



Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Halloween: A Celebration of Mortality

CHRISTINA PYRGAKI

I love Halloween, more so than any other holiday, and this is rather curious since Halloween is not celebrated in Greece, my home country. It was in 1993 when Tim Burton released *The Nightmare Before Christmas* that I first heard about Halloween and I fell in love with it! I have always loved scary stories, movies, and books, but Tim Burton's classic first introduced me to a holiday that celebrated darkness in a unique manner, and the fourteen-year-old me was enchanted forever.

I moved to Denver, Colorado just days before the Halloween of 2002, and I could hardly wait to experience Halloween in this country. October in Denver is a month of spectacular colors and nature sets a beautiful scene for the holiday. Red and yellow leaves barely hang from the trees, waiting for a slight breath of chilly air to swirl them around until they softly land on the sidewalks and the decorated yards. Front yards often become fake cemeteries with Styrofoam tombstones and crosses, with the occasional radius and a set of phalanges coming out of the ground. White sheets hang from the trees, giving a ghostly welcome to visitors and guests. I could barely contain my excitement walking around, taking in both the beauty of nature and the omnipresent spirit of Halloween! My first Halloween party in the USA, however, left me slightly disappointed. I walked into the party expecting ghouls and goblins, witches and undead creatures, but instead I got sexy nurses, *Futurama* characters, and even then President G.W. Bush. Halloween was not the dark celebration I expected; rather, it had become a kind of cultural Frankenstein, combining elements of Carnival and the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain—two very different celebrations.

Carnival has its origins in the ancient Roman Festival of Saturnalia and ancient Greek Dionysian Festival. Both these festivals celebrated the rebirth of nature that comes with spring, fertility, and life's plea-

sure. Carnival, which takes place during the four weeks preceding the Easter Lent, faithful to the celebration of life's pleasures, connects individuals with the playful side of their personalities and allows them to break away from social conventions and appropriate behavior. Both the Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Church, after failing to eradicate the pagan rituals of Carnival, resolved to embody Carnival in their traditions—a common church practice when it came to pagan traditions resilient throughout human history.

Halloween is the polar opposite of Carnival. The former has its origins in Samhain, a pagan festival that marks the beginning of winter, and the death of nature before its spring rebirth. Necessary as this death was for rebirth to happen, winter was scary—especially in an era of limited resources and shelter, when a long winter could literally cost lives. So, the Celts made this day a celebration of death in an effort to ostracize the fear of death. According to the Celtic tradition, on the night of October 31, the souls of those that have passed away during the year wander the earth before they pass on to the world that awaits them. The living wore ghoulish costumes to fit in with the unearthly visitors and to disguise themselves among them. Treats were left at the doorsteps of houses to appease the spirits—this practice evolved into “Trick or Treat.”

As I already mentioned, in Greek Orthodox tradition, there is nothing similar to Halloween, but recently I realized that there is something that could be thought of as equivalent to Halloween: the four last Saturdays of the Easter Lent which are called Psychosavata, spelled ψυχοσάββατα, [psee-ho-sa-va-ta] and translated to “Saturdays of the souls.” During these days, the pious churchgoers, mainly the women in the family, cook Koliva as a humble offering to the dead. Koliva is a mixture of boiled kernels of whole grain, ground walnuts, sugar, finely chopped parsley, covered with confection-

ers' sugar, decorated with Jordan almonds and shaped to resemble a freshly-filled grave. The tradition of offerings to appease the dead originates in ancient Greece, but the Church, just as with Carnival, after failing to eradicate the pagan tradition of offerings to the departed, embraced it in its own tradition. Koliva is blessed by the priest during the evening Mass and distributed to the Mass attendees in memory of the family's departed, while part of the mixture is spread on the graves of the ancestors. I still remember walking among the graves at dusk with my grandmother as a very young child. We would make a stop, first at her parent's grave to scatter Koliva on the tombstones, and then at my grandfather's parents' graves to do the same. I was too young to understand the meaning and significance of what my grandmother was doing, and too busy trying to wrap my head around the fact that my grandmother had parents and what it meant that they were dead! I was not able to make the connection between Psychosavata and Halloween until very recently since Psychosavata does not involve any of the graphic images of death that one encounters in Halloween, e.g. skulls and skeletons, and there is no mention of ghosts or ghouls. The dead are referred to as the “sleeping ones” and their souls are thought to visit our world in the form of moths. I am not sure whether the lack of graphic images of death in Psychosavata is due to excessive squeamishness of the Greek people towards the supernatural or the influence of the Church, but I do know that one of the reasons I like Halloween is because it comes with an abundance of such images. They serve as a reminder of mortality and darkness, and although I realize ghouls and ghosts do not exist, what they symbolize helps me keep things in perspective. Much like the ancient Celts, I like to face the darkness (the one that accompanies the winter, the one residing in the souls of humans, including my very own), make friends with it, and try to overcome it as best I can.

