

# THE TRICORN

NEWSLETTER published jointly by the BOSTON •  
LONG ISLAND • PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS

AUGUST 1994

## BOOM TIME FOR JUNIOR GREAT BOOKS

The Junior Great Books Program has taken off in many areas of the country. More and more school districts are finding Great Books a valuable adjunct to their regular curricula. In most places the original idea of leaders coming from a corps of parent-volunteers has been superseded by a prevalent pattern of student groups led by teachers. Those who lead the groups must first be trained in the Great Books method, because the too-common style of guessing the answer in the teacher's mind subverts the Great Books style of open-ended questioning. The supply of parent-volunteers has been decimated by the return of women to work, of course. However, there are still places where parents and other volunteers carry the program.

The impressive Detroit program now consists of 400 student participants (grades 2-12), and forty trained discussion leaders from all walks of life - librarians, parents, nurses, teachers, social workers, and many other community volunteers. Every other Saturday, from September through March, twenty groups meet at the library for one and a half hours to discuss the Junior Great Books selections. Detroit's far-reaching success is due to participant enthusiasm, a network of parent and community support, and a strong sense of purpose and progress that has developed over the years. The Detroit program receives an annual grant from A & R Pipeline (not to be confused with A & R Auto Parts). The money subsidizes part of the fee for leader training, and all of the costs of the "Finale" - the library's end-of-year Great Books celebration.

A more usual, school-centered Junior Great Books Program has become an instant success in Maryland. Christ Episcopal is a small elementary school in Rockville. In 1991, Coleen Fitzpatrick, a learning specialist and the school's Great Books coordinator, piloted the Junior Great Books Read-Aloud Program. Just one year later, all students in grades K-6 were participating in Junior Great Books. "We knew JGB was going to be wonderful," states Fitzpatrick, "but it was more than that - it was a resounding success!"

Fitzpatrick initiated Junior Great Books after reading about the program in an education journal. She and the school's librarian decided to take the Foundation's Basic Leader Training Course and pilot the program in the first and second grades. "We felt that if we could handle Junior Great Books successfully with five-, six-, and seven-year-olds, we could handle it well with older students." As Fitzpatrick and her partner tried the Read-Aloud material that first year, the first- and second-grade teachers observed and made notes. Now, all K-6 teachers have taken the training course and implemented the program with about 125 students. "Our schoolwide goal is to make cross-curricular connections and to develop children's critical thinking skills and abilities," states Fitzpatrick. She says, in summing up, "Junior Great Books is one of the most rewarding programs I've ever experienced as a teacher. We're committed to making the time and finding the energy to do the program justice."

## More Kudos for Junior Great Books

Junior Great Books received the highest rating in general curricular features of any reading program evaluated by the National Javits Project for Language Arts Research. The Javits project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education to establish criteria and identify exemplary programs with the goal of improving the language arts curriculum for gifted and talented students. The project's final report concluded that Junior Great Books "supports and promotes active, interpretive, risk-taking engagement with literature. It creates a stimulating classroom that values diverse thinking, collaborative learning and reflection. It fosters a community of co-learners and problem solvers."

## BOSTON NEWS

### Mary Vallier Honored

Mary Vallier, long time Great Books leader and former President of the Boston Council, was named Citizen of the Year by the Quincy Sun newspaper. This award was presented at a reception attended by more than 100 family members, friends, city officials, and invited guests, many of whom are Great Books friends.

As a co-founder of DOVE (Domestic Violence Ended), Mary has devoted the past fifteen years to aiding battered women and abused children. The shelter she helped to establish has served as a model for similar programs in other parts of the country. After founding DOVE, Mary went into the community, speaking to groups, and was also instrumental in training the DOVE staff of volunteers.

Mary was a board member of the Quincy Symphony Orchestra for seventeen years, and is presently an active member of the South Shore Coalition for Human Rights, United First Parish Church, and the Women's Alliance. As she approaches her eightieth birthday, Mary appears ageless and indefatigable.

One of the City Council members summed it up as he presented Mary with a commendation: "You are an example of what all of us should be. Your gracious soul and tender touch are truly a benefit to the people of this community."

