

Fall 2024



MCLL News

A midsummer day's dream of a picnic



What could be more enjoyable on a perfect summer day than packing a lunch and meeting friends in Angrignon Park?

The sun was shining and the ducks were paddling on July 26 when MCLL held its first-ever Midsummer Picnic. Members emerging from the Angrignon métro had to walk for no more than a couple of minutes, following a series of eye-catching MCLL lawn signs, to our leafy glade by the water, in the shade of massive willow trees.

What followed was a leisurely afternoon in which old friends greeted new, stories were told, snacks were shared, and laughter was plentiful. It was tempting to stay til evening!

Last spring MCLL program administrator, **Zoe Chiu**, and the **office volunteers** came up with the idea of hosting Mix and Mingle events — low-cost or free get-togethers open to all. The hope was to revive the social life of 680 Sherbrooke before the pandemic. Volunteers — accustomed to manning the office phones, doing online tasks, and locking and unlocking doors — were happy to take on this new challenge.

The program began with a comedy event held in spring, when members gathered to share belly laughs and snacks while watching Monty Python, Phyllis Diller, and Bob Newhart clips. Next was a Scrabble round-robin held in the music room. Players rotated from chair to chair, switching opponents with each new game while keeping a cumulative score. Participants paid \$3 for each event. (The picnic was free!)

More entertaining happenings are in the works. Please join us! 🍁

Susan Purcell



McGill

School of
Continuing Studies

Denise Marchand

Portrait artist probes her subjects' emotions

Last year at MCLL's request, **Denise Marchand** began weekly visits to Manoir Westmount to converse in French with interested residents. Staff became aware that Denise was a portrait artist with a special interest in the human experience of drawing live models and suggested she use some of the residents as subjects. Several residents wanted to take part, and last winter Denise began one-on-one sessions with 12 female and two male residents. The Manoir held an exhibit of her work last spring entitled "For the Beauty of Aging." Included was this graphite and charcoal portrait of Stanley Wasilewski. **Lorne Huston** asked Denise about her process:

Could you describe your approach?

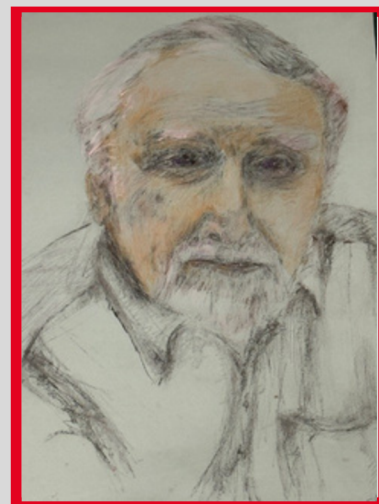
I keep it very simple. I start by taking some photos, and I ask them to bring me an object with a special meaning in their lives. I don't ask them to pay, and the portrait is theirs to keep after the exhibition.

What do you need from your subject?

My main interest is to engage in conversation to get a feel for who they are. I don't consider myself primarily a visual artist — I need to hear their story and feel the spirit and emotions that my subject is willing to share before I can make a portrait.

Why do you do this?

I have no interest in drawing a perfect nude body in an art class! These elderly subjects are so beautiful. This practice helped me grapple with the reality of aging, with my fears. Making portraits brings together two dimensions that are vital to me: interpersonal communication and my profound attraction to the act of drawing. Each portrait is an attempt to convey something of this experience of togetherness. 🍁



Art in the MCLL lounge



Sylvia Kissin's paintings are currently on view in our lounge for all to see and enjoy. As she has written, "I began painting in 2009 while still working as a lawyer, with classes in Toronto and Montreal. My medium of choice is acrylic. Initially drawing inspiration from paintings which I admired, I eventually created my own abstract works which emphasize colour, composition, texture, and size. Starting in 2015 I have published a yearly calendar showcasing my paintings. Since retiring in 2018, I have devoted more time to painting in a studio collective where I benefit from fellow painters' works and critiques. My first show was at the Maison des Arts in Mont Blanc, in the Laurentians." 🍁



MCLL leaders:

Let's give seniors a sense of agency

“What is your vision for the McGill Community for Lifelong Learning (MCLL)?” is a somewhat daunting question one is asked upon taking up the challenge of leading MCLL. It is one that **Nadine Ozkan**, MCLL vice president, and I are tackling.