So, this Halloween, once more I will make peace with the idea of the upcoming winter; I will remember my beloved grandmother, who I know would agree that Halloween is more fun than Psychosavata, and think about mortality as a fact of life. Afterward, I will put on my witch's hat, grab my broom, go out with friends who make me laugh, and celebrate my mortal heart off! Nobody can avoid mortality, but one can

temporarily defeat it by living life to the fullest and that is what my Halloween is about. Have a great Halloween everyone! ☉

References:

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**CULTURE DESK: Exhibition Review:
“Chinese Gardens: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats”
At The Metropolitan Museum of Art through
January 6, 2013**

BERNIE LANGS

The great art historian, Lord Kenneth Clark, entitled two of his best essays, *What is a Masterpiece?* and *Moments of Vision*. If you would like to experience moments of greatly enhanced visual experience while gazing upon a trove of fabulous art, which boasts several masterpieces, head over to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to view “Chinese Gardens: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats.” This exhibition features more than sixty paintings as well as ceramics, carved bamboo, lacquerware, metalwork, and a handful of contemporary photographs, all drawn from the museum’s permanent collections. The Met notes that the exhibit “explores the rich interactions between pictorial and garden arts in China across more than one thousand years. In the densely populated urban centers of China, enclosed gardens have long been an integral part of residential and palace architecture,



Above: Qian Xuan, Chinese, ca. 1235–before 1307. Wang Xizhi Watching Geese. China, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), ca. 1295. Handscroll; ink, color, and gold on paper. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Below: Yuan Jiang, active ca.1680–ca.1730. The Palace of Nine Perfections, China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), dated 1691. Set of twelve hanging scrolls; ink and color on silk. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

serving as an extension of the living quarters.” If you want to learn about the nuts and bolts of this exhibition, I suggest reading the excellent review by Holland Carter in the August 16th *New York Times*.

The rub of this review is that there are two ways (or a mixture of both) to experience this exhibition. One can look over the paintings and read the long descriptions next to each about what they represent and how they came to be in terms of both art and political or cultural history.

The other approach, which I adhered to, is to concentrate on the visual, and thus emotional experience of beholding these masterworks and just skim the placards. The basic subject matter of Chinese paintings, which is often views of nature, mountains, lakes, pavilions, gatherings of “Immortals” and so on, are familiar to me. Walking into the first gallery of “Chinese Gardens” took my breath away, and reading at length in the art’s presence seemed like a distraction. Visiting such a large exhibition is almost akin to a protracted sports



event; one has to pace oneself so as not to become overwhelmed by the middle and run out of steam by the end. I found that reading the descriptions detracted from my energy. But if this style of art is new to you, I highly recommend reading at least some of the posted notes.

Certain works in the exhibition just grab you with their serenity, such as the calm majesty of “Returning Home Through the Snow” by Dai Jin. Others, such as Yuan Jiang’s masterpiece, “The Palace of Nine Perfections,” brings one to a new level of understanding of how art can teach one unique ways of perceiving physical and spiritual dimensions—simultaneously. A rare feat, indeed. In the 1990s, I read a lot of Chinese philosophy and though I can’t call back all that I learned from a school such as the Confucian, or from a system such as the *Tao Te Ching*, or an explanation of the experience of reality such as *The Eight Levels of Consciousness* (a favorite of mine), a show like this brings up the power and feeling evoked by each that remain in my subconscious. There is more to see on view here than

just a beautifully crafted pavilion floating in the mist or a faraway mountain partially hidden by a thin cloud cover. One is viewing the depths of a civilization steeped in a long history of images that were carefully and slowly refined over the centuries to gel with their philosophies.

Many years ago, I attended a lecture by then Director Philippe de Montebello; he explained that the longer one looks at a work of art, the more one sees. He implored the audience to take their time with a painting, to let its meaning seep in. He said that he was once at The Frick Collection, where he stood for so long in front of a Velasquez painting that a security guard came over to check on him. Please visit “Chinese Gardens” and stand for a while in front of these fabulous works of art, which offer the viewer so much. ☉

For Your Consideration—Ones to Watch Vol. 2 Edition

JIM KELLER

Fall thrusts the Oscar season into high gear. Over the next four months, many films will come out: the good, the bad, those with Oscar hope, those without, but one thing's for sure: come February, the votes will be locked-in and we'll have another Academy Awards. Here I spitball from those performances coming down the pike, to see what might stick in the Best Supporting Actor and Actress races—the second installment of the three-part series.