We agree.

### Peg Mahoney's Play Produced

Congratulations to Peg Mahoney, produced playwright! In April, the Boston Center for the Arts presented a staged reading of her play, *Patterns in Glass*, with a full house both nights. A discussion followed both performances, with the audience providing critical feedback. Many Great Bookers were in attendance, which made for lively discussion. Peg says she is in the process of rewriting, with the hope of a full production next season. Her many friends are delighted for the popular new playwright.

### Sad News : Joe Dennis

Last Winter, in a small town in New Hampshire, a big bear of a man was found sitting comfortably in his chair, his treasured books by his side, listening to Mozart. Months before, as he sat writing, his ever-present oxygen beside him, the eighty-year-old bear had scrawled, "He got caught in a perfectly natural condition: mortality."

Joe Dennis's loved ones are sure that Joe went out on a grand note.

# PHILADELPHIA NEWS

## Honor and Memorial Cards

Honor and memorial cards are available for those who wish to honor or remember friends by contributions in their names made to Great Books. Simply send the necessary information along with your contribution to Bernard Wald, 2200 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Apt. 902-S, Philadelphia, PA 19130, His phone number is 215-564-0463.

## Golden Anniversary Ahead!

Great Books will be fifty years old in 1997!! A cause for celebration, and celebrate we shall! Our Philadelphia Great Books Council is already co-planning with the San Francisco Council, and a number of other regional councils will surely be jumping on the celebration bandwagon. Meetings are scheduled locally and at Colby to brainstorm ideas. Our 50th Anniversary Committee, headed by Public Relations Chairman Marney Hague, would be delighted to receive your suggestions for forms our observation might take. Write to Marney at 2018 Green Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130, or call her at 215-977-7873.

## Publicizing Our Program

Philadelphia Great Books has high hopes of attracting new members through demonstration panel discussions this fall, co-sponsored by the local council and The Free Library of Philadelphia. The participants in these two or three projected discussions will be chosen from local groups, with readings yet to be selected. These events, to be heavily publicized by the Library, should draw a considerable audience. They will take place in the auditorium of the Main Library, Logan Square.

## Rubbernecking at Readers

Why must I find out what utter strangers are reading? What impulse compels me to twist my neck painfully to read the title of the book the old fellow across from me on the bus is dozing over? How close can I get to that girl buried in a book on the beach without kicking sand in her face? I *must* know the title of the book being consumed by the woman sitting alone in the restaurant: Is she having a plate of Plato? A dish of Dickens? A bowl of Bellow? Of what possible use to me is this information? None! Does my world expand with the knowledge that the steel-suited woman at the bus -stop is wasting her wits with Judith Krantz? Why am I disappointed to discover that Sidney Sheldon is popular at the pool?

How dare I be critical at the choices of these strangers? I've read my own share of junk in my day. And yet I continue, year after year, stretching my neck and sticking my nose in other people's books.

## If Your Leader Is Leaving...

Has your group been meeting for decades? Is your faithful old leader announcing his or her retirement, after only twenty-three years at the helm? Does the group lack other trained leaders? Is no noble soul poised to leap into the breach? This isn't THE END; it's simply time to reorganize. What you need now is a *corps* of leaders, several group members who will take leader training in order to rotate in facilitating discussions. In that way no one member is unduly burdened, and the group survives and thrives. A good number of groups have already organized this way, since leaders seem to be an endangered species. It amazes us now that when the Program began, co-leaders (two at a time!) were standard equipment for groups. That idea long since starved out of existence.

If your group is ready to adopt this method, contact Coordinator Betsy Galante (215-885-2595) or Leader Trainer Sibyl Cohen (215-568-9827).

# LONG ISLAND NEWS

## History Repeats Itself at Long Island Spring Institute

In the Biographical Acknowledgement of *The Martial Spirit*, a history of the Spanish-American War, Walter Millis says:

It may seem that I have stressed the satiric aspects of the war. This is true; and my defense is the belief that every war in modern times has presented precisely the same elements, though ordinarily they are concealed beneath the immense tragedy which war normally involves. Our war with Spain merely offered an opportunity to examine them in one case where the tragedy was not present.