Since retiring, I've enjoyed unprecedented control over my time and attention, which has been both transformative and enjoyable.



I've encountered at MCLL a vibrant community of individuals who, despite their age, exhibit a vitality and engagement that rival those of much younger people. This experience has challenged my previous ageist attitudes and highlighted the importance of confronting such biases, which are as damaging as racism or sexism.

At MCLL, we are sitting on a valuable resource and are keen to share it more widely. Society often overlooks the elderly, who may face loneliness, health issues, or a loss of

purpose. MCLL is addressing these issues by creating a supportive and dynamic environment. The fact that many members remain at MCLL for years suggests they too find a sense of agency here, with opportunities for learning and community that foster lasting happiness.

Our challenge as leaders is to spread awareness of MCLL and its programs, including to those who might feel intimidated by the idea of a university. Our diverse offerings range in style from rigorous study groups to casual meet-ups. To attract more members, we need to expand our curriculum and enhance our marketing efforts to reach individuals with specific interests, such as writing memoirs or improving health. Fostering intergenerational study groups has also proven beneficial, promoting mentorship and friendships across ages. We should continue such initiatives. Financially, emphasizing our planned giving program will encourage members to sustain and grow MCLL by contributing to its future.

MCLL aims to be a centre not just for learning, but for applying that knowledge to advocate for our community and beyond. I look forward to collaborating with Nadine to advance these goals in the coming two years. 🍁

Chris Neal, MCLL President



Fall study groups **New moderators...**

Dan Babineau

Music in Cinema



After starting out in corporate communications, Dan spent 31 years at Champlain College teaching film production and music appreciation. For 20 of those years, he also taught a course a year at his alma

mater, Concordia University, in subjects from special effects to crime cinema to film music. He came to realize he had a soft spot for the history of film music, from silent films onward. Of MCLL, Dan quips, “After years teaching CEGEP, what a treat it is to learn with people who understand my references to *Casablanca*.”

Jared Beebe

Adventures in Mine-finding on Four Different Continents



Oklahoma-born Jared is used to travel, having lived in five U.S. states by the age of 10. A temporary job in the 70s with the U.S. Geological Survey at their map warehouse led to his career in geology. Junior explora-

tion companies sent Jared around the globe to explore for profitable mineral deposits. His searches ranged from copper in Sudan to gold and silver in Mexico. He generally worked three months away, three weeks home — repeat. His wife is from Quebec; in 1998 they moved to Montreal.

Alan Belk

Let's Do Philosophy



As he approached midlife in the late 90s, Alan was tired of being “a wage slave in IT.” Born in the U.K., he had relocated to Toronto in his twenties and now decided to move with his wife and children to Guelph,

to get an MA, then a PhD, in the philosophy of science. After several years teaching at University of Guelph, two years ago he moved to Montreal, where his daughter now lives. Alan loves being an “active grandparent” and enjoys life in leafy Outremont. He welcomes the chance to discuss ideas at MCLL, especially about the “why” of science.

Peter Blaikie

From Paris 1919 to Berlin 1945



Peter is a distinguished lawyer and a notable figure in politics. Former president of the federal Progressive Conservative Party and head of the English-language rights group Alliance Quebec, he was lead plaintiff in the 1979 constitutional challenge of the Quebec Charter of the French language. He says he landed at MCLL after years meeting a group of male friends for lunch. “They told me I couldn’t stay in the group if I didn’t join MCLL.” Peter gave in and has taken several study groups in recent years.

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Fall study groups ...So glad to have you!

Randy Kritkauský

Exploring Indigeneity in North America



Randy was an environmentalist in Pennsylvania in the late eighties when he heard that Soviet president Gorbachev wanted westerners to bring their environmental know-how to the USSR. With

his wife he created *Ecologia*, an international non-profit, and spent two decades commuting to (by then) former Soviet states. Eventually realizing “the public is not spiritually engaged with nature,” Randy delved into his maternal Anishinaabe heritage and in 2020 published *Without Reservation*. From his homes in Vermont and Montreal, he fights for recognition for indigenous cultures.