~The Ladies~

THE SINGER: Anne Hathaway—*Les Misérables* (director: Tom Hooper):

FYC: Hathaway plays Fantine in this adaptation of the stage musical, based on Victor Hugo's classic novel set in nineteenth century France. The film tells the story of paroled prisoner Jean Valjean, who becomes mayor of a French town. Valjean agrees to take care of Cosette, the illegitimate daughter of Fantine, while avoiding recapture by police inspector Javert. Hathaway's career has come a long way. From 2001's *The Princess Diaries* to her nomination for 2008's *Rachel Getting Married*—a role that had her portraying the more reckless of two sisters, she's been on her way up. When Hugh Jackman hauled her on stage (literally) for his opening song as host of the 81st Academy Awards, Hathaway proved that she could sing as well as act. A lethal combination when done successfully (see Jennifer Hudson's Best Supporting Actress win for *Dreamgirls* in 2007), it will be interesting to see if Hathaway delivers in an adapted stage production of this magnitude.

THE DUTIFUL WIFE: Sally Field—*Lincoln* (director: Steven Spielberg):

FYC: Her last role as Nora Walker, the matriarch of ABC's *Brothers and Sisters*, earned her three consecutive Emmy nominations and a win in 2007. But prior to her TV success, Field did time on the Oscar circuit, winning twice for 1980's *Norma Rae* and 1984's *Places in the Heart*. Now she returns to the Oscar party, as the famous wife of President Abraham Lincoln—a role that, depending on the amount of screen time given, could net her a third nomination and possible win. Mary Todd Lincoln witnessed her husband's assassination and

she is known for having become mentally unhinged as well as for dressing in black in subsequent years. Some speculated that she suffered from bipolar disorder. This was never proven, but Mary Todd Lincoln was committed to an asylum in 1875, though she engineered her escape. While the film isn't likely to detail her later years, it may allow Field the opportunity to showcase some of her darker character traits and if done right, there's no reason to think that Oscar won't eat it up.

THE GOLDEN GIRL: Judi Dench—*The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (director: John Madden):

FYC: It'd be surprising if one of the year's most well-received and top grossing films didn't end up with a nomination in one of the main categories. Enter Judi Dench as the effervescent lynchpin amidst a well-woven cast who hunker down together in a makeshift Indian hotel as they prepare to confront the next chapter of their lives. While there are many stand-up performances in the ensemble, recently widowed housewife Evelyn is the true anchor, making Dench the actor with the best shot at Oscar. Previously, the dame has racked up six nominations and one win, beginning in 1998 with a leading role in *Her Majesty, Mrs. Brown* and ending in 2007 with her third Best Actress nomination for *Notes on a Scandal*. It was *Shakespeare in Love* that gave her a Best Supporting Actress win in 1998, but Dench has yet to capture that elusive Best Actress statuette. If the Academy feels that Dench should be honored, by all rights, this could be her year. Although, she may have to tango with another industry vet, Pauline Collins, to come out on top.

THE COMEBACK KID: Pauline Collins—*Quartet* (director: Dustin Hoffman):

FYC: The last time Pauline Collins danced with Oscar was back in 1990 when she received a Best Actress nomination for *Shirley Valentine*, in which she portrayed a stuck-in-a-rut housewife who is afforded the opportunity to see the world, and herself, in a different light. The film was based on a London play, which Collins also starred in and later reprised on Broadway. Now she returns as Cissy, a member of a group of retired opera singers living in a

home together. The film recently bowed at the Toronto Film Festival and early word is that Collins is the member of the ensemble cast with the biggest shot at landing a nomination. You needn't look very far to see that Oscar loves doling out awards to older actors and if the film gets enough buzz and she is able to surpass Dench, we could see Collins' name pop-up in this category. It's not likely that both Dench and Collins will make it in, however.

THE TRANSFORMER: Olivia Williams—*Hyde Park on Hudson* (director: Roger Michell):

FYC: Have you seen the trailer for *Hyde Park on Hudson* in which Williams is transformed from a petite brunette to an off-kilter, rangy, wild-haired woman with a toothy grin? If you haven't guessed it, Williams plays Eleanor Roosevelt in the film, which focuses on a weekend in 1939 upstate New York when the King and Queen of the United Kingdom visited the Hyde Park estate. Unlike most of our other would-be contenders, Williams has not yet had the pleasure of a dalliance with Oscar, but that doesn't mean that her hopes are dashed. If history is anything to go by—and where the Academy is concerned, it is—Oscar loves women who transform themselves for a role. Whether it's Nicole Kidman's 2002 Best Actress win for *The Hours* or Charlize Theron's 2004 Best Actress win for *Monster*, time and time again this is proven. This could easily be the case for Williams, provided there is enough for her to do in the film. Early word out of the Telluride Film Festival suggests there is.

