



**AFT Washington  
Retiree Chapter  
Local 8045R**

# Retiree Newsletter

*A Union of Professionals*

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## It's spring—it's time for The Annual Meeting!

This year's annual meeting, our 11<sup>th</sup>, will be held on **Friday, May 2, 2014**, beginning at **11:30 a.m.** The location will be the same as last year: **South Center Plaza Conference Room, 635 Andover Park W., Suite 105, Tukwila.** For instructions on how to get there, call **Merrilee Miron** at 206-242-4777 or 866-992-3892 (toll free), or send her an email, [mmiron@aftwa.org](mailto:mmiron@aftwa.org).

Lunch (free!) will be served at noon, and after lunch we'll have as entertainment folk singer **Carl Allen**, who sang at the annual meeting in 2009. He was a great hit then, and we're sure he will be again this time.

Following the entertainment, **Rosemary Thurston** will present the results of our opinion survey (*see below*) and lead a discussion of how we might make use of what we learn from that survey.

This is always a fun event, with an emphasis on conversation, friendship, and conviviality. Please plan to attend. **RSVP** to Merrilee, as shown above, **not later than April 29.**



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## Look for our opinion survey in April

During the first part of April, we will be conducting an opinion survey of those members who receive this newsletter via email. The survey will address such matters as your interest in staying in contact with other retirees, your interest in educational, national, and state issues, as well as issues of retirement finances and economics. And more. The survey will also inquire about your willingness to meet or work with other retirees who are members of the chapter.

Ross Rieder, President  
Susan Levy, Vice President  
Roger Carlstrom, Secretary  
Mary Hale, Treasurer  
John Guevarra, Director  
Carol Hamilton, Director  
Rachael Levine, Director  
Rita Smilkstein, Director  
Rosemary Thurston, Director

Roger Carlstrom, Editor

Merrilee Miron, AFTWA Staff  
Liaison

The survey is an experiment, and it could well be that following the completion of this survey, we'll seek to survey those of you who receive this newsletter only via the US Postal Service.

As the saying goes, "stay tuned"!





## An update on our campaign soliciting voluntary contributions

The executive board's campaign to solicit voluntary contributions from our members has gone well. We've had a good response: Our treasurer, **Mary Hale**, reports that as of March 31, we've received almost \$900 in contributions. In early April, she will be sending out thank-you letters to all those who have contributed.

The campaign is intended to raise money that will help the chapter fund activities that support education and benefits for current and prospective retirees. The executive board has encouraged contributions ranging from \$10 to \$100, but of course, the amounts members contribute are entirely up to them.

If you haven't yet contributed but would like to do so, it's not too late! Just send a check made out to AFT Washington Retiree Chapter, Local 8045 R (or shorten it to AFTWA Retiree Chapter, Local 8045R). Here's the address: 625 Andover Park W., Suite 111, Tukwila, WA 98188.

## A cautionary note on Medicare

**Kate Snow** of NBC Nightly News filed a story on February 25, 2014, "[How to Avoid the Two Words that Cost Thousands in Medicare Bills.](#)" The two words to avoid are "under observation."

When you go to the hospital or take someone there, she said, don't let the hospital state on its forms that the patient is on "observation status" because Medicare won't pay for services rendered under that status.

The horror story she told involved a man who was admitted with stroke-like symptoms, was placed under "observation status," and subsequently sent "to a nursing facility for rehabilitation. At a cost of about \$22,000." Snow reported that "Medicare pays for rehab only for

people admitted to a hospital for three or more days as 'inpatients.' Medicare will not pay for rehab if they were classified as 'observation status' when they received treatment at the hospital."

The man's spouse was persistent and succeeded in getting the status changed to "inpatient," but it wasn't easy. The [website](#) provides a video with tips from a Dr. Ashish Jha of the Harvard School of Public Health, "who explains what you can do to prevent this kind of billing issue."

## On making a "good fist" of old age

March 17, 2014, was the 81<sup>st</sup> birthday of British children's books author and novelist **Penelope Lively**, who, on that day, was interviewed by NPR host of "Fresh Air" **Terry Gross**. In the interview, "[Author Penelope Lively Shares 'The View From Old Age.'](#)" Lively rejects the notion that old age is a "status"; rather, she contends, "it's more situational. It's that you've arrived at a different place. I don't feel that I have a particular status. I certainly don't much play the old age card, although I might from time to time. So it's more that you've arrived at this completely different stage of life that, frankly, you had never given very much thought to."