Lawrence Lincoln

Optimizing Aging in 2024



Larry has made running and other healthy practices part of his daily routine since he was in medical school in the 70s. Recently retired from orthopaedic surgery at St. Mary's Hospital, Larry continues his health-conscious lifestyle. He spent three years as a family doctor in Cowansville before returning to McGill to qualify as a specialist, which “with the current training system emphasis, would be next to impossible” now, he notes. He says sleep, exercise, and social connection are keys to good health.

Peggy Leech

Smorgasbord of Science and Technology



Peggy organized and is introducing this series of lectures. Her background is in meteorology; as a consultant she tackled problems such as the effect of severe weather on transmission lines. For 25

years she taught applied physics at John Abbott College, and concluded her career there with nine years as an associate dean. She's done lectures and workshops at McGill and Université de Montréal's École Polytechnique. Peggy joined MCLL in 2022 and, as a member of the curriculum committee, has mentored other moderators since 2023.

Maurene Wilson

Writers' Circle



Maurene taught at University of Calgary in International Social Development and Latin American Studies and did fieldwork in Latin America, including five years in Nicaragua. Some of her most important teachers have been indigenous people she has known. A single mum, she moved to Montreal to be near her daughter, now an architect, and two grandchildren. Here Maurene turned to creative writing. “After years of academic writing, I wanted to see if I had a spark of creativity left in me.” She had a busy summer participating in writers' workshops. 🍁

Susan Purcell



Books

Tales of adventure, loss, and serendipity

Birdsong

Sebastian Faulks (1997)

Bereft at abandonment by a married woman in France, Stephen Wraysford returns to England. Four years later, he is thrust into the hellish gas and mud of northern France as a First World War recruit. This hard-hitting novel intertwines the horror of war, its main focus, with Stephen's quest to locate his lost love. It jumps forward at times to 1978 England, where a young woman seeks to understand the wartime ordeal of a grandfather she never knew. Grim but gripping, lightened toward the end when a broken Stephen unexpectedly finds healing.

The Briar Club

Kate Quinn (2024)



Another fun feminist take by Quinn on a historic era, this time the McCarthy anti-Communist witch-hunt days of the early 50s. It's set in a shabby Washington boarding-house full of odd and unfriendly female residents. When the

mysterious and attractive Grace March moves in, a community builds and the fun begins. Before long, one body and then another are discovered, and shocking truths come out.

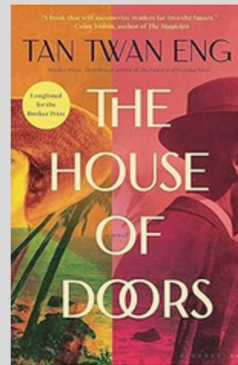
The Navigator of New York

Wayne Johnson (2002)

A mammoth tale of a man's search for the truth about his origins, starting from a lonely boyhood in Newfoundland and onward to New York and the frozen Arctic wastes. Laced with tragedy and betrayal, this novel gives a real sense of the mad rush for the North Pole and the strange men who were driven to reach it.

The House of Doors

Tan Twan Eng (2023)



This novel weaves fact and fiction in the telling of several stories set in the British expat community of Penang, Malaysia in 1921. Writer Somerset Maugham is visiting a British couple while on the lookout for inspirational plots. One such plot is the trial of

Ethel Proudlock for killing her neighbour, a true story which actually inspired Maugham's novel *The Letter*. Another is told by his hostess, trapped in a loveless marriage, about her liaison with a close Chinese ally of revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-Sen.

When Will There Be Good News?

Kate Atkinson (2008)

It begins with a six-year-old girl narrowly escaping a traumatic murder scene. We then jump 30 years ahead into a series of seemingly unrelated but interesting narratives which eventually begin to fit together and make sense of it all, with the help of some amazing coincidences. Grisly murders and cruel abandonments litter the plot, but Atkinson manages to inject this rollicking tale with warmth, wit, and positivity. Hard to put down!