THE NEWCOMER: Kerry Washington—*Django Unchained* (director: Quentin Tarantino):

FYC: Ask critics about the 2010 film, *For Colored Girls*, and they'll likely tell you that while it wasn't that great, the performances were something to behold. Among the impressive ensemble—featuring Whoopi Goldberg, Janet Jackson, Phylicia Rashad and Loretta Divine, among others—Kerry Washington has been singled out and prompted many to pencil her in as a Best Supporting Actress contender for the 2011 Academy Awards. This didn't come to pass, but that hasn't left Washington without her

supporters and it likely had a hand in getting her the starring role on ABC's *Scandal*. In *Django Unchained*, Washington plays the wife of a slave-turned-bounty hunter who is held captive by a brutal Missouri plantation owner. If this isn't an intense role, I don't know what is. As if that weren't enough, Tarantino's latest film features a high-caliber cast including Jamie Foxx, Leonardo DiCaprio and Christoph Waltz, making this film and its actors ones to watch this Oscar season.

~The Gents~

THE VERITABLE SHOE-IN: Philip Seymour Hoffman—*The Master* (director: Paul Thomas Anderson):

FYC: A storm is coming; are you ready? Anderson's last film, 2007's *There Will Be Blood*, walked away from the Academy with two statuettes (Best Cinematography and Best Actor) culled from ten nominations and just barely lost Best Picture honors to *No Country for Old Men*. Now, Anderson has employed Philip Seymour Hoffman as his theatrical prized horse. Having won a Best Actor Oscar for 2006's *Capote* and earning Best Supporting Actor nominations for 2008's *Charlie Wilson's War* and 2009's *Doubt*, critics are saying that Hoffman works wonders as Lancaster Dodd—a charismatic intellectual known as “the Master” whose faith-based organization catches on in 1950s America. The film was rolled out by The Weinstein Company via surprise screenings in Los Angeles and San Francisco, which dovetailed nicely with teaser trailers to fuel the fire of mystery and intrigue. Now that the film has been released, critics everywhere are chomping at the bit to see it.

THE PRETTY BOY: Leonardo DiCaprio—*Django Unchained* (director: Quentin Tarantino):

FYC: It's been nearly two decades since Leonardo DiCaprio earned his first Oscar nomination for 1994's *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (Supporting Actor). Since then, he has earned Best Actor nominations for 2004's *The Aviator* and 2006's *Blood Diamond*. With his title role in last year's *J. Edgar*, many thought it'd be his year, but he didn't secure a nomination. So will DiCaprio's year come and will this be it? In Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, he plays Calvin Candie—the aforementioned plantation owner who is holding Kerry Washington's Broomhilda von Shaft

captive. There's no doubt that his talent can set the screen ablaze, but historically, roles like this tend to go unrewarded. Take last year's critically acclaimed *The Help*, which earned four Oscar nominations, not including the nuanced performance by Bryce Dallas Howard as the wicked, racist Hilly Holbrook. It seems people were too afraid of backlash and the “racist” label that might come along with supporting something against the American ideal of a true “melting pot” to stand behind her raw performance. In any case, DiCaprio's character would need to go through some sort of major light-seeing transformation akin to realizing slavery is an abomination to fall in line. But this isn't something Tarantino's films usually examine, so I have to bet against it. Although, as I always say, anything is possible.

THE WASHINGTON MAN: David Strathairn—*Lincoln* (director: Steven Spielberg):

FYC: Based on Doris Kearns Goodwin's Lincoln biography, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, *Lincoln* is a drama that focuses on the political collision of Lincoln and the men of his cabinet en route to abolition and the Civil War's end. One of those men was Secretary of State William Seward (David Strathairn). Seward was seriously injured in both a carriage accident before Lincoln's assassination and an attack by Lewis Powell simultaneous with Lincoln's assassination. In this election year, it'll be interesting to see how the film fares, since it focuses on the last few months of Lincoln's life; namely, slavery's end and the Civil War Union victory. Nominated for Best Actor in 2006 for *Good Night and Good Luck*, Strathairn is known for powerful, controlled performances and I expect nothing less from him here.

THE WILD CARD: William H. Macy—*The Sessions* (director: Ben Lewin):

FYC: *The Sessions* is based on the true story of Mark O'Brien—a man in an iron lung who hired a sex surrogate to lose his virginity. In the acclaimed Sundance film, O'Brien (John Hawkes) contacts a professional sex surrogate (Helen Hunt) with the help of his therapist and priest. The latter is played by William H. Macy, who earned a Best Supporting Actor nomination in 1996 for *Fargo*. I've included him because the role is interesting, in that one wonders why a priest would assist a man in such an en-

deavor and what kind of inner turmoil that could cause. Besides, Macy is tried and true in his countless, consistently great performances, and with a starring role on Showtime's *Shameless*, this could be the role to push him over the top.

THE FOREIGNER: Michael Fassbender—*Prometheus* (director: Ridley Scott):

FYC: You're probably familiar with Ridley Scott's return to the *Alien* universe in this not quite prequel about explorers who discover a clue to the origins of humanity, and who journey through the universe where they discover a threat that could lead to human extinction. Likewise, you may be familiar with Fassbender's turn as a sex addict in last year's *Shame*, for which many critics are still lamenting his conspicuous absence in the Best Actor category. As the lone droid crew member, David, Fassbender strikes an eerie balance between aloof and all-knowing, which keeps us guessing about his motives. Since the *Alien* franchise historically includes cyborgs of his ilk, it's always a question of what side they'll fall on and this is no different in *Prometheus*. The question is: how long will it be before the Academy finally rewards this young actor for consistently amazing performances?

