This past week I happened to watch a PBS documentary on happiness. Although it was billed as The Emotional Life, its total focus was trying to determine what makes us happy. For decades, there has been no shortage of advice from people who think they know the secret of happiness. They have been writing self-help books, and readers have spent $10 million on these books. For the past 30 to 40 years, legitimate scientific studies have been collecting data, using brain-wave measuring circuitry and frequent, detailed questionnaires. All of this seems to prove that happiness is something we all seek. After all, happy people have better health, better relationships, better careers, a sense of curiosity, and resilience after facing adversity or trauma.

Without a doubt, the one finding which evoked a response in me came near the end of the program. Despite what most of us may think, people are actually happier near the end of their life than in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. The results of an extensive study of what participants from 18-95 years old were feeling throughout the week showed increasingly positive emotions with each ascending age group. The findings were explained as seniors being clearer on their own strengths and weaknesses and knowing who cares about them and who doesn’t. Seniors can thus mold the world around them to create a happiness bubble. We (I’m now including LLI members in this senior group) have changed our motivation from worrying about the future to experiencing the moment. The silver lining of aging is that we don’t have the burden of long-term future plans and can concentrate on what matters most to us. Youth, attractiveness, and power can be tossed aside. We value friendships and family.

As LLI members, we must be among the strongest group enjoying a better emotional life. We appreciate life and learning, we keep a full social schedule with classes and lunch time conversations, and we are glad for the memories shared with our loved ones. From high chair to wheelchair we seek connections; we are made for each other. Our LLI social connections have been established by a common interest in the arts, history, science, health, world politics, and religion. I think of the rare instances when an LLI convener has been late, and of how it is scarcely noticed, because everyone in the room is chatting. There is such a tangible sense of comradery and caring that the beginning of a new term brings, a sense of excitement similar to back-to-school days when we were children. It’s a day to reconnect with dear friends. Once connected, we take a journey together as we learn and share. (continued on Page 2)
TAKING COURSES ON FAITH

If you ask a dozen people who Joe Gastiger is, you are likely to get a dozen different answers. To some, he’s senior pastor of First Congregational UCC in DeKalb. For others, he was an outstanding English instructor at NIU. A native New Yorker, Joe graduated from the University of Iowa, where he studied in the prestigious Writer’s Workshop before coming to DeKalb. Still others recall him as a skilled program coordinator for NIU’s Honors Program, a position he left in mid-life to earn a degree from Chicago Theological Seminary. And he’s also a former DeKalb School Board member, a poet, a husband, a father, and a valued friend. But, if your poll was conducted exclusively among LLI members, Joe would be identified, first and foremost, as one of our most popular conveners.

At the urging of a colleague in 2005, Joe offered Silos and Steeples, an LLI study group exploring the unique voice of Midwestern poetry. But, as you can tell from the title, it was also concerned with religion. Since then, Joe has offered many courses, most of which explored some aspect of spirituality or religious thought, including Mystical Traditions of the West, World Religions, Early Christianity, History of the Bible and The Protestant Reformation.

Yet, in the classroom, Joe seldom tips his hand about his own beliefs. When asked how he manages to handle potentially sensitive issues so even-handedly, he simply says, “My journey in life has taken a strange and circuitous path. My personal religious convictions are very dear to me, because they are such a unique part of my identity, but my aim never is to evangelize.” Those who take his classes agree that he is unfailingly respectful of all religious traditions - or the lack thereof. That’s why his classroom is always a comfortable place to explore wide-ranging topics regardless of one’s own beliefs.

This spring, for LLI, Joe will tackle eschatology, the end of the world, a topic that has long interested him. Joe says, “I am fascinated by the topic of apocalyptic imagination. What is it that makes the notion of the end of the world so attractive in many religious traditions?” As usual, his personal fascination promises to blossom into hours of lively discussion and profound insights for all who enroll.

Joe Gastiger not only enjoys teaching LLI but also studying menus in France.

MUSINGS (continued)

One of the statistics from a study of social connections shows that, if your friend is happy, it increases your own happiness by 15 percent. If you learn that a friend of your friend is happy, your own happiness increases by 10 percent. Obviously, happiness is contagious. Need I remind you to spread this happiness to friends who don’t know about LLI yet? Encourage your friends and neighbors to join us for a session. Registration is not required for guests whom you think could be hooked into our circle once they experience an LLI course. Let’s spread the happiness!

Oh, dear, I must now sign off. Jack, my dear dog, says his happiness lies in taking a walk. I have to admit that I am happy to keep him happy. We are connected.
FIELD TRIPS: NEW DIRECTIONS IN A NEW YEAR

While LLI field trips have been popular with our members, the Lifelong Learning Institute Steering Committee, on the recommendation of the Field Trip Committee, has decided to shift that committee's charge and to not organize regular field trips every term. The reason is simple: many institutions in the area, from banks to travel agents to NIU offices, are offering field trips. So, rather than duplicate their efforts, we're going to do something unique to LLI.

