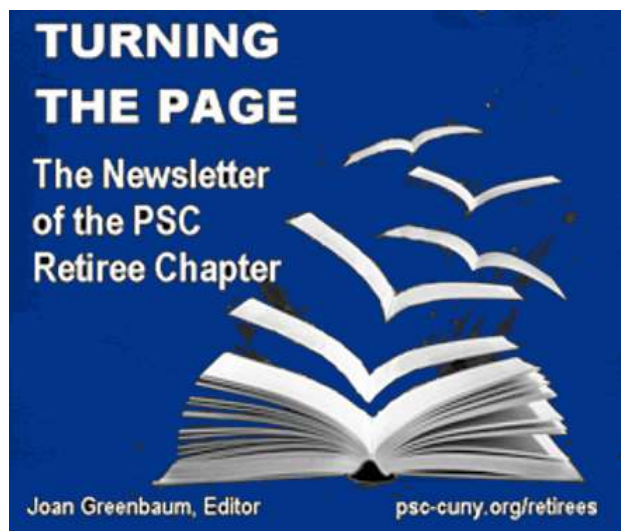


JUNE 2020

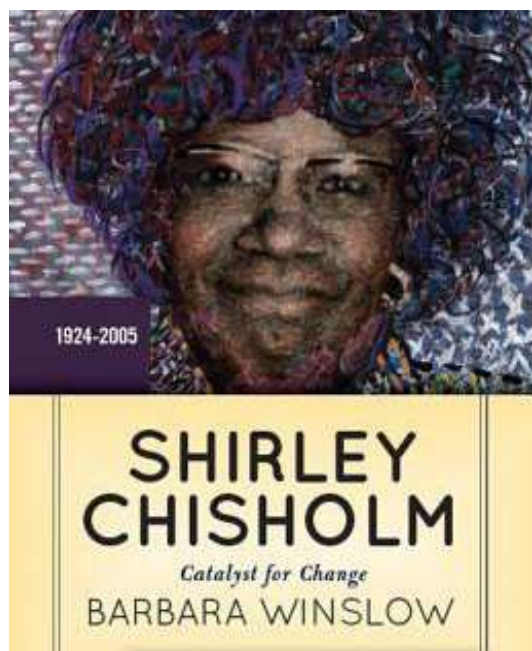


Academic Year 2019-20 No. 8

psc-cuny.org/retirees.org

CHAPTER MEETING, MONDAY, JUNE 8, 1 PM. Our chapter meeting will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the nineteenth amendment (women's suffrage).

Speaker: Barbara Winslow, a member of the retiree chapter and professor emeritus at Brooklyn College, will talk on "Upending the History of Women's Suffrage: Bringing Race, Class and Empire to the Fore."



A historian of women's activism, Prof. Winslow has authored or edited several books including *Shirley Chisholm: Catalyst for Change*, *Clio in the Classroom: A Guide for Teaching U.S. Women's History* (co-editor), *Reshaping Women's History: Voices of Non-Traditional Women Historians* (editor) and *Sylvia Pankhurst: Sexual Politics and Political Activism*.

We'll also be honoring three women who are retiring from the PSC staff whose union work has made such a difference over the decades for PSC members – Executive Director **Debbie Bell**, Membership Director **Diana Rosato**, and Policy and Research Director **Kate Pfordresher**. We're making them honorary members of our chapter.

[If you are a member of the Retirees Chapter and do not receive an email invitation to this virtual chapter meeting by Friday, June 5, write us at retirees@pscmal.org.]

IMPORTANT:

For updates and resources from the retiree chapter during the COVID-19 crisis, check our webpage: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>

A CUNY CRISIS THAT BEGS FOR MORAL COURAGE AND LEADERSHIP

Bill Friedheim, Chairperson,
Retirees Chapter

The City University is at an existential moment. At stake is its one hundred seventy-year-old mission to educate "the children of the whole people."