THE TV VET: Bryan Cranston—*Argo* (director: Ben Affleck):

FYC: If you're not familiar with Bryan Cranston, you live under a rock. First drawing attention for his work in 2006's *Little Miss Sunshine*, he co-starred in ABC's *Malcolm in the Middle*, and now stars in AMC's *Breaking Bad*—a show that won him three Emmys, with a fourth waiting in the wings. The show's success has catapulted Cranston into stardom and since 2011 he has appeared in six films per year, including last year's *Drive* and this year's *Total Recall* remake. This fall he'll bow in Ben Affleck's third film, *Argo*, which examines a CIA “exfiltration” specialist's risky plan involving a faux film production to free six Americans who hid at the Canadian ambassador's home during the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis.

So more film food for thought as we approach the top of the Oscar season slope that, once coasted down, will give us our nominees. It's a wild ride, there will likely be surprises in store and not all of our ladies and gents will fare well, but there it is, a look, at a glance. ◉



New York State of Mind

This Month Natural Selections interviews Joana Loureiro, postdoctoral associate in the Laboratory of Virology and Infectious Disease.
Country of origin: Portugal.



1. How long have you been living in the New York area? I am originally from Portugal but moved here from Boston, Massachusetts, almost 5 years ago.

2. Where do you live? Thanks to being a Rockefeller University postdoc, I am fortunate enough to live in RU Housing, in one of the most affluent neighborhoods of New York City: the Upper East Side.

In other words, I live across the street from the university.

3. Which is your favorite neighborhood? There are wonderful scenic views, cute corners, great restaurants, interesting stores, incredible museums, fantastic music venues, etc., everywhere you go around this hustling and bustling city, but if I must, I guess I favor the East Village. Every time I walk down there, I run into some sort of adventure. Either I accidentally stumble into the Howl! Festival or the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, or there happens to be a Dog Run that day. Or I may see a bunch of people dancing on the street around a few musicians that just met around Tompkins Square Park and decided to have an impromptu performance! On an especially eventful East Village day, an opera singer who just happened to be passing by will join the impromptu performance and deliver an effortless “Queen of

the Night” aria, which leaves me saying some cliché like “Only in New York City!” Some days going down to the East Village is less eventful. “All” that happens is that the old man sitting on the park bench where I am reading my book strikes up a conversation and ends up telling me about his beatnik days or the 1988 Police Riot. I have yet to go there and not find something inspiring or downright awe-inspiring in this artsy/quirky neighborhood.

4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? Cupcakes! And underrated? The Portuguese restaurant Alfama in Midtown. Portuguese cuisine rocks.

5. What do you miss most when you are out of town? The variety of sounds, people, the fact you can always find a place that is open if you want to have something to eat or drink, the 24/7 subway, the availability of taxis at any time of day or night.

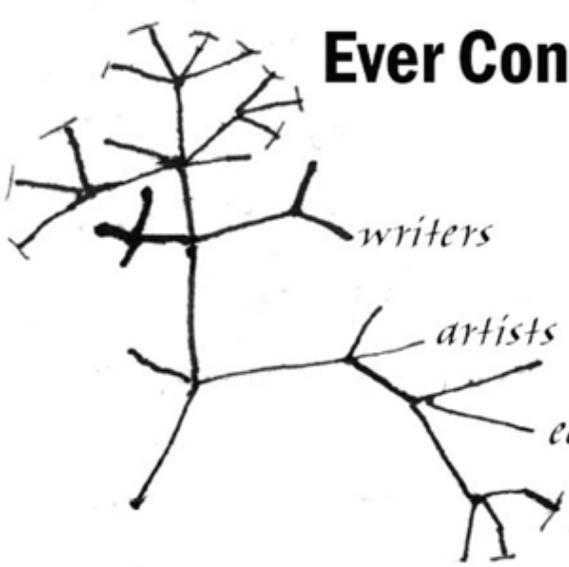
6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be? High real estate prices because they are driving extreme gentrification of Manhattan and Brooklyn. The way things are going, low income and working class people, struggling artists and “struggling scientists,” etc, will not be able to afford living in the city, and without diversity, New York City is not New York City.

7. Describe a perfect weekend in NYC. One in which I plan nothing and somehow all sorts of wonderful things happen.

8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC? Besides all the wonderful people I have met here? Joining the Improvisational Theatre Group at Rockefeller University: I love it!

9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? Lisbon, Paris, Berlin, Munich, London, Barcelona, Rome, Prague, Boston, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle?

10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Hell, yeah! ◊



Ever Consider Branching Out?