In Chapter I, Millis describes the historic event as beginning with the irrelevance of a boiler explosion (the sinking of the Maine), being *conducted like an absent-minded comic opera*, and ending with *a colonial empire acquired - a strangely unstatesmanlike combination of sheer accident and (President McKinley's) direct revelation*. From all this he drew the conclusion, "It seems hardly just," to which we add, "It seems hardly history."

But what is history anyhow? Mostly yesterday's newspapers, read with the hope that maybe hindsight might precede foresight, or maybe that by knowing what didn't really happen in the past, we'll find out what's happening now... and who decides when an insurrection becomes a revolution? and why we didn't buy Cuba when we had the chance? and how come we're always electing war heroes to political office? and is this what Aristotle meant when he said that poetry is more philosophical than history? or did he mean that history will always be an outside source?

## Long Island's Latest Addition

A new group is meeting at the Franklin Square Library - 19 Lincoln Road, Franklin Square. Anyone interested in joining call Marguerite Rossi, 516-437-2625.

## Reminder

The Colby Committee appreciates your support of the **Is Wachs Memorial Endowment Fund**. The number of donors, and gifts in memory of Great Books participants and friends, continues to grow. Contributions are tax deductible. Checks, payable to the Fund, should be sent to the Is Wachs Great Books Forum, Inc. - 680 Elton Road, Riverhead, NY 11901.

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## I, For One...

I, for one, do not find solitude  
a lonely trip.  
To tag along a third would only crowd  
my self-companionship.

Charles Ferrara

## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

Books - Billiards - Booze. Some thoughts on seeing that the library at Pocono Manor has been converted into a bar-annex. For over ninety years it was a haven and quiet refuge for book lovers and muted conversations. Walls were lined with books. Numerous comfortable chairs here and there. Objects of art stood about. How many ideas and emotions must have been born there! Now all is changed. A door has been cut in the wall into the bar. A billiard table has been placed in the center of the room. Several tables have appeared for additional bar seating. An era has passed. Is this another metaphor for the decline in book reading?

Charles S. Brown

To the Editor:

December 13, Is Wachs's birthday, brought many memories of that really good man. This past holiday season a number of greetings showed how many other friends were also thinking of Is. Two, in particular, seemed very dear - Nancy O'Rourke's and Jess Horseman's. Perhaps you might want to use some quotes in the Tricorn. Both Nancy and Jess said they would be pleased:

Nancy O'Rourke: "...wondering how Colby can get along without the loving and generous presence of Is. The time always has to come, but it is never the right time for those left behind, even when logical for the one we lose..."

Jesse Horseman: "...so saddened by our loss of Is Wachs. His memory will live as long as any of my children are around. Mary was one of his greatest fans, and you well know that I found him without peer. He was my favorite participant. He always brought a special point of view to every group, and yet I never saw him try to dominate a discussion. I had more respect for Is than for any man I've known..

Evelyn Reader

To the Editor:

Recently, in preparing for a discussion of selections from Plato's *Republic*, I reviewed notes made when I discussed similar selections at the Great Books Summer Institute on "Great Issues in Education" at Bennington College in 1955. There I first met Is Wachs, and the Wachs Great Books Summer Institute was inspired, I believe, by the experience we shared during that week.

Among other readings was A.N. Whitehead's *The Aims of Education*, from which one of my favorite passages seems to characterize what should be the primary aim of leaders: "What education (discussion of great Books - A.B.) has to impart is an intimate sense of the power of ideas, for the beauty of ideas and for the structure of ideas, together with a particular body of knowledge."

I wonder how many currently active leaders share Whitehead's view?

Yours in the Great Books Enterprise,

Aaron Bechtel

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Editor's note: The piece about Frank Alberti in the February Tricorn was wrongly attributed; the writer was Ann Levison.