In a crisis that begs for moral courage and leadership, the chancellor, the Board of Trustees and many college presidents have waved the white flag of capitulation. They have preemptively called for course reductions and massive layoffs of adjuncts before Governor Andrew Cuomo has called

for cuts to CUNY's budget. In anticipation of an austerity agenda from both the Governor and Mayor, they are creating a path for the State and City to dismantle CUNY's mission.

Barbara Bowen, President of the PSC, in a May 18th letter to Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez and Board of Trustees Chairman William Thompson, wrote:

There is no justification for the terminations of employment and, in many cases, of health insurance that CUNY colleges have announced. Taking such actions at any time would be alarming; doing so in the midst of a pandemic is inexcusable. Brooklyn College has announced plans to slash course offerings by 25 percent; The College of Staten Island called for reductions of 35 percent; and John Jay College announced plans to lay off more than 400 adjunct faculty. The University has allowed these plans to go forward without budgetary justification, without a public accounting of how federal stimulus money will offer relief, and without fiscal transparency. CUNY must do better.

The pandemic has disproportionately savaged the low-income, minority and immigrant communities served by CUNY. CUNY students are taught in large part by a precarious, contingent workforce, whose members move from pillar to post just to secure a bare-bones living.

There's a ripple effect to adjunct layoffs. Many lose healthcare benefits. Students see course offerings reduced, including classes needed for graduation. Full-time faculty, fortunate enough to retain employment, end up

teaching larger classes compounded by the reality that distance learning may remain the norm into the fall semester.

Austerity falls hard on professional staff, the backbone of support for students, faculty and the academic mission of the University. They too are subject to cutbacks and layoffs, expected to do more with less – and for the immediate future to do it from home.



A seventy car/bike caravan protest on May 18th in front of CUNY headquarters before a Board of Trustees meeting.

Instead of cutting, CUNY management should be championing the University's role in the City's recovery; should be drawing on money from the federal stimulus packages; should be in the lead calling for fairer taxation of the ultra-rich in the State and City with the greatest inequality in the nation. As President Bowen wrote in her letter:

“If ever there were a moment when the trustees and chancellor of a public university needed to stand up for the university with whose future they are entrusted, this is the moment. The communities hardest hit by coronavirus are exactly the communities that will need CUNY the most, as thousands of displaced workers seek to earn college degrees and learn new skills. CUNY is uniquely positioned to be a central part

of an economic recovery that aims to address injustices of race and class exposed by this crisis. CUNY built new colleges during the Depression. Such vision is sorely lacking now.”

There has been organized pushback against this failure of leadership. A caravan of seventy cars and bikes protested in front of CUNY headquarters when the Board of Trustees met on May 18th. Mass virtual meetings at Brooklyn College and CSI slowed the flow of cutbacks at those two institutions. More than 150 department chairs from across CUNY signed a letter proclaiming that they were “not elected to impose preemptive budget cuts that will mean faculty colleagues lose jobs and health insurance during a pandemic, students lose access to college courses during an economic catastrophe.” As events move quickly, retirees should check the PSC website to see how they can plug into this organized push back.

It's time for vision, not cutbacks, for leadership, not craven submission by the chancellery and Board to an austerity agenda. In this existential moment, let's rethink the role of a great urban, public university. In the words of the iconic labor organizer, Mother (Mary G. Harris) Jones, uttered more than a century ago: “Don't mourn, organize!” □

SOLIDARITY: FIGHTING FOR ADJUNCTS

-Marcia Newfield, retired, past Vice-President
for Part-Time Personnel

For a long time now, adjuncts have described themselves as the canaries in the coal mine—the harbingers and victims of the disasters created by the tiered university system. In the coal mines, the canaries would succumb to poison gases released in the mining process before the gases would affect humans.

The Corona plague has been used by the administration to frighten some (not all) college presidents into reacting to anticipated enrollment declines and cuts to city and state aid to public higher education by non-reappointing adjuncts and other precarious employees (including staff and college assistants who are members of DC 37).