Attend *Natural Selections'*
Annual Open Meeting:
Wednesday, October 10
at 5pm in the Faculty Club

Everybody is welcome
Opportunities for
involvement in various
aspects of production

The Nosy Writer: A Conversation with Lanie Fleischer, Hospital Social Worker

CARLY GELFOND

Lanie Fleischer sits behind a desk in her office wearing a blue sleeveless blouse with a green beaded necklace and blue dangly earrings. It's her hair that you notice first: short, black, and curly, but with swathes of white here and there, like islands on a map. The second thing you notice is the kindness in her face. Lanie came to The Rockefeller University Hospital as a social worker in 1988. She is now Supervisor of the Social Service Unit, but will quickly point out that "that's kind of a misnomer—it's really only me."

Carly Gelfond (CG): Oh. So you're your own supervisor?

Lanie Fleischer (LF): I am! But in a broader sense I report to the Director of Nursing and Patient Care. And ultimately, of course, I report to the Physician-in-Chief—Dr. Barry Coller. You know, in the past, there were more people in the social work department. At that time, the research centered on inpatient studies and a therapeutic community evolved in response to their needs. We had patients who were more clinically diverse, many of whom were very, very ill. And they stayed here, not just for a short visit. I mean they really lived here. So it was a whole different ball game back then. The hospital has evolved.

CG: What changed?

LF: Well, a lot. Advances in clinical medicine with an emphasis on outpatient treatment and in lab techniques. Also, one of the laboratory heads—Dr. Martin Carter—died suddenly in 1993. And this affected the study of epidermolysis bullosa, which is a genetic skin condition that causes deformities from constant blistering. Rockefeller had been one of the sites of registry for that disease. People as young as infants were coming from all over the world with this. But when Dr. Carter died, the registry didn't continue here. There was also another study that was being done in Dr. Zanvil Cohen's lab, involving wasting in HIV patients and the use of thalidomide, and the immediate reason why that study ended was that Dr. Cohen died. Other things shifted, too: Dr. Jules Hirsch's studies on diet and Dr. Mary Jeanne Kreek's studies on addiction reached milestones.

Rather than clinical description over time, many studies became reliant on measurements that are lab-based and the data can be gotten on an outpatient basis rather than an inpatient one. Years ago, my time was much more taken up by the inpatient unit than the outpatient clinic. But now that's completely reversed. Most of my work is in the outpatient unit.

CG: How else have your responsibilities evolved?

LF: Some of what I used to do was recruit patients for studies. But now there is staff in the Clinical Research Office doing that and it's much more structured. So my responsibilities are now just social work. Every hospital has to have a discharge planning coordinator, somebody who's in charge of getting people the things they need when they leave, like home care, if they can't manage on their own. So I'm that person here, and I'm also the domestic violence coordinator.

CG: How do patients end up in the social work office?

LF: I depend on the nurses for referrals. And the investigators. But everyone who volunteers for a study gets told about the services that are available, so they can ask to see me directly.

The biggest source of referrals I have is from the HIV studies. Incidentally, that's when the volume of outpatient visits increased dramatically: when the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center became associated with the RU Hospital. And Dr. Martin Markowitz came and began several HIV studies. The clinic got going in full force. A lot of those patients had recently been diagnosed and didn't have any health insurance. They needed medical care and sometimes access to medicine, so they were a big percentage of who I saw. That's still a main source of referrals. We also see patients who need medical follow-up due to incidental findings. Then there are patients who need counseling, for instance, those dealing with the stress of homelessness. We have an increased number of patients coming in who live in shelters. And we have more referrals of people looking for jobs than previously.

CG: Do these issues have anything to do with why people volunteer for a clinical study?

LF: Yes, they often need the money. Most people say they want to contribute to science but there's a significant number of people who say they need the money. Some people have HIV disease and are in the study to get treatment, and there are all the patients with conditions needing treatment, for instance, psoriasis, and they, too, are coming for medical treatment. And then there are a lot of people who are here because they're answering ads.

CG: I'm curious how a homeless person would find out about the study.

LF: Often it's through the free newspa-

pers—*AM New York* or *Metro*—and through word of mouth.

CG: Does someone who's homeless go back on the street once the study is over?

LF: Well, most of the homeless people who we see are in shelters. But if they need a referral then I give them a referral to a shelter and other services and I follow their course. A number actually have insurance—they have Medicaid. Most are not in crisis.

CG: What is difficult about your job?

LF: Keeping up with the range of services available that would be beneficial to our patients. Or, the range of needs themselves, and the unpredictability of what these needs might be. Well, and another difficulty involves a phenomenon that happens to people with terminal diseases. We've had studies where people were terminal, and as much as they know what their situation is, there's often a rekindling of hope. Even though they know the disease can't be reversed, hope arises and also the anguish surrounding the original diagnosis—well, the staff has to be ready for that. The demands on us are very wide-ranging, from questions about where to go shopping in New York, to facing dire circumstances. So it's hard for all of us.

