



February 2016
Academic Year

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RETIREES NEWSLETTER

Professional Staff Congress

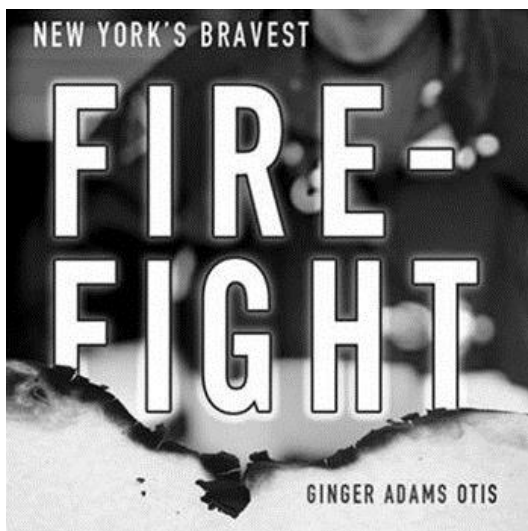
Joan Greenbaum, editor

psc-cuny.org/retirees

CHAPTER MEETING, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1. The featured speaker at the Monday, February 1 chapter meeting is **Ginger Otis**, author and NY *Daily News* reporter, who will discuss her book, ***Firefight: The Century-Long Battle to Integrate NY's Bravest.*** Several members of the Vulcan Society, the organization of black men and women who fought for a place in the Fire Department of New York City, will join Otis. Together, they will tell a powerful story about human agency and change from an important chapter in NYC civil rights and labor history.

As always, the Chapter meets at **61 Broadway, 16th floor**, in the **PSC Union Hall, from 1–3 PM**. Light refreshments will be served. [Last year we had mounds of snow for the February meeting but we are betting on clear sailing for this eventful meeting. You also might enjoy the book after you hear Otis talk].

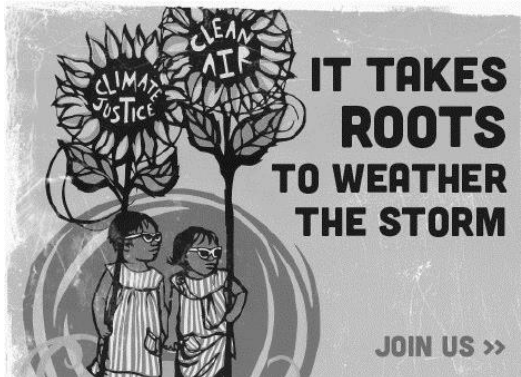
The Retirees Executive Committee meets at 10 AM in the PSC's Justice Room, 15th floor. Executive Committee meetings are open to all members. We have been discussing goals for the chapter and planning future events.



UPCOMING:

WRITERS' WORKSHOP. If you are at home (or tucked away in a library) and want to share your writings, join us. And bring five copies of a few pages to share for supportive discussion. For more information contact Connie Gemson at 212-874-7788. The group meets the second Tuesday of the month from 2-4 PM. PSC 15th floor. **Next meetings: February 9, March 8, April 12, and May 10**

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP. The PSC Retiree Chapter has been the catalyst for the Social Safety Net campaign, and is now working with in-service members to develop an ongoing Environmental Justice project. After the November Retiree Chapter meeting, which presented a panel on Climate Change, twenty retirees stayed to discuss organizing a permanent group to address this critical issue.