The Field Trip Committee has a new charge and has become the Cultural Events Committee. This committee will go through lists of events at NIU and elsewhere in DeKalb County and the Fox Valley and find a few every month that it believes will educate, entertain, and/or intrigue LLI members. The committee then will get the information out to LLI members via e-mail and announcements. For some events, the committee plans to offer get-togethers, where LLI members can socialize and talk before or after a performance, exhibit, lecture, or play. These get-togethers could be held at restaurants, at event venues, or LLI members' homes.

Occasional field trips still will be organized, especially those that complement LLI classes. A convener or LLI member can recommend a field trip to the Cultural Events Committee for consideration. Therefore, field trips for the spring term are not being organized by LLI.

Your new Cultural Events Committee, with members carried over from the Field Trip Committee, welcomes LLI members' suggestions for events at all times. And, if there are any area arts or culture organizations whose mailing lists LLI should be on, please send the information to me at modssspanish@yahoo.com.  

Jan Modloff, Cultural Events Committee chair

NOTES FROM NOTABLES

Popular culture is where society tells its stories.—David Gunkel

The problem with No Child Left Behind is the inherent idea that there's a level playing field.—Lee Shumow

Twenty-five percent of my job is coaching; the rest is recruiting, speaking, administering.—Carol Owens

Mark Twain repeatedly returns to the theme of the frightening power of the mob.—Meredith Fredrich

The Windy City, as a nickname for Chicago, predates its use by politicians in 1893, so probably derives from the strength of winds along Lake Michigan. - Edward Callary

Banking by cell phone was used in sub-Saharan Africa before it was used in the U.S.—Lynn Neeley

What corn is to the Americas, wheat is to Europe, and rice is to Asia.—Ron Toth

When a language is lost, you lose an entire cultural system.—James Collins
PREMIERING THIS SPRING AT LLI
March 16-May 6

County Government: Role in Health & Human Services-- Eileen Dubin
Challenges & consequences facing DeKalb & Kane Counties

Twilight of the Old Order: The World 1900-1914
- George & Elaine Spencer
  Old aristocracies, new ideas & technologies, revolutions

Human Immune System (repeat) -- Lazlo Hanzely
Innate, acquired, active & passive immunity; disorders; boosters

Tour de France: Four Operas -- Clark Neher
French operas: Faust, Samson & Delilah, Carmen & more

Awaiting the Revenge of Heaven: Tracing the Roots of Christian Militancy & the Islamic Jihad -- Joe Gastiger
Links between religious fervor and doomsday fantasies

Baseball Past and Present -- Dan Dillman
Designated hitter, baseball movies, Abner Doubleday, superstitions

Giving Back: The Charitable Side of Life -- Jerry Smith
Business of philanthropy, benefits to givers and recipients

U.S. Supreme Court: Personalities & Process
- Lou Pierce & Paul Pawlowski
  History & process, using C-Span interviews with justices

Know More about Your Computer than a 12-Year-Old -- Jack Reich
Operating system secrets to make life easier; meets in computer lab

MARK YOUR 2010 CALENDAR!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LLI Spring Term</td>
<td>March 16—May 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLI Soiree</td>
<td>June 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>LLI Summer Term</td>
<td>July 6-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>LLI Fall Term</td>
<td>September 14—November 4</td>
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Plan ahead! In the fall 2010 term, LLI will test moving NIU Notables to Tuesdays at the request of several of our devoted members with Wednesday conflicts.

SPELLING BEE
Several LLI members won kudos at the October DeKalb Community Spelling Bee, sponsored by Altrusa. Sue Lehlo was one of the key Altrusa workers that night. Clark Neher was the pronouncer. And the LLI team of Stephanie Breed, Tom Diedrich, and Jan Graefen came in third. The word they missed was eremitic, meaning pertaining to a recluse or hermit. The final winning word was prestidigitator, meaning a magician. It was a night of triumph for those of a certain age. The winning team members, from Oak Crest–DeKalb Area Retirement Center, ranged in age from 72-90.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

**Fall 2009**
- Liz Blau
- Marlis Corneille
- Bill Cummings
- Jennie Cummings
- Deanna Forrest
- Dwight King
- Jamie Rothstein
- Sharon Skala
- Diane Strand
- Barbara Tripp
- Robert Wheeler

**Winter 2010**
- Kathy Blair
- Greg Protano

IN MEMORIAM
- Jim Willrett
- Sandy Scott
- Ray Maher