CG: What's the best part of your job?

LF: Oh, it's the sense of being in and working in a reliable and functional community. Nursing is central. The team is crucial. Then the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

CG: What is an unexpected part of your job?

LF: This interview was unexpected, I'll tell you that! (laughs) Especially after you've been working here for this length of time, you just kind of feel like a fixture in a way.

CG: What is one moment that occurred on the job that you will never forget?

LF: There are a couple of things, really. One is kind of funny. Richard Galbraith, who was in Dr. Kappas' lab, did a study involving young people with a very rare disease called Crigler-Najjar syndrome, affecting the metabolism of bilirubin, which makes you jaundiced. Anyway, there was this great kid, W----- who had to stay in the hospital and spend many hours in phototherapy each day. While he was here, he fell in love with a woman who was a patient volunteering in Dr. Mary Jeanne Kreek's study. Many patients had to be supervised if they left the hospital premises. So we used to accompany the patients into town. One day it occurred to me that it seemed like these two would re-

ally like to go out. So I went out with them to the movies. We had a good time, but the next day I felt he was so subdued, and so I said to him, “What did you think about last night? Did you have a good time?” And he said, “Well, yes, but there was one thing that was wrong.” And I said, “What was that?” and he said, “Well, you were there.” And I thought that was so funny!

The other thing I’ll never forget had to do with B----, who was like a hero to us. He was from rural Tennessee, and he had incredible limitations from epidermolysis bullosa, and he also had terrific emotional stamina. And he wound up moving here, with our help, because he felt that he would have a richer life in the city, and he really made a life for himself in New York. But he was susceptible to carcinomas, which led him to require amputations. Eventually he needed an arm amputation that would

go above his elbows, but he didn’t want to have it. And it was hard to understand why, if his life depended on it—after all, he didn’t have a full arm at this point anyway. But it turned out that it was because of the way he wrote. He’d put an elastic band around his arm, stick the pencil into it, and that’s how he would write, and eat, close doors, etc. Ultimately he did decide he would have that last amputation. But afterward, he gave me this little note, and it said, “You see? I haven’t given up.” And I realized as I was reading it that this was the evidence that he hadn’t given up. Because he had still found a way to write this note.

And then there’s this one other thing. Can I go ahead and tell you one more thing?

CG: Sure.

LF: Another thing that I’ll never forget was kind of devastating and at the same time ab-

solutely extraordinary. I really will never get over this—but in a way I don’t know what it is I’m getting over. What happened was that I had a friend who developed ovarian cancer. And then she developed this very rare complication that Dr. Bob Darnell was studying. It’s called paraneoplastic syndrome, a rare neurological complication from cancer. People who have this don’t usually die of the syndrome, they die of the cancer, which was true for her. I remember that when I learned that this friend was going to be seen at RU, I was just floored. It seemed like, somehow, I worked in this hospital, but it was impossible that I could be faced with knowing somebody who came here from another part of my life. It’s sort of like: you imagine all these funny demarcations in your life, and then, one day, you realize they’re not really there. ◉

From Bench to Canvas

CHRISTINA PYRGAKI



Photograph by Beatriz Lopez.

Natural Selections interviews Beatriz Lopez, research assistant in the Laboratory of Molecular Biology.

Natural Selections (NS): How long have you been doing science and how long have you been painting?

Beatriz Lopez (BL): I’ve been doing science for four years, and painting a lot longer. I painted my first painting when I was fourteen years old.

NS: Has your work in the lab changed your art or the way you think about art?

BL: I have always felt that science and art are connected. Even though my paintings do not have science as a subject, the creation of a painting requires understanding of physics and material sciences; this knowledge goes into making a painting appear the way it does. The physical principles behind the colors in a painting and how they change with illumination, the pigments, binders, varnish, and support materials need to be understood before being used in a painting.

NS: Where do you draw your inspiration from?

BL: In 2001, I did my first self-portrait. I wanted to find a way

to remove all that was within me. Since then I’ve become the protagonist of my paintings. In Frida Kahlo’s words: “I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best.”

NS: Do you think the employee art show encourages the participation of employees enough?

BL: I think the art show encourages employees to display their talent. It was designed to give artists at all skill levels an opportunity to exhibit their artwork. I really enjoy this event.

NS: What is the best and worst memory from your participation in the art show over the years?

BL: I’ve been doing it for three years. The best memory is of people telling me they like my work.

The worst one was when, two years ago, my painting was considered controversial. The painting could be part of the show under one condition: the piece would be displayed in a place not too visible for the public. I accepted the condition.

NS: What would you change in the way the art show is organized and run?

BL: A little more thought should be put into the arrangement and display of the art work. For example, direct light makes it hard to see and appreciate art pieces with reflective surfaces, i.e. pictures covered by glass. But other than that I think that the art show is a rather well organized event.

NS: Are you participating this year?