She is aware, she says, that old age "depends totally on two things:" health and income.

[I]f you have reasonable health and reasonable income, it's not too bad a place to be. Of course, if you're poverty-stricken, then it's an appalling place to be. Equally, if you're particularly struck down by one of the age-related diseases, then it's a bad place to be.

You make "a good fist" of old age. That is, you're "more or less" *tough*: "We're all in the same boat, frankly, and I'm most warm to those

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friends who are making a good fist of it, even though all of them have – or most of them – have got something wrong.”

Gross asks her about surviving the loss of a spouse. (Lively’s husband died at the age of 69 in the early 1990s from esophageal cancer.) Gross asks her to read an excerpt from her most recent book, *Dancing Fish and Ammonites – A Memoir*.

The world is full of widows, several among my closer friends. We’ve each known that grim rite of passage, have engaged with grief and loss, and have not exactly emerged, but found a way of living after and beyond. It’s an entirely changed life for anyone who’s been in a long marriage, 41 years for me: alone in bed, alone most of the time, without the presence towards which you turned for advice, reassurance, with whom you shared the good news and the bad, every decision now taken alone, no one to defuse anxieties.

She thinks women adapt to such losses more effectively than men, who have a more difficult time with the loneliness.

There’s much more to the interview. You may want to check it out [online](#).



## Here are my spring updates! By Mary Hale, Treasurer



**The first AFT Washington Solidarity Event is scheduled for May 16 and 17.** This event is designed to promote solidarity within our union membership, the labor community, and the

broader community. Especially if you live within the Puget Sound area, we encourage you to participate.

- When: Fri., May 16, 4:00 p.m. through Sat., May 17, 5:00 p.m.
- Where: Best Western Executive Inn, downtown Seattle
- Reservation Deadline: Tuesday, April 15
- Reservation Phone # 206-448-9444 or 800-351-9444 (toll free)

**COLA Decision Still in Doubt:** After almost two-and-one-half years of litigation, a COLA increase for TRS 1 and PERS 1 pensioners is still in doubt. As I reported in my January/February column, we anticipated that the State Supreme Court would issue its decision – whether these two pension systems were wrongfully denied a COLA increase, effective July 2011 – at the end of the 2014 legislative session in mid-March. This did not happen. According to a representative of the **Retired Public Employees Council of Washington**, the Supreme Court is now expected to issue its decision in a few months (mid-June, 2014). Many of our retirees are in the PRS 1 system, others are in both the TRS 1 and PERS 1 systems, and still others have a spouse or partner

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in the PERS 1 systems. We don't know the numbers in each, however.

**2014 Legislative Session, a Mixed Bag for Education:** With few exceptions, most 2014 state legislative pundits gave this session decidedly mixed reviews, identifying the session as "largely forgettable." When asked to cite a 2014 legislative session highlight, one of my district representatives responded (tongue in cheek): "We are going to get out on time. You could say that's a good thing."

While legislators (1) failed to provide a state-funded pay hike for teachers (the sixth year in a row), (2) showed indifference to higher education by failing to put more money into financial aid to help ease the cost, and (3) added only a relatively small amount of supplemental money to address the Supreme Court's basic education mandate of a few years ago, it did (a) pass a bill that allows undocumented immigrants to receive state aid for college, and (b) froze college tuition for a second year.

## David Brooks's complexity By Michael Kischner



Why do some of my best-informed friends consider **David Brooks** "the reasonable conservative"? His writing conceals bias, fallacious logic, moralism, and dishonesty. One example appears in a column published in *The Seattle Times* under the title "The inequality problem and its roots" (Jan. 19, 2014).

In this column, Brooks scoffs at the "primitive zero-sum mentality" that assumes that "growing affluence for the rich must somehow be causing the immobility of the poor." He decries "our

tendency to simplify complex . . . problems" and then shows us what proper complex thinking looks like: "There is a very strong correlation between single motherhood and low social mobility. There is a very strong correlation between high school dropout rates and low mobility. There is a strong correlation between the fraying of social fabric and low economic mobility." Next, violating a fundamental law of logic, Brooks turns correlation into causation: "Low income is the outcome of these interrelated problems. . . ."

Why could causation not go the other way? Maybe poverty causes single motherhood, high school dropouts, and the fraying of the social fabric. But such explanations do not contain enough moral judgment for Brooks. To say that poverty is the problem, he writes, "is to give yourself a pass from exploring the complex and morally fraught . . . roots of the problem. It is to give yourself permission to ignore the parts that are uncomfortable to talk about . . ."