In her May 18th letter to Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Board of Trustees Chairperson William Thompson, PSC President Barbara Bowen cited current adjunct cuts: Brooklyn College is cutting 25% of its courses, College of Staten Island 35%, and John Jay is laying off more than 400 adjuncts. The numbers cut rise every day: BMCC Social Science Department has cut a majority of sections offered to adjuncts. Bronx Community College has issued non reappointments in Education, Adult Literacy and Communication Departments. The Language Institute at Queens College is being shut down June 30.



From a TV ad that aired on NYC stations in late May.

The PSC has been in continuous bargaining with CUNY to ward off these cuts and protect CUNY workers from being forced to go to campus. In April the DA passed a resolution stating that “The PSC stands by the principle during the pandemic of keeping everyone working, getting paid and maintaining health insurance, and rejects any attempt to anticipate or resolve budget difficulties by dismissing or not reappointing employees, including contingent and part-time employees and student employees.” The PSC secured agreements with CUNY to postpone the adjunct notification deadline from May 15th to May 29th and then to June 30th so as to give the colleges more time to account for federal stimulus funding, new

enrollment projections and potential State tax increases that could mitigate the cuts. Adjuncts teach 56% of the courses at CUNY. Another PSC demand is keeping adjuncts on health insurance through December.

Negotiations and lobbying are not the only efforts the PSC is making. CUNY faculty and staff working with the PSC staged a mobile, socially distant protest throughout Midtown on Monday, May 18, the day of the last CUNY Board of Trustees meeting. Riding in cars and accompanied by well-spaced bicycles, the protestors traveled from CUNY's central office on East 42nd Street, past Governor Cuomo's NYC office and on to Billionaires' Row to demand a halt to layoffs and the levying of new taxes on the wealthy to protect public education. See the PSC website (psc-cuny.org) for photos of the demonstration and numerous articles on our situation.

The last two virtual Delegate Assembly meetings focused on the PSC campaign to fund CUNY and stop layoffs. The first on May 11th was held after delegates petitioned for it; the second was a regularly-scheduled meeting on May 21st. Both DAs attracted large numbers of delegates and other PSC members — 239 and 244 persons, respectively. The most controversial vote was on a resolution to delay filing grades until the final date for filing, May 28th, and possibly beyond. It was defeated 63 to 44 at the first DA and was reintroduced by several chapters at the May 21st meeting, when it was again defeated, this time by 90 to 41. Arguments seesawed between "it would show power" to "it would not be powerful enough." Others argued that it would have negative effects on students who need grades to graduate and register for courses.

It was agreed that the PSC keep all unresolved bargaining issues as visible as possible in the months to come, including weekly creative actions. In addition, the PSC has followed the DA directive to launch a public-facing media campaign including expenditures on TV and social media to highlight the need to fully fund CUNY and stop layoffs. □

ATHENA vs AMAZON

Mike Frank, LaGuardia CC

Dania Rajendra is director of Athena, a coalition of 52 organizations that help each other with labor and policy issues among gig workers, immigrants and low-wage workers throughout the country. As the speaker at our May chapter meeting, she told us about how Athena has targeted Amazon's business practices by putting public pressure on the company. Amazon employs 850,000 workers in the U.S., with the majority working under speeded-up conditions in Amazon's warehouses, where they work in close quarters despite many cases of COVID-19 in their ranks.

Dania, formerly associate editor of the PSC's newspaper, *Clarion*, described Athena's multiple areas of concern: working conditions in Amazon's warehouses; the company's provision of technical support for ICE (the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency); its relations with police departments; its pressuring of officials to provide the subsidies and tax breaks it receives; its funding of climate-change deniers; and its monopoly position in the industry. A Herculean task against a truly Amazonian corporation. Amazon is the most invasive data company into our lives, more so than even Facebook, she explained.



Image from front page of the 11/26/19 digital New York Times covering the Athena coalition against Amazon.