## Read All About It

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One of the three chairs at Walden, you remember, was for solitude. "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude." said our friend Thoreau. He may have had in mind Wordsworth's "inward eye, the bliss of solitude," with its implied freedom to read, whenever and whatever. In the world that's increasingly too much with us, we must grab the "whatever" even in a crowd, to translate reading matter to mind. The matter of reading is a problem as endless as the horizon. What to read next? What not? What to reread? An individual and insoluble problem, yet a happy one. Three concomitants are How, Where, and When to read, pleasant posers in themselves.

How? The primal position of children, lying flat on the floor as if drawing strength from the earth like Antaeus, is often the private preference of adults. (Alas, society ranks the vertical person above the horizontal one, in public.)

Now Where? The world is full of Where. Quality of comfort while reading varies greatly according to the degree of absorption. An assignment demands a hard chair at a desk. A novel needs a nest. Articles can be gleaned casually: in the bath, while stirring the soup, during a boring phone call, even in a stuck elevator.

As for When - *carpe diem*. Carried to extremes, reading has risks. A driver can be nudged from behind if his reading at the wheel persists beyond the period of the red light. A meal might be missed by virtue of a mesmerizing author. And in traveling, a later plane may have to do, if concentration on facts or fiction blocks out scheduled announcements. (I had occasion to sleep overnight on an airport bench because a Russian novelist preempted my catching a once-a-day flight; yet I continue to be a terminal reader. Other hazards include sunburn from printed page takeover on the beach, and collisions (Oops) caused by reading while walking. Ignoring the smell of smoke could send a devotee of deep philosophy into deeper sleep; the lone, similarly entranced occupant of a leaky rowboat risks greater depths.

Ah, books. At home or away... Some are like beloved pets. I know where each of mine came from, and when. I remember our first acquaintance and my subsequent degree of fondness. I know they are there to come home to, and I can rediscover them with understanding friends. I can no more forget the advent of my dear Holy, a nondescript gray cat who stayed with us for nineteen years, than I can the gift of a Tenniel-illustrated *Alice in Wonderland*. In each case I coveted sinfully and still do: I dwell on photos of Holycat, and guard my non-loanable volume. Oh, the joy of the obsession. In sedentary solitude, I glean reality. Literary intimacy with fictional and biographical characters has stretched my mind so that I can listen and commiserate with winners and losers, can hear one side of a broken relationship and understand both it and the other, can believe the incredible. An embarrassment of riches from solitary reading. Anyone for a hundred years of it?

Claire Gerber

## Summer Discussions in Wilmington

Once again, participants eager for a summer fix found their way to Wilmington for the seasonal discussions those in the area have come to anticipate. Readings this year were Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, some work by women poets, and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

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PHILADELPHIA'S 24th ANNUAL GREAT BOOKS

FALL INSTITUTE WEEKEND

November 11, 12, 13, 1994

POCONO MANOR INN

FREEDOM IN THE BALANCE

Falconer . . . . . John Cheever

Two essays:

A Plea for Captain John Brown. . . . .

Henry David Thoreau

Free Man's Worship. Bertrand Russell

Largo Desolato . . . . . Vaclav Havel

translated by Tom Stoppard



*When you have robbed a man of everything, he is no longer in your power. He is free again.* Alexander Solzhenitsyn

COST WILL HOLD AT: \$200 per person , double occupancy, \$260 for single occupancy. Price includes meals, lodging, books, entertainment and tips.

TO REGISTER: Please send a deposit of \$100 per person for double occupancy and \$130 for single occupancy with your registration form to

Sylvia Perelman  
8214 Marion Road  
Elkins Park, PA, 19117

CANCELLATION: Your deposit less a charge for books and mailing will be refunded if notice is postmarked no later than October 8.

REGISTRATION FORM

Enclosed is a deposit of \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 per person double occupancy or \$130 per person single occupancy - (if available) made payable to Fall Institute Committee.

Names (please give the first and last name of each person)		Non-smoking	Smoking	No
		group	group	preference
(first) _____	(last) _____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
(first) _____	(last) _____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Address (street) \_\_\_\_\_

(city) \_\_\_\_\_ (state) \_\_\_\_\_ (zip) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Special requests should accompany this form. They will be honored if possible.

(Optional) I would like to room with \_\_\_\_\_

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Great Books  
14 Bay Second St.  
Islip, NY 11751