Get it? If the poor stay poor, it's their own fault. It's not the fault of decades of tax legislation to protect unearned income, nor of government spending on financial sector bailouts rather than on food stamps or extended unemployment benefits, nor of Republican resistance to raising the minimum wage even as CEO compensation soars to unimaginable heights.

Brooks gives himself a pass on exploring whether these "correlate" in any "complex and morally fraught way" with the fact that the richest 10% of families control 74.5% of the nation's wealth. Evidently this involves no character deficiencies that are "uncomfortable to talk about." Such deficiencies belong only to the poor.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, English landowners passed laws that allowed them to

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devour Ireland’s land and wealth while pouring contempt on the character deficiencies of their starving victims. David Brooks doesn’t do contempt; he does complexity. It looks a lot like contempt, only less honest.

*Michael Kischner taught English in the Seattle Community Colleges for 39 years and retired in 2006. Previous articles appeared in the July/August 2012 issue of the Retiree Newsletter, and in the February 2011 issue.*

## To everything, turn, turn, turn. . . . By Carol Hamilton

I joined the **Seattle Labor Chorus** two years ago.

In late January of this year, the night after iconic activist and singer/songwriter, **Pete Seeger**, died at the age of 94, I arrived at our usual rehearsal space to find the projector and screen set to show us a video from May, 1997. It featured Pete, who had come to Seattle’s Folk Life Festival to help launch the Seattle Labor Chorus. Pete was in his usual form, backed by his grandson, **Tao**, encouraging, leading, directing the singers.

On Saturday of that January week, **Janet Stecher**, our chorus director, worked with the **Seattle Folklore Society** to offer a community celebration of Pete’s life. As we arrived at the crowded Phinney Neighborhood Center, the hall was bursting with

activists; the overflow crowd jammed the upstairs rooms. Those who had signed up in advance had the opportunity to share a song or tell a tale. We heard about Pete coming to their camp when they were children to lead the music; Pete celebrating the life of blues singer, **Huttie Ledbetter**; Pete joining in the civil rights’ movement and anti-Viet Nam war rallies; Pete performing on their college campuses; and Pete birthing labor choruses all over the country. Janet chose to have our chorus sing a "round" about jazz – a little-known Seeger composition – to share a relatively unknown song from this master song writer. Then came the familiar works like "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?," "If I Had a Hammer," "This Little Light of Mine," and "We Shall Overcome." Professional and amateur voices--joined together – celebrating his lyrics, capturing his rhythms--so spontaneous, so spirited!

Today, seventeen years after Pete helped birth the Seattle Labor Chorus, many of the original members are still among the nearly 40 plus voices of the Seattle Labor Chorus. Why? Because they believe, as Pete advocated, in using music to promote economic and social justice – and because it's rewarding to gather with like-minded folk who are actively engaged in the turning.

So, sing a song, join a chorus, go to a labor union event to support teachers or transit workers. You could help by turning to an old or new cause and giving it your energy.

What does it take to join the Seattle Labor Chorus?

Simply this: "Show up and learn the songs!" Tuesday evenings, 7:15 - 9:15, Keystone Church, 5019 Keystone Place North, Seattle. Questions: 206-524-7753.



*Photo by Garret Munger*

*Seattle Labor Chorus, Celebrating Pete Seeger*

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Carol Hamilton taught part time at Seattle Central & South Community Colleges and at Edmonds Community College from 1974-79, and then she taught English full time at North Seattle Community College from 1979 until her retirement in 2010. She presently serves as a retiree representative on Local 1789's executive board. She wrote about her efforts to document the history of Local 1789 in the January/February 2012 issue of the Retiree Newsletter.

## The weight of things By Marilyn Smith



Each day brings a multitude of things into our lives: notes of reminders we've written, bills, receipts, photographs on a handy smart-phone, groceries, leftovers, and whatever else we've purchased or received. In retirement the mass of papers, rosters, readings and documents slows down, but if we are not relentless in tossing them into the recycle bin one by one, they continue to fill up our files, drawers and the tops of our desks until their weight becomes too heavy to sort.

Someone else could do it quickly: a series of treks to the recycle bin and all would be clean and empty again. The problem for the owner of all these things is the memories we hold for their contents – the pain of letting them go. They reconnect us to the life we have lived: our students, our family (many long deceased), the places and times we have known.