Though Amazon is not unionized, there have been many worker actions at its warehouses in the U.S. and Europe. Dania referred to the walkout of workers in Michigan, many of them immigrants from East Africa. She mentioned the worker at the Staten Island facility who was

fired for protesting inadequate safety measures and the protests by French workers, which led to government intervention shutting down the company's operations in France. In addition, two workers in the U.S. were fired after organizing a virtual meeting for their colleagues. Although actions in the U.S. have been relatively small, they have been reported in the mainstream press as indications of much broader discontent within Amazon's workforce.

Athena, she said, is a movement of action groups bringing attention to the ways that Amazon has control over our lives, our communities and our democracy. After her presentation, Dania fielded questions from chapter members, reminding us that we do not need to feel guilty for using Amazon services including their vast cloud computing operations, which keep data on all of us as well as housing Netflix and the Zoom platform we were using for our meeting. Several members suggested other sites for book buying. Others asked about the ways that unions and groups were putting pressure on Amazon to get better conditions for warehouse workers. To date, Athena has testified before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Antitrust, as well as gotten thirteen state Attorneys General to examine worker conditions in what Amazon calls its 'fulfillment centers.' In New York State, Attorney General Letitia James has taken up the case of Chris Smalls who was fired and publicly ridiculed by Amazon management for organizing a walkout. Athena has also brought pressure against Amazon for the firing of five other whistle blowers. It has also helped local protest activities around warehouses, such as in Carteret, New Jersey, where the Mayor and the community are bringing action against Amazon for the increase in COVID-19 cases there.

Labor action at the distribution centers is the key to progress on all the fronts where Athena is engaged. Amazon's forceful response to protests and to communication among workers that it does not control shows that management understands the potential for worker resistance and is determined to squelch it before it spreads. The brutal pace of the work process at Amazon distribution centers involves heavy

lifting and repetitive motions and has resulted in injuries and illness. It will take worker action in these centers that disrupts the flow of Amazon's profits to bring this Behemoth to heel. □

RECLAIM OUR VOTE

Doris Hart, member of the Retirees Chapter
Executive Committee

Because of voter suppression, 17 million people, mainly minorities, were removed from voter rolls from 2016 to 2018, according to the Brennan Center for Justice.

And the purging continues. To counter this, **Reclaim Our Vote**, sponsored by the **NAACP**, is sending out thousands of postcards asking people to re-register in five states where it is possible to gain seats in the Senate and win the Presidency: Texas, Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina and Mississippi.



Of all the postcards mailed, 25% of people who have received cards have re-registered. Reclaim Our Vote also works to ensure registered voters have what they need either to obtain absentee ballots or to help them get to the polls.

Volunteers are needed to write postcards. Sandy Radoff, a volunteer in New York, can deliver a package to you if you live in Manhattan or Brooklyn. The package contains instructions, postcards, postage stamps, and lists of people who need to re-register. Please email her at slradoff@gmail.com. □

IN MEMORIAM

In Memoriam: Raymond T. Hoobler



Our CUNY colleague and fellow member of the Retirees Chapter died of COVID-19 on April 29, 2020. Ray served on the Chapter Executive Committee and was a regular at our monthly chapter meetings and at union marches and demonstrations.

Ray was Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at City College and the Graduate Center, and an extremely productive research mathematician. Contradicting the belief that mathematics is a young person's game, Ray's productivity only increased after his retirement when the conclusion of his teaching, mentoring and administrative responsibilities, all of which he took on with the utmost seriousness, freed up more time for research.

Ray and his wife, Frances Kuehn, the painter, were devotees of theater and concerts, particularly of performances that were on the edge.

Ray used to say that if he went to a concert that didn't include a piece he disliked, then he wasn't stretching himself enough.

Ray's activism was not limited to his support of our union and our university. He was an energetic supporter of environmental causes in the northern part of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan where, together with his sister, he owned property inherited from his grandfather, his namesake Dr. Raymond T. Hoobler, whose shingle Ray always displayed on his desk.

