tension and masterful reconstruction of a lost world.”

The book also offers detailed, lyrically written descriptions of horrifyingly savage and bloody deaths of animals and men, and an abundance of foul language. This is not a good choice for the reader seeking a pleasant escapist story. But you, the intrepid reader who is willing, will be grabbed and held fast by an adventure that will remain in your memory long after the book is finished.

It is 1859, and the era of the English whaling industry is almost over. The owner of the whaling vessel, The Volunteer, describes what has occurred. “We have killed them all… It was tremendous while it lasted and magnificently profitable too. But the world turns, and…Besides, no one wants the whale oil anymore – it is all petroleum now, you know that.” There is, however, one last opportunity to make a profit from the vessel. A sham whaling expedition to the Arctic waters off Greenland is planned, and two men sign on as part of the crew.

The first is Patrick Sumner, a disgraced ex-army surgeon. Hopelessly addicted to laudanum, he is filled with shame at the direction his life has taken, and its spiritual emptiness. The second is Henry Drax, a harpooner and psychopathic monster. As much in thrall to his lust for blood as Sumner is for laudanum, Drax “grasps on to the world like a dog biting into a bone – nothing is obscure to him, nothing separate from his fierce and sullen appetite.” The murder of a young cabin boy onboard ship causes a collision of these two men, and what ensues is a look at what men do under extreme conditions, for money, and to survive.

For those who have tried to read Moby Dick and were stymied by the endless detail, unable to get through it, “here is a story of the cold, the chase, and the kill, the moral ambiguity and greed of men and the overwhelming will to survive.” Short listed for the Man Booker Prize of 2016, a New York Times Top Ten Notable Book for 2016, finalist for the Los Angeles Book Prize, and named a Best Book of 2016 by the Wall Street Journal and the Chicago Tribune, The North Water is cinematic in its depiction of place and time. Even minor characters emerge fully developed and memorable. The gore, violence and language are not gratuitous, but integral to the authenticity of the story. Agree to sign on for the trip, and experience an unforgettable read.

Spring Toy

by Mike Cohen

Winding our way to where youth lingers
on the thought of toys, the feel of spring…
a spring that was a toy… a toy that was a spring…
Slinky…

Like a parent guiding a child,
I positioned the Slinky for its first step
then watched it
coil and uncoil its way
step by step down the stairs.
With joy and pride I watched
the magically organic downward progress.

Then it ended.
There was sorrow at the foot of the stairs
where the Slinky lay, a helpless cylinder
trembling slightly.

But the anticipation
of another joyful descent
would entice me to start up again…
as spring does every year.