Many PSC members participated in the historic and massive September 2014 March in NYC and realized that one march does not resolve the issue. We have since met in December and January and will meet in February to formulate a mission statement with a view toward recognition by the PSC Executive Council. So far our focus has been on gathering information on environmental justice in CUNY (courses, programs, activities) and in NYC (other environmental organizations and events). We aim to move to coordination of activities and action. Join us. Future meetings and activities will be listed in the

retiree section of the PSC website. You can contact us through the website. **Next meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2-4 pm.**

SOCIAL SAFETY NET WORKING GROUP. This working group has been meeting monthly and is committed to fighting for an expanded social safety net, including Food Stamps, Unemployment Insurance, Disability payments, Medicaid, and, of course, Medicare and Social Security. We have been conducting activist workshops throughout the state with union and community groups. If you have a community or religious group that would welcome a workshop, please let us know: safetynet@pscmail.org. **Next meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 17, 12-2 PM.**

OTHER ACTIVITIES. As winter winds down, we want to continue to plan outdoor activities, such as historical walking tours and trips to places of interest. We are also planning an outing focused on food and architecture (nosh and learn). And nothing would prevent us as a group of retirees from getting tickets together to a Mets or Yankees game in April or May. Let us know your suggestions for activities, and if you want to help organize an event, contact us: retirees@pscmail.org.

THE MONTHS THAT WERE

JANUARY 11TH LUNCHEON. The winter luncheon was a chance to meet and greet old (sic) colleagues, amidst a backdrop of photos from **Stephen Sommerstein** and an outstandingly researched and moving talk by **Mark Levy** about CUNY students' involvement with Freedom Summer. All of this was bookended by a current CUNY graduate student, **Robin Laverne Wilson** (professionally known as Dragon Fly), who sang and performed freedom songs with and for us.

newspaper, *Main Events*, provided the chapter a PowerPoint version of his much acclaimed photo exhibition of the second march from Selma to Montgomery featured recently at the New York Historical Society (chronicling the participation of a busload of CCNY students). The PowerPoint presentations of both Sommerstein and Levy can be viewed on the PSC website at psc-cuny.org/bearing-witness..

Freedom Schools Remembered: Mark Levy. There is no better way to welcome the New Year than by remembering the past, particularly times of hope. And that is what Mark Levy, the speaker at the January luncheon, did. He reminded us of the great movements of the '60s, when people of color and women were gaining strength in this country.

A graduate of Queens College and retired public school teacher, Levy spoke about his journey south to teach, along with his wife, in Mississippi. They were part of a group of volunteers from colleges and universities throughout the North who taught and lived in small communities in the deep South. Rather than dwell on himself, he mentioned the unsung heroes who had influenced his decision to become involved in the Civil Rights Movement and the people he lived and worked with during Freedom Summer. He recalled three women: Helen Hendricks, a secretary, and Dorothy Zellner and Rita Schwerner. They were Queens College students



The front page of the April 5, 1965 *Main Events*, the CCNY evening students newspaper which Sommerstein edited.

Sommerstein, who in 1965 was editor of the CCNY evening students'

who recruited him and other classmates to the Freedom Schools in Mississippi.

He credited Helen Hendricks, who opened his eyes to inequality and exploitation. Above all, he lauded the courage of black people who lived in the communities where the schools operated. We often hear the expression, "It takes a village to raise a child." Well, in Mississippi it took a community to ensure the success of the schools. The local people put their lives and livelihood in jeopardy to protect, feed and house their northern visitors. When the volunteers from the North ventured out at night, they were accompanied by their host; their meals were prepared and delivered to the schools by women of the community, who also entrusted their children to the effort. Levy said that he was always aware that he could leave at any time, but not them. The community members had to stay, and may still be there. Regardless of where they are, their courage and that of the Freedom School teachers and pupils remind us that what we had and lost may come again. We misunderstood the strength of an opposition that has steadily eroded and chipped away at progress. If we get another chance, let us not "Take our eyes off the prize. Let's hold on."
-Cecelia McCall

Bearing Witness To The Freedom School Movement: Jacki DiSalvo.
Retirees at our recent luncheon experienced the moving presentation

by Mark Levy of the remarkable documents and photos from his Queens College Civil Rights Archive (archives.qc.cuny.edu/civilrights/about), especially those about CUNY faculty and students' participation in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer. Mark, formerly of Queens College, like Tony O'Brien (another PSC activist attending the session), taught in the Meridian Freedom School, where classes ranged from literacy to Black History to languages and typing. Others, including myself and David Laibman (Brooklyn College), were also volunteers.