Susan Purcell



Books

How the West set the scene for Mid-East conflict

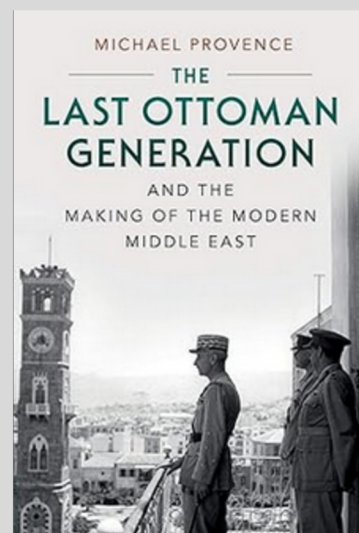
The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East

Michael Provence (Cambridge University Press, 2017)

With the defeat of Turkey in the First World War, the Ottoman Empire's Arab territory was transferred to Britain and France, who divided it into new colonial states. These colonies would eventually become present day Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. The League of Nations gave Britain and France mandates — legal status for transfer of territory—whose intended purpose was to oversee the well-being and development of Middle East inhabitants.

In theory, mandates would free the Middle East population from the “Turks.” Michael Provence concludes that this was not the case. He critically reconstructs the mandate period between the two World Wars through the eyes of local people. He shows how Ottoman rule was imperfect but more just and democratic than the regime imposed by the war's European victors. Middle East inhabitants had much in common before Europeans divided them into colonial states and created ethnic tension leading to present day conflict.

Provence follows the lives of Ottoman military officers who led armed revolts against the mandates. He quotes petitions to the League of Nations from civilians and political leaders demanding the right of self-representation and decrying aerial bombing of their villages. He introduces us to people like Madame Shahbandar, a resident of Damascus, who held meetings in her home and organized women's marches. Michael Provence brings the interwar years to life and documents with extensive notes, bibliography, and maps. 🐦



Carolyn Cunnison

Older learners inspire this new moderator

Barbara Karasek joined MCLL last spring as a moderator, fresh from a long career in post-secondary teaching. She led a popular study group on Folk & Fairy Tales. Barbara's enthusiasm was infectious. We asked her what's behind it.

Why are you so happy to share ideas with lifelong learners?

When I was teaching children's literature courses at Concordia University, the presence of older students, given their familiarity and experience with the material, added immeasurably to class discussions. I vowed that, upon retirement, I would seek out teaching/learning groups consisting of mature individuals . . . and I have found this with MCLL!

What's special about the way MCLLers handled your fairy tale SG?

As children and as adults —much parenting and grand-parenting expertise there! — group members
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Older learners' life experience enriches discussion

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were familiar with the material and yet interested in discovering what more these stories had to offer. The variety of group members' backgrounds, both academically and with regard to career history, made for lively discussion. I initiated each class by imparting some of my "expertise" from decades of having analyzed these stories, but the observations and questions shared by the group provided many new insights. It was a very satisfying exchange of views!

Editor's note: Has an MCLL moderator made learning an exciting experience for you? Let us know! 🇨🇦

MCLL September 2024 lunch

A creative way to keep lunch costs in check



School lunch took on a new meaning when MCLLers met for their annual See You in September lunch — not in a restaurant, but in our classrooms. Tables were rearranged to create a dining room atmosphere, complete with candlelight, flowers, soft music, and a roaring fire (on screen, of course). After a summer apart, new and returning members enjoyed each other's company in an ambiance of warmth and friendship.

The **Special Events Committee** had investigated multiple restaurants to accommodate our large group, but ultimately concluded that \$60-\$70 per person was an unreasonable amount to pay for lunch. They decided to think "outside the box" and tried this format as a test case. For \$35, food was catered and wine provided. Afterwards people congregated in the lounge for coffee and dessert, so everyone had a chance to mingle.

A team of volunteers arrived early to set up and stayed to clean up. Among them were **Jeff Sidel, Nadine Ozkan, Lorne Huston, Christine Mutter, Gordon Postill, Tim Skene, Denise Lord, Dagna Liszkowski, and Margit Zylberberg**. **Zoe Chiu** and **Sally Cooper** from the office and office volunteer **Helen Forsyth** helped in numerous ways. It was a great example of MCLL members pulling together to make things work. 🇨🇦

Special Events Committee: Linda Sidel, Cynthia Bowllan, and Kathy Lauer

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We'd love to hear from you!

Please send your comments or suggestions to suepurcell@videotron.ca

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