In addition to his wife, Frances, Ray is survived by his son Jason, his daughter Aurora (Chuck), stepdaughter Beth (Cheto) and three grandchildren.

Michael Engber, CCNY □

In Memoriam: Jean Weisman

Jean Weisman, a long-time member of the staff at the City College Center for Worker Education and PSC activist, died unexpectedly on May 6th.

I first met Jean around 1968 in Madison, Wisconsin at a Students for a Democratic Society demonstration. She was an undergrad there and I was a graduate student. Shortly after that chance encounter, she went off to Wisconsin's industrial belt seeking a job like other student activists were doing then. Ultimately Jean graduated from the University of Wisconsin and we lost track of one another until sometime in the 1980s.

Jean had moved back to NYC where she grew up. She was working at one of the municipal hospitals but was ready to move on. She looked to City College where her mother, Martha, taught. She also found me again. I was then the Executive Director of the relatively new Center for Worker Education at City College. Located in lower Manhattan, the Center offered a special degree program for working people. Though we didn't have an opening at the Center then, she did get a job with the college's Continuing Education program. The next year there was an opening for another staff member at the Center and she was hired.

Over the years, Jean served on the staff of the Center, where she contributed to the success of many students. She helped them navigate the jungle of financial aid requirements and also counseled them on academic as well as bureaucratic matters. Not a few students owed their success in college to her efforts on their behalf.



Labor Day Parade, 2006

A former faculty member, Maggie Block, remembers Jean's readiness to help her colleagues. One evening while getting ready for her first class of the term, Maggie had an accident. "I realized I had probably broken two fingers. It was painful and I needed to go to the hospital to get X-rays. I was concerned about my students because I knew I couldn't teach the first class of the term, which was to start in less than two hours. Jean, perhaps getting ready to leave for the day, saw me coming toward the office and asked what was wrong. She said not to worry, she would call all of my students and tell them the first class was cancelled, that I would be there for the second class and make up the missing one later in the term. Then she guided me to the elevator and

said she'd take me to St. Vincent's Hospital. I told her she didn't have to do that but she insisted on hailing a cab for me and making sure I was OK before going back upstairs to call my students for me."

Jean was no-nonsense. She was also kind and responsive to the needs of students and faculty. Her presence at CWE, the way she listened and quietly solved problems helped create the warm atmosphere at the college that made it such a wonderful place to learn and to teach.

She was also an expert on Cuba and often taught courses on its social and political history in the post-revolutionary period at the Center and at other CUNY colleges. She organized and led student groups on visits there. After she retired a few years ago, she lived in Havana for a long period while working on a book she hoped to publish. She was living there when I led a class of graduate students on an intersession course to Cuba a few years ago. Together with a Cuban friend of hers, she volunteered to spend an evening with the students.

Jean's activism in the union started in earnest during the budget crisis in the early 1990s. City College responded to the crisis by laying off personnel, especially staff. But the union chapter there was at the time indifferent to the needs of the staff. So Jean organized meetings of staff members, something the City chapter wasn't ready to do, to press the PSC for help. When the response was anemic, she and others went to a delegate assembly meeting to press the case on behalf of laid-off staff, again to little avail. That experience led her to years of activism at the PSC, where she served as a grievance counselor, was elected chair of the HEO chapter for six years, served on bargaining teams and was elected to the Executive Council. And when she retired she joined the Retiree Chapter and became a member of its executive committee.

We will miss her – a committed, courageous member of the Professional Staff Congress.

Steve Leberstein, CCNY □

MEMORIES OF THE PRESENT

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN PANDEMIC

Renate Bridenthal, Brooklyn College

Life is fragile; life is sturdy; if you're lucky, life goes on.