And what about the things we have purchased or been given, the treasures of our lives full of history and art on their own, and vital to us? They carry a deep life of their own, sometimes

spanning centuries and other owners. They testify to the hands, mind, and spirit of their creators and to us and our passions.

As life's end becomes more visible, such treasures speak of our own departing and loss, even if we find pleasure in handing them on to those we love. No one will love or know them in quite the way we have. As **Marcel Proust** wrote, "Even when one is no longer attached to things, it's still something to have been attached to them because it is always for reasons which other people didn't grasp."

In a series of articles about dismantling her parents' home, **Olivia Judson** quotes **William James**, who observed that the loss of possessions gives "a sense of the shrinkage of our personality, a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness" ("Home Dismantled," February 15, 2014, *New York Times*). Objects we sort are also lifelines to memories and people we've forgotten.

How do we hold onto those memories that things evoke and still move forward in the life we have left? If retirement allows us time for new pursuits, it also expands the time we have to look back and be swamped by all we have accumulated and will continue to accumulate – a major conundrum that few of us can escape.

The world still beckons.

*Marilyn Smith holds the title of Faculty Emeritus and in 2008 retired from North Seattle Community College, where she taught a wide variety of courses in English and the Humanities as well as in integrated studies programs. Her article, "The Root Cause," appeared in the April/May 2013 issue of the Retiree Newsletter, and "We pile on the years," appeared in the January/February 2012 issue,*



## Husky crew then; Seahawks now By Roger Carlstrom, Editor

I have found that anyone who has read *The Boys in the Boat* (2013), by **Daniel James Brown**, has had the same reaction I had: It's a terrific, page-turner about the University of Washington crew that won the gold medal in Berlin in 1936. I particularly enjoyed the book because it reminded me of my youth in the 1950s when I would listen to the crew races on the radio (Freshmen, JV, and



Varsity) and when I'd bike down to the Seward Park Peninsula to watch them in person when the races were in town and held there.

I happened to read the book in the frenzied aftermath of the Sea-

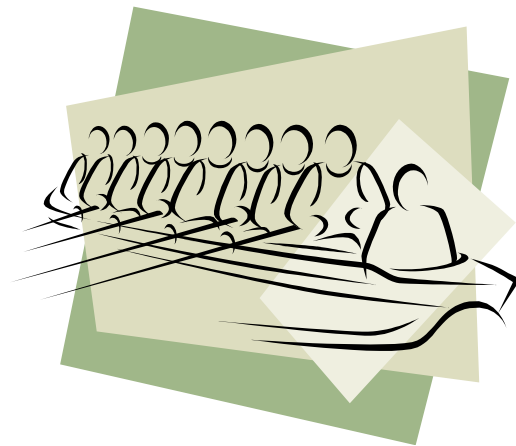
hawks' Super Bowl victory and in the aftermath of the televised Sochi Olympic Games. I was struck by the public frenzy that accompanied crew racing in the 1930s and, of course, by the "parallels" between the importance **Hitler** placed on the Games then and the importance **Putin** placed on them earlier this year. (Caution: I'm not equating the two men, just seeing some parallels.)

Brown tells us that "In the 1930s rowing was the second most popular Olympic event – after track and field. . ." (336). Notwithstanding the Olympics, rowing was incredibly popular in the United States as well. Thousands would tune their radios in the Bay area to listen "to coverage of the race [between the Huskies and the Golden Bear] up in Seattle, on the Columbia Broadcasting System's radio network" (97). For the Intercollegiate Rowing Association regatta that was held each year in Poughkeepsie, *millions* of people would listen to radio coverage (111).

There was frenzy all around. When the Huskies in the Olympic Trials at Princeton qualified to go to Berlin,

All over Washington State – in smoky little mill towns out on the Olympic Peninsula, on soggy dairy farms nestled up against the Cascades, in posh Victorian homes on Seattle's Capitol Hill, and in the Huskies' drafty shell house down on Montlake Cut – people stood and cheered. Mothers and fathers rushed off to Western Union offices to send congratulations to their sons back east. Newspapermen frantically scrambled to compose headlines. Bartenders served rounds on the house. What had been a dream was a reality. Their boys were going to the Olympics. For the first time ever, Seattle was going to play on the world stage. (282)

Huskies in '36. Seahawks in '14. A big deal each time.



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labor donated