HEAR! HEAR!
HOW OUR BROTHERS
Died For Freedom
AND HOW WE ARE CARRYING
ON THE FIGHT IN MISSISSIPPI

Mickey Schwerner James Chaney Andrew Goodman

HEAR
Mrs. Fanny Chaney
Courageous Mother of James Chaney
At New Zion Baptist Church
2319 THIRD STREET
THURS., AUG. 27, 1964
7:30 P. M.
C O R E

I am from an economically strapped working-class community of trailer courts and modest tract houses—

ours, condemned for Teterboro airport, was purchased at an auction and moved down the street. There wasn't a single black person in my neighborhood, and I absorbed the prevalent prejudices. My Catholic high school, in a partly black town had few black students. Antioch, the progressive college I attended on a disability scholarship as a polio survivor, also had few black students. I only interacted with African-Americans on the jobs which were part of our college curriculum. But soon, to my family's anxiety, I fell in love with a man from Harlem (and CUNY) and became a lifelong anti-racist activist.

The Student Nonviolent Organizing Committee (SNCC) hoped our white parents and neighbors would besiege their politicians to pressure the Justice Department to offer protection denied African-Americans, whose lives then, as now, were thought by Whites not to matter. I taught in the Freedom School in Greenville, which was safer than Neshoba County, where Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney and Queens College student, Andrew Goodman, were martyred (and where less than 20 years later Reagan began his Presidential campaign). We lived off the brave generosity of black families, but dared not to leave black neighborhoods. It was the only time I ever experienced a whole community united around a common cause behind their own grassroots leaders. We also registered voters

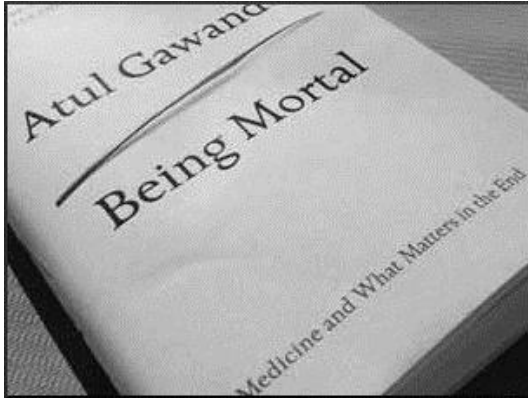
into the Freedom Democratic Party and tried unsuccessfully to replace the segregationist delegation to the Democratic Convention, a tactic which eventually diverted the movement into politics which, I believe, has paralyzed the black movement ever since. Resisting that take-over by then mostly white politicians led SNCC to cease building a unifying bi-racial movement, but thankfully both strategies may be revived in the Black Lives Matter movement. Unfortunately, we have learned the hard way that political rights will not eliminate still pervasive racism while our capitalist rulers retain the economic power that the movement hasn't challenged since MLK was assassinated on the eve of his Poor People's occupation of Washington.

-Jackie Disalvo



The Student Voice, SNCC newspaper in 1965

**DECEMBER'S CHAPTER
DISCUSSION; 'BEING MORTAL'
THE BOOK AND OUR LIVES**



Sooner or later we all have to go to a doctor for something. How have doctors' attitudes toward aging patients affected the care we receive? How do we, as informed individuals, become more comfortable with the intersection of modern medicine and our own mortality?

These themes, and others, examined in *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande were explored at the December 7 meeting of the Retiree Chapter. Drawing upon the insight and experience of three of our members, those present then engaged in small group discussions relating these issues to themes in Gawande's book and our own lives.