For me, isolation has turned out to be surprisingly social. In apocalyptic mode, I have heard from and even seen people far away: California, Germany, Slovakia, even Australia. The pandemic's stretch has made the world even smaller. But personal life has, paradoxically, also gotten smaller. I found out that house-cleaning is a lot harder than it was when I last did it thirty years ago. I learned that simple fare can be tasty after all, and that meat is less and less desirable. I discovered a kind neighbor who offered to order for me through her Fresh Direct account. In return, I offered her my massage machine when her back stiffened due to endless hours of office work at home.

In other ways, a new kind of normal has taken over. My various groups meet via Skype or Zoom. Of these, the most important is the monthly meeting of the International Committee of the PSC, which is as vibrant as ever under the Chairmanship of Prof. Manny Ness, Political Science, Brooklyn College. We have interesting speakers on events in other countries and useful projects. Currently we have joined with Historians for Peace and Democracy to develop a syllabus on sanctions, their origins, intended political uses and unintended consequences. A book on the matter is also in the works.

I think that for all of us the pandemic has laid bare the bones of capitalism, its glaring and growing inequalities and the need for fightback. We in the Retirees Chapter are most likely to recognize the vengeful return of the past. As best we can, let us work for a better outcome.

□

IN A DARK TIME, THE EYE BEGINS TO SEE

Constance H. Gemson, LaGuardia CC



Streets were once a whirl of sound and movement. Now the Upper West Side seems like a slow summer Saturday with so many skipping town, finding pleasure somewhere else. Cheery optimism is not present now. My neighborhood looks like an empty stage set. Owners post signs on their restaurant doors, bright as beach balls. Some signs say closed, with takeout orders only. A few flyers post long messages with support for their neighbors and the community we all love. Others read like prayers. I look up at the sky, seeing birds that once circled in unity flying in all different directions. The sky still seems blue and the day is beautiful. This cheerful view is an illusion. These days are the time of the Coronavirus. The world seems split open.

I discover hope in an unusual place. For over five years, I conducted telephone classes for the elderly. No, we don't Skype or Zoom. The process is simple. We meet by conference call to create a safety net, warm as a winter quilt. The program is called University Without Walls, one of the programs of Dorot, a not-for-profit organization. Topics include art, music and health advocacy. For this spring, I developed seven one-hour phone sessions. One title was *Resiliency: Bouncing Back After Hard Times*. I researched the theme, produced a booklet for group members, and encouraged discussion. Intimacy develops. We are aware of sadness or joy in a simple *Hello*. We are scattered over this country in different settings, time zones

and histories. Group members live in San Francisco, Miami, Staten Island and the Bronx. Most participants do not have computers.

At least two in my group are homebound. Their entire world may be a very small space. Usually we explore the class's topic. Now, we assess their lives. The participants do not focus on political strategies or new medical advances. Their solutions are simple. Discover knitting. Plan a schedule. Reach out to friends and family. Listen to music. Light a candle. Write letters. One bed-bound woman told the class how she loved crocheting booties and filled them with jelly beans. I suggest journaling to keep a record of these dark times. One member states she lived in Israel through "the war years. I can get through anything." Another mentions the power of those who survived the Holocaust. Unity develops between these unknown, invisible strangers. Our phones, our thoughts become a chord of connection. In this time of the Coronavirus, this bleak unknown, the music of our voices, lights the way.

(Reprinted from The West Side Spirit)

□

Peter Ranis. York College writes:

There isn't too much lightness today as we struggle through both Trump and COVID-19. With the help of my very artistic granddaughter Flora Ranis we collaborated on the cartoon below:



"the lion growing anxious"

QUARANTINE CULTURE

Anne Friedman, BMCC

It is ironic that our new Zoom culture has reopened my world and "quarantine" has been somewhat liberating. Since early January, recovering from spine surgery, I've basically been cloistered at home, unable to attend Retiree Chapter meetings, a book discussion group that follows those monthly gatherings and most of anything else that involves traveling and sitting for long spells. So now on Zoom I've reconnected to the PSC world of meetings, discussions and debates. Released from my fog of ignorance, which can at times be quite relaxing, my eyes and ears are perked up and my nerves jangle differently than they have for a long while.

