Musings

Joe Gastiger
Steering Committee Chair

On behalf of the LLI Steering Committee, I want to wish you a very enjoyable rest of the summer. Whether you garden or golf, go out to concerts in the park, read to a grandchild or travel overseas, I do hope you have the chance to meet someone new, to see something beautiful, and — at least temporarily — to escape the worry and rancor and nonstop news.

One of the implicit assumptions of LLI is that we can come together as neighbors, colleagues and friends, and talk about practically anything without getting angry and insulting each other. That is a skill that most of us grew up with, but a skill more and more pundits and strongmen seem to have somehow lost. We may be the people who need to keep that art alive.

This fall, we’ll offer a selection of study groups that cover a wide range of interests. Here are some questions our conveners invite you to explore:

- How much do our ways of thinking — politics, sciences, aesthetics — trace back to Plato, Aristotle or any of the seven sages active in Greece more than 2,000 years ago? How did that culture slip into the DNA of our own?

- When prairie schooners first crossed into Illinois, how high was the grass? Are we able to turn depleted farmland back into prairie? Can that bring back the pheasants, and one day, maybe, even the bison? What is the value of all that remains of that ecosystem?

- Will a welter of new election laws, restricting who can vote, how, where and when, play a big part in this November’s results? To what degree do state regulations and even county rules already favor one party over another?

- How much do we know about each of the six wives of Henry VIII? Where did they come from, and what influence did they have on affairs of state? Did Anne Boleyn actually have six fingers on her right hand? Why did the king almost have the one wife who outlived him executed for heresy?

- How has Israeli society changed since that small country’s lightning victory in the 1967 Six Day War? Can a viable Palestinian state rise out of the rubble of Gaza or from a patchwork of Arab villages on the West Bank? What are the chances that the grandchildren of people on both sides of the barrier wall will be able to live in peace?

- Can a bitter drink, brewed from leaves and vines in the rainforest, open our eyes and ears to

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At Home on the Prairie

In the fall of 1967, Michael Haines traded the north shore of Lake Michigan for the cornfields of DeKalb County and never looked back. A native of the Highland Park/Deerfield area, he enrolled as a freshman at NIU and soon became part of a network of young student activists, many of whom remain close friends to this day.

His undergraduate degree—a double major in philosophy and mathematics—shows a rather remarkable range of interests and might have propelled him into the broader world, except for one incident which proved a game changer. As a junior, participating in a student demonstration to support striking AFSCME workers, he linked arms with a fellow student to block access to a campus building. That fellow student was an intriguing young woman named Lana, and it soon became evident that more than arms were linked. They began dating and were married just six months later in May 1970.

Michael is still remembered in our community for one of his first endeavors, the creation of Mother Sunshine. It was a nonprofit substance abuse treatment, prevention and education center that also became the first homeless shelter in DeKalb County. Michael went on to earn his master’s degree in mental health from NIU. Eventually the core functions of Mother Sunshine were incorporated into NIU’s new Health Enhancement Services Office. Michael was hired as its director, a position he held for 20 years. He retired in early 2008 after becoming executive director of the National Social Norms Resource Center, also housed at NIU.

Among Michael and Lana’s many civic interests are promoting education and literacy, protecting the environment and combating food insecurity. These latter two interests have resulted in a particular focus on sustainable organic gardening and farming. That really began for them in their early married life when they purchased a five-acre farmette near Malta—two city kids trying their hands at farming and animal husbandry. From the outset, they were hooked. Their interest eventually propelled them to their current home on 20 acres in rural Kingston. In 1999, they purchased and developed a tall grass prairie and wetland on 60-plus acres that has been deeded to the DeKalb Forest Preserve as part of the Haines Creek Conservation Corridor, ensuring that it will be remain preserved in perpetuity.

Be sure to enroll in Michael’s fall LLI class, “A Great Time Out On The Prairie,” which begins Sept. 11. Michael is a charismatic and engaging speaker who will both entertain and inform you about the natural world around us. Spoiler alert: There is even some talk of a field trip to witness a prairie burn, weather conditions permitting. See you there—you will not be disappointed.

— Brad Pietens

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mysterious other world and help us to overcome our fear of death? What can we learn about the spiritual effects of psychedelics, and how is that likely to alter our understanding of God, perhaps, or of ourselves in years to come?

Friends, we have an eclectic list to choose from this time, with enough to intrigue, enlighten and possibly unsettle almost anyone. We hope you’ll sign up soon, and maybe even bring along a friend.

Until September then, I wish you good health and wonder.
Featured This Fall at LLI – Sept. 10 to Oct. 31

**Why Do the Greeks Matter?**
(8 weeks)
*Christopher Nissen*
Explore ancient Greek civilization and the roots of many modern concepts.

**How Elections Work**
(4 weeks)
*Carol Zar and Elizabeth Bass*
Examine how and when we vote, history, other countries’ election systems.

**A War Without End:**
*Understanding the Conflict Between Israel and Palestine*
(7 weeks)
*Joe Gastiger*
Study roots, narratives, milestones, interpretations of this struggle.

**Notables**
(8 weeks)
*Weekly speakers*
Listen to and question experts on drones, elections, translating and more.

**Psychedelics and Spirituality**
(8 weeks)
*Tom Roberts*
Consider the religious, mystical, spiritual implications of psychedelics.

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**Important Parking Reminder**

If you have a white NIU retiree parking pass, remember that this pass is not valid in the visitors parking lot during the daytime. If you want to park there then, you will have to pay. But the retiree pass is valid in the nearby parking deck on Carroll Avenue, the lot behind the Peters Campus Life Building and other NIU parking lots.

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**Notes From Notables**

In farming, every year is a do-over. — *Jamie Walters, Whiskey Acres Distilling Co.*

I can’t let my students go into the workforce without knowing how to use these tools (AI, ChatBots). — *Andrea Guzman, communication*

Learning how to criticize tradition is vital to democratic literacy. — *Kerry Burch, leadership, educational psychology and foundations*

Over half of all species on our planet are parasitic. — *Jennifer Koop, biological sciences*

Alcoholism is a progressive, chronic, fatal disease, marked by physical compulsion, coupled with mental obsession. — *Paul Priester, interdisciplinary health professions*

A good funeral gets the dead where they need to go and the living where they need to be. — *Micah Morton, anthropology, quoting Thomas Lynch*
The More We Get Together

More than 25 LLI members enjoyed good food and good conversation in a good atmosphere at our spring buffet luncheon, catered from the Ellington Restaurant in the Holmes Student Center. Its dining director is always very accommodating and has the Capitol Room set up so that we can enjoy our food and each other’s company. Watch your email for details on another luncheon in the fall after classes begin in September.

Our 2024 soiree was a rousing success! Over 40 members gathered at Brad and Linda Pieten’s home on June 22 and enjoyed good company and a lot of delicious hors d’oeuvres and desserts. The day was warm with rain forecast. But the evening was comfortable enough for many to gather outside on the deck, and the rain stayed away until everyone was safely home. Special thanks to the Pietens for graciously hosting and to the committee who made sure that all went smoothly. We look forward to another soiree, so mark your calendars for Saturday, June 21, 2025.

— Judy Olsen, Soiree Committee chair

LLI members enjoy lunch and each other’s company at our spring luncheon at the Holmes Student Center. These LLIers were among the many enjoying the deck at the Pietens’ home at our annual soiree, with delicious food made by our members.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

LLI Fall 2024 ................. Sept. 10-Oct. 31
LLI Winter 2025 ............... Jan. 14-Feb. 6
LLI Spring 2025 .............. March 18-May 8
LLI 2025 Soiree..................... June 21