Lolly McIver, retired professor of ESL at BMCC, provided an overview of Gawande's book, noting that he believes that medicine "concentrates on repair of health, not sustenance

of the soul". Doctors are skilled in what they do, but they do not understand human needs, according to Gawande. In the rush to be cured, people have given over too much to doctors. "We look to doctors and medicine for something they cannot provide," McIver asserted. Gawande explains that with continuing advances in drug therapy and the development of new surgical techniques, more hospitals were built to accommodate the increase in those treated. Lives were given over to the medical institutions, with life being prolonged. And then, as a consequence, nursing homes were built to free up hospital beds—not because old people needed nursing homes; but because hospitals needed the beds. Gawande believes that nursing homes were never created to help people facing dependency in old age. According to him, the systems designed to deal with old age were always created to solve some other problem.

People in nursing homes generally resent the regimentation they are subjected to. The assisted living movement might provide some answers, but society, as a whole, has not addressed the issue of independent living in old age.

Joan Greenbaum, Professor Emerita at LaGuardia and the Graduate Center, shared some personal experiences in creating support networks. Greenbaum was involved in a very serious automobile accident while in a taxicab in

Washington, D.C. She organized help and assistance in being “kept sane” by a network of family and friends throughout her recovery. She wanted to stay in her own apartment, and she understood the stress placed upon individual caregivers in her family, so she recruited different people in the network to provide different needs. She avoided placing too much stress on any one person. She also asked a friend to serve as an email “gatekeeper” to coordinate visits. Joan noted, that one of her favorite Stones' songs was, "You don't always get what you want—but you get what you need"; but finding out what she really needed was not easy. She concluded by saying, “the process of starting a conversation about possible needs in aging or illness is really important for all of us.”

Personal experiences in living within an assisted living community were described by **Tucker Farley**, Professor Emerita at Brooklyn College. Tucker, who co-founded the first Woman's Study program in CUNY at Brooklyn College, is now living in Collington, a Kendal affiliate, located in Mitchellville, Maryland, outside of Washington, D.C. In making the choice to relocate, she reflected on the situation of her mother, who had Alzheimer's disease, and who resisted any movement away from her husband, the caregiver. Farley came to believe that a setting which gives graduated levels of care is important as one grows older. She also recognized

some signs which indicated that she would not be able to live independently. Entering the Kendal community as an independent liver in one's own apartment, the resident has assisted living and Alzheimer's care available, if necessary. Farley researched the Kendal group and the Quaker philosophy. She found a good fit between her views and the diversity that the Washington, D.C. area provides. She described the variety of activities and facilities which make her “so happy.”

-Joel Berger



Atul Gawande

AND THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES: Lolly McIver reflects on the book. Atul Gawande's book, *Being Mortal*, is both brilliant and maddening. Gawande has done all of us--young through very old--a good turn by opening a discussion on how medical professionals treat humans as they age. People are

living longer, but with less and less control over how they live. These days people rebel when they are warehoused in nursing homes.

Traditional old age in which the elderly were supported by a large family has gradually eroded. Now we have a fully defined idea of 'retirement' (a once radical idea) that includes, as Gawande says, a reverence for independence that "...takes no account of the reality of what happens in life: sooner or later independence will become impossible."

The maddening part about Gawande's book is that he mentions almost no one who is old and working to figure out what happens when independence is no longer possible. A good question to ask is "Where are the retirees demanding better choices in old age?" We need a political movement of engaged old people who bring about change in our institutions and our thinking about old age.

-Lolly McIver

And Tucker Farley reflects on living style & housing choices:

When I retired and thought about how to take care of my future self, whatever that might mean--(my memory wasn't as good as it used to be), I knew it made sense to do it earlier rather than later. I wanted to be able to make friends, and to become an active, contributing member of a community, living independently as long as I could.

I did not want to wait too long, or enter only for care I would eventually need without friends immediately at hand.

I looked over a number of independent communities, and rejected for-profit ones. Among the not-for-profits, I liked the Quaker-run Continuing Care Communities: the Kendals. They are resident-based and in many domains resident-run--I shared their values of equity, social service and activism--and very importantly, each campus is linked with a college or university so residents continue to have vital cultural and intellectual lives.