Somewhat freed from focusing on my physical pain, I'm revving up my creative and intellectual juices plunging into artwork and the study of language. My joy in creating mixed media collages has become an obsessive activity that I begin after morning coffee, staying occupied for varying lengths of time during the day.

My workroom overflows with paper of all sizes, shapes, textures and color, shapes cut neatly, with fancy edges, ripped and folded. Canvas, paints and pens, pencils for drawing and coloring, thousands of buttons sorted by hue; vintage postage stamps, old maps, jewels that sparkle and stick, glue, paste, glitter, ribbons, embroidery thread; journal books, archival albums, cut up calendars—spill off shelves and out of containers, and every so often the mess drives me to "get organized." No magazine or journal gets to the recycling pile until I've scoured the pages for potential material. Tiny canvases, 2x2 and 3x3 on tiny wooden easels, are displayed throughout the apartment and barely a surface remains collage free.

Improving my Spanish is less of an obsession, I guess because it requires more intellectual resources. But what a great excuse to watch telenovelas in Spanish, early on with English subtitles, but now with the titles in Spanish. I have seen soapy series and politically oriented ones, some including up to 80 episodes.

Studying on the computer, reading stories and news articles in Spanish has led me to some interesting serendipitous experiences. By pure coincidence, the day after Bill Friedheim announced at our Retiree meeting that Jean Weisman had died, I unexpectedly came across her photo online. This was after following a trail that began when I read a biographical piece about the famous Cuban educator, Norma Guillard, and her challenges with teaching campesino families and her visit and work in the States. Curious to learn more about her, my Google search landed on a link to a video of Norma Guillard speaking on a panel at the Graduate Center. The organizer and moderator of that event was Jean Weisman. There she was, sitting in front of me on my screen, doing her wonderful cross-cultural work, the day I heard of her death.

Somehow this search that started with practicing Spanish again, serendipitously led me to the CUNY Historical Archives where I began by listening to interviews with members of our chapter talking about their time at CUNY. Discovering the richness in those recordings has piqued my interest and I will add listening to more interviews to my unregimented retiree repertoire and quarantine culture.

WHICH DAY OF THE WEEK IS IT?

Joan Greenbaum, Graduate Center



I thought I had the time thing conquered. I got out an old little black and white checkered pocket notebook left over from I don't know

when, and I set it beside my coffee cup as a reminder for first thing in the morning. I planned to use it as a Corona day-journal. After the first cup of coffee I would open the book and write in the day of the week, the date and the weather. I had plans to write about how I was feeling, what was happening with those I love, and news of the day, but on most days the date and weather was 'all she wrote.'

That first half-month back in March felt like an eternity and then by the time May zoomed around (pun more or less intended) I had been in so many Zoom cocktail hours, Zoom writing workshops, Zoom yoga classes and indeed Zoom meetings, that I had no idea where the time went. They say that as we get older time speeds up, but none of us ever experienced anything like a stay-at-home speeded-up time like this. And hopefully we will not be doing so again, although hopeful is the operative word.

It has been a bittersweet time. Colleagues and friends lost; colleagues and friends recovering; children out of work. Grandchildren at a distance. Helpful neighbors. And more. I'm sure we each have our own lists. I have found a bit of routine in Zooming into gentle yoga classes (in my pajamas). I have joined an online creative writing group with funny people who enjoy each other's company and offer excellent, positive comments on each other's writing. I have a delightful Zoom group of women of, as they say, 'a certain age,' where we toast each other and share our own stories. And I have been in what feels like an infinite number of union meetings, as I am one of our retiree representatives on the PSC Executive Council. CUNY has been deluged with an administration full of control freaks who have demanded first that staff go to campus, and then that everyone start teaching online as if we had been doing this all of our lives. Each heavy-handed administrative order required push-back and fight-back—at a distance—something we all had to learn rather quickly.