BL: No. This year for me has been a year of experimenting with new techniques, to get new inspiration, and I have nothing concrete to show yet.

NS: Is there another art piece in the art show that impressed you that you still remember from previous years’ shows?

BL: Yes! I loved my sister Paola Emhardt’s *Mixed Media* from last year’s show. ◉

Take Me Out to the Ball Game

AILEEN MARSHALL

In just one month, the World Series starts. Have you ever wondered why there were so many people gathered around television sets in the Faculty Club in October? What your co-workers were talking about around the coffee pot those mornings? How you won in the lab's World Series pool?

Baseball is known as "The Great American Game," illustrated by a commercial from about thirty years ago, which ran with the tagline "baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet." For many years, it was common belief that Abner Doubleday invented baseball in 1839 in Cooperstown, NY. The belief comes from the Mills commission—a 1905 report by the National League. This was the basis for the location of the Baseball Hall of Fame. In recent years it has become known that this origin is a myth. Abner Doubleday was a Civil War general, but he was a cadet at West Point in 1839, and his family had moved from Cooperstown the year before. When he died, he left many papers and letters, none of which even mentioned baseball.

It is not clear where the modern game of baseball actually started. There are references to a "base ball" and a "bat and ball" game in both British and American writings as early as the 1700s. It probably evolved from the British game, rounders. Baseball is also somewhat similar to cricket. Now, The Great American Game has become popular in the Caribbean, South America, Japan, and Taiwan.

Baseball is played on a field made up of four bases arranged in a diamond pattern. A player on the offensive (batting) team comes up to bat at the base called "home plate." A pitcher on the "mound" in the middle of the diamond throws the ball to the batter. The batter attempts to hit the ball far enough so that he can get to the first base without a player on the defensive (fielding) team catching the ball before it hits the ground, or tagging him with the ball before he reaches the base. If he does this, he is "safe." If he hits the ball far enough, or if the fielding team fails to catch the ball or tag him, he can run to as many bases as possible. If he manages to go around to all three bases and back to the home plate, that is a "home run." Once any player reaches the home plate safely, a point is scored. If the batter swings at a ball that was hittable and misses, that is a "strike." When a batter gets three strikes, he is "out." The next players keep coming up to bat until there are three outs, then the teams switch sides. When the other team gets three outs, that is the end of the "inning." When the first team, "the visitors," is up at bat, it is called the "top" of the inning. When the home team is up at bat, it's known as the "bottom." The game is played for nine innings, or if the score is tied in the bottom of the ninth inning, until the tie is broken.

The World Series officially started in 1903, although there were other championships before then. The owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates, the champion that year of the well-established National League, agreed to play the Boston Pilgrims, of the newly formed American League, in a best-of-nine game series. The next year, the owner of the New York Giants refused to play Boston, seeing the American League as inferior and citing a lack of consistency in the rules between the two leagues. By the following year, the two leagues had resolved their differences, and the tradition of the World Series was born.

The series is now a best-of-seven, with a 2-3-2 sched-

ule, established by Charles Ebbets in 1924. Two games at one team's stadium, three games at the other team's location, and then back to the first team's ballpark if necessary. The locations of the first games of the World Series are determined by the All Star Game, in the middle of the regular season: whichever league wins that game gets to start the World Series in their home ballpark.

The history of the World Series can be divided into two eras: the pre-Yankee era, 1903-1920, and the Yankee era, starting in 1921. The New York Yankees have played in 40 of 103 World Series, and won 27. While the Boston Red Sox, the Chicago White Sox, and the Chicago Cubs dominated until 1920, the Red Sox did not win again until 2004. Some say it was the "Curse of the Bambino" that caused this shift in dominance. Babe Ruth, also known as the Bambino, was a very prolific home run hitter for his time. When the Red Sox traded him to the Yankees in 1920, the resulting Red Sox losing streak was said to be the team's punishment.

In 1919, the famous "Black Sox" scandal occurred. Some players on the Chicago White Sox plotted to throw the Series for money, including Shoeless Joe Jackson. After an investigation, those players were suspended, and the White Sox would not win a Series again until 2005. The position of baseball commissioner was established after that to help enforce the standards of the game.

The World Series has been played every year since 1905 except for 1994, during the players' strike. The commissioner at the time, Bud Selig, was also a team owner and thus an interested party. That season began with an expired collective bargaining agreement, and in August the players went on strike. By September, with no agreement in place, Selig canceled the rest of that season.

Of course, New Yorkers have bragging rights. Over the history of the series, teams from New York (Yankees, Giants, Dodgers, and Mets) have had 65 World Series appearances, and won 34. A New York team won every series from 1949 to 1956.

So, come the end of October, when you see your colleagues cheering around the television in the Faculty Club, stop and watch a while. We can all enjoy the Fall Classic. ◊

Life on a Roll



3rd floor Flexner Hall, August 2010 by Joseph Luna