I did not want to leave my home. But the more I saw of the active, alert, vital independent living residents in Kendals I visited, with beautiful memory units, health centers, assisted living apartments, and attractive independent living residences with housekeeping, meals and a lifetime health plan, the more alive the prospect of moving from my beloved Brooklyn became. The DC area Collington Kendal has a gorgeous 125 acre campus, and--the best part for a Brooklyn gal--well established diversity! A good many of the residents, mostly liberal, have lived all over the world with active

interesting lives. The staff is caring and well taken care of in turn.

I have a spacious apartment with two patios and gardens. I take a fabulous water aerobics class twice a week, and believe it or not (I didn't think I could do it with my bum knee and mended broken back and bad feet): senior Pilates! I haven't felt this good in years, quite frankly. Residents may have varying ages/health issues, but we have chosen to live and participate in a caring community. As one who has been independent all my life, I am both humbled, and expansive--it is good to build caring mutual interdependence.

And I have found a project that is engaging me: a new senior coaching and assessment program developed by Kendal Outreach & Hebrew Senior Life at Harvard that considers wellness not only as physical fitness but includes coaches, tracking/data base, an interdisciplinary team supporting residents as whole persons: "Vitality 360." Doing exciting useful work in the community is revitalizing me!

-Tucker Pamella Farley
tuckerpfarley@gmail.com
Collington.Kendal.org

For more information about Kendal communities, including locations and philosophy see: www.kendal.org

TAKING POLITICAL ACTION WITH PSC/CUNY COPE.



Called once again to contribute to PSC/CUNY COPE, the union's political action fund, retirees responded generously, and in volume. As of mid-January, 266 retirees wrote checks for a total of \$13,709 – or more than \$50 a person. That's more than all of the other PSC chapters combined. Impressive as that may be, the needs are greater than ever at a time when the Governor's budget threatens to cut CUNY funding by half a billion dollars and as we enter a contested election season across the board from city and state to federal and presidential. We need to elect advocates in New York City, Albany and Washington who will promote the interests of our students, faculty, professional staff and university, and work to expand the safety net so essential to us as retirees. If you have not contributed already, please do so **by sending a check payable to PSC/CUNY COPE and mail to:**

PSC/CUNY COPE
Fifteenth Floor
61 Broadway
New York, NY 10006



RETIREES CHAPTER HONORED

At its 2015 Annual Gala Benefit on December 8, Metro New York Healthcare for All honored the PSC Retirees Chapter for trade union leadership in health care justice. The chapter joined two other honorees, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (for political leadership) and the People's Budget Coalition for Public Health (for community leadership).

Past honorees reflect a who's who of political, trade union and community leadership around issues of health care justice in New York City and state.

The award cited the PSC Retirees Chapter for initiatives developed by its Safety Net Working Group – public forums, workshops to widen the circle of activists promoting the defense and expansion of the safety net and its popular educational booklet, *Defending and Expanding the Safety Net: A Call to Action*.

HIGHER EDUCATION LOBBY DAYS AND MORE. PSC's Legislative Committee has a great deal of heavy lifting to do in the coming months. With Cuomo's kicking CUNY in the can and attempting to send our State funding

over to De Blasio's budget, our students, staff, faculty and programs stand to lose millions. This is a political fight for all, and traditionally retirees have provided the foot 'soldiers' if you will, in visiting local, state and city elected officials as well as paying a call on Albany. The next NYSUT-coordinated lobby effort is the **Higher Education Lobby Day on February 24-25 in Albany**. Immediately after the NYSUT-sponsored lobby meetings, CUNY students will arrive in Albany for a Student, Faculty, and Staff lobby day on February 25. If you are interested in going to Albany to press our case for funding, or are willing to visit a local Assemblymember or Senator, please sign up at psc-cuny.org/2016_lobbying or contact Kate Pfordresher, PSC Director of Policy and Research at kpfordresher@pscmail.org.

And please keep your browser bookmarked to **PSC-CUNY.ORG** for critical news.