Still, with each day filled, and with months sliding by, I return to my little black and white pocket notebook and note that I don't know the

day of the week unless I check my notes. Have you noticed this too? ☐

‘One of the Lucky Ones’

Gail Green-Anderson, LaGuardia CC

I started to write this on April 27th while “self-isolating” in the bedroom of our Brooklyn apartment. When I started experiencing some of the symptoms of COVID-19 on the evening of April 17th, I made an appointment for a telemedicine appointment with a Virtual Urgent Care practice which advertised that I could get an appointment later that evening. When I reported my symptoms, the doctor told me I might have the virus and I should self-isolate. She gave me specific instructions. My husband, Rick, opened up the foldout couch in our second bedroom.

We live near a hospital and the sirens blared all that night as they had for weeks. I was scared. Scared that I would need to go to that nearby hospital. Scared that I had already infected Rick.

But I am, as our family doctor told me when I spoke to her in another telemedicine appointment the following week, one of “the lucky ones.” I had a suspected case of the virus, but a mild one. My temperature returned to normal and the aches and fatigue diminished during the first week following my call to Virtual Urgent Care. My ability to taste and smell would eventually return. Now, weeks after my two-week period of self-isolation, I feel like myself. And Rick, thank goodness, has remained well. I’m grateful.

But still....

I first started writing about staying inside during the pandemic weeks before I got sick. I intended to write a piece about being confined in an apartment after being outdoors, riding my bike during the day and sleeping in a tent at night. The stay-at-home order here in New York began shortly after Rick and I had returned from a cycling and camping trip, starting in Savannah, Georgia and ending in St. Augustine, Florida. That trip, like so many other cycling and camping trips we had taken, was

wonderful, a particular joy in our respective retirements. We had hoped, when we both retired over three years ago, to be able to take those trips year-round, not just during the summers when the academic calendar had made it most possible for us to travel.

The pandemic, in particular the threat it has posed to older people, has sharpened my sense of vulnerability while at the same time making me imagine future cycling and camping trips with a vengeance.

I need to stay healthy and adventuresome so I can cycle again with Rick in new places, sleeping in our tent under the stars.

In my status as Senior Citizen, now fortunate to go to Senior Shop, 6:30 to 7:30 a.m. at our local supermarket, as one whose age places me among those most vulnerable to the virus, as one who was exceedingly fortunate to have had a mild, suspected case of the virus, I need to not only imagine but work towards a future where I am pedaling and camping, not confined by disease and fear.

I want more than good luck to keep me in the saddle. What will it take for my dream to be realized? What will it take for many of us to have good health and adventure in our later years? These are the questions now before me.



☐

COVID-19 AND HOSPITAL INEQUALITY: WHY IT'S GETTING WORSE, AND HOW TO FIX IT

An important new article by Baruch College adjunct faculty member Barbara Caress examines inequality in NYC among private voluntary and public system hospitals. She notes in her introduction:

“The COVID-19 pandemic is hitting the under-financed hospitals serving thousands of poor and working-class New Yorkers the hardest. The emergency federal funds for hospitals haven’t corrected their inequitable status vis-à-vis

far better-off private hospitals, and have even reinforced it. Now it’s up to State and City policymakers to straighten things out and make New York City’s hospital system work better for everyone.”

The article was published online by the Center for New York City Affairs (4/29). See the full text at: <https://tinyurl.com/HospitalInequality>.

(Barbara Caress is a healthcare consultant with long experience in non-profit, union and public policy management and administration. She teaches health policy at Baruch.)

LIFE DURING WARTIME. Josh Brown, the retired director of the American Social History Project at the CUNY Graduate Center, has produced a series of weekly political illustrations, beginning in 2003 with the war in Iraq, called Life During Wartime. The entire collection, 2003-2019, is online at: www.joshbrownnyc.com/dw.htm.



Fresh meat for the food supply chain