RETIRING: MEMBERS WRITE ABOUT THE PROCESS

As we welcome a batch of newly minted retirees to the PSC Retirees chapter, here are some offerings from our members about their own processes into and within retirement. There is no one way to envision, enjoy and wander through this relatively new phase in history. Write to us with your own stories; we welcome (very) short essays, poems and art work, as well as tales of the

bumps along the way after leaving a campus in which a lifetime of love and labor has been spent.

-Joan Greenbaum

joanbaum@ix.netcom.com

College Adjunct

I appear as daily faculty, an ordinary feature.

then I disappear, no Houdini stunt, just reality:

rationed work in a rationed world.

I may or may not show up next semester.

I sign up for assignments: take crumbs of time:

least desired hours in a country of rich feasts and affluence.

My students speak English as a second or third choice.

Their minds move fast and fluid or careful and measured to master the new place, new space of this new world.

What is red tape? What are the secrets all Americans know?

What are the idioms easy to know to those born here?

I ask my students before they sleep, what language do they dream?

This poem is from my chapbook called Shattered Ladder: Broken Work.

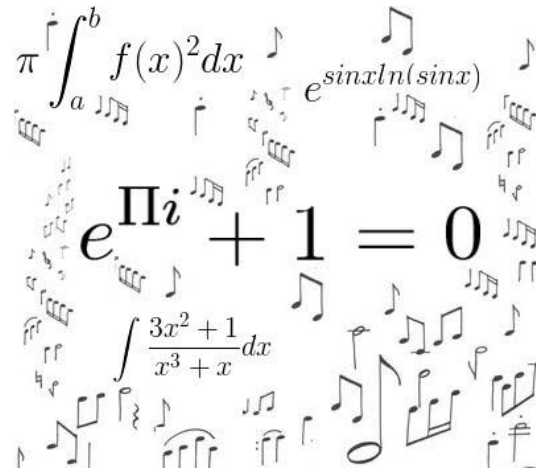
-Constance H Gemson

Another Life is Possible

I finished my Ph.D. in mathematics at Columbia in 1967, got a job at CCNY as Assistant Professor,

worked my way up to Professor by 1981, spent a lot of time and energy on research and on editing a journal that I co-founded in 1985, and retired from City seven years ago. But let me go back for a moment, way back...

I started taking piano lessons at the age of seven when I lived in Brooklyn, and didn't practice much; instead, I enjoyed composing and improvising in various classical styles -- "Bach" fugues, "Mozart" sonatas, "Brahms" intermezzi, and so on, and this continued over the years. But after college, like many young people with an interest in both music and mathematics, I decided I'd make a better living in math; so that's where I headed.



In 1999, however, I decided to go back to more serious composing, overlapping that with the mathematics papers I was still writing. I was fortunate to be able to sit in on a composition course David Del Tredici was giving at City, and

found the time to do a lot of work for it. The result was that by the time I retired from mathematics in 2008, I was able to hit the ground running as a composer.

jgoodman@ccny.cuny.edu

In 2002 I started a nonprofit composers' cooperative -- the New York Composers Circle -- with 14 members, which has grown by now to about 80 members, including both composers and performers (<http://www.NYComposersCircle.org>).

We put on at least four public concerts a year, meet monthly for "salons" where we listen to and comment on one another's music, run an annual composers' competition for nonmembers, and host a series of outreach concerts in public high schools (such as Bronx Science, my alma mater) and senior centers (such as the Hebrew Home for Aged in Riverdale, where I may wind up some day). I'm currently the Concert Director of the NYCC, and also a member of its Board.

So no more mathematics since 2008. But a few years ago, I decided to try something different: I started working on a novel -- my first such attempt. The novel is finished now (if you're curious, it's about a mathematician who suddenly disappears one day), and I'm presently working on finding an agent.

Next year... Who knows!

-Jacob E. Goodman, Professor Emeritus, City College of New York