



Instructions for living a life.

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

--Mary Oliver

Three Leaders Step up to the LC

Janet Simpson, Angela Mercy, Lynn DeFehr...

You've seen their names in these pages many times, because all three have been working hard for BAH: Janet on the Outreach Committee and the Membership Committee, as our representative at the 2017 Village Network Conference, and currently on the Publicity Committee and as an office volunteer; Angela on the Volunteer Task Force, as a strategic planner, and currently as organizer and leader of the Gifts of Aging interest group; and Lynn as an office volunteer, member of the Neighborhood Cluster Council, interviewer of prospective volunteers and new members, and, of course, decorator of our (winning) entry in the Leopold's Festival of Trees last December!

All three have now stepped up their game by joining the Leadership Council, where their experience, expertise, and talents will be put to good use in further shaping Bellingham At Home for the future. Newly elected LC members serve for three years.

Please thank them for their service if you see them and wish them well.

BAH's New Writers' Group Gets Underway

By Sandy Stanton

Being a writer, I had to see what this new Writer's Group would offer, so I went to its first meeting on July 8 in Jane Pryce's pleasant backyard patio surrounded by her remarkable garden. An umbrella shaded the six of us—Jan Claussen, Maria Thurston, George Edward, Ann (Margaret) Miller, and me, plus Jane—as we sat around the table, getting to know each other and enjoying snacks provided by Jane and others.

The first thing we decided was to be flexible—about meeting times, about places, and about how we would spend our time together (besides enjoying each other's company and good food). As writers, we had experience with different genres, but several of us shared an interest in memoirs.

For this meeting, Jane brought out a basket of greeting cards from which we each selected one based on the cover art; this was to inspire us to write a short piece, on the spot, to read to the group. It was more fun than I expected!

We agreed to bring something we had written next time and read a short excerpt (maybe three minutes) to the group. We could request a critique, or not. Relevant comments could be offered, or not. As we found when we met next on August 16 (with Joan Dow joining us), just the experience of reading and listening can be edifying. Jane had a new inspirational gimmick for a quick-write: old newspaper articles, like "Spud Hits Train Boy" (British paper, 1989).

Our August 24 group was small but enthusiastic, and two more may join us next time. Those present really wanted to have weekly meetings, so the next one will be Friday, August 31, 2:00, at my house (see contact information below for directions).

We welcome new members! Bring something you have written, of whatever genre, that you can read to the group in three minutes or so. We learn from each other! Our impromptu work (just a few lines) will again be inspired by a collection of things (can't say what yet!) put out on display. Light refreshments will be available.

Jane will be in England until September 24, so if you're interested in joining the Writers' Group, please contact me at 541-588-2446 or js.stanton@gmail.com.

From the Office **Buzzing with Excitement**

By Colleen Harper, Program Manager

Tuesday July 24th we had some unexpected excitement at the BAH office. Janet Simpson was sitting at the desk in front of the window when a BSAC member came in and said, "Do you know you have some wasps in your window?"

Surprised but not alarmed, I leisurely walked around to the outside of the window to have a look. Between the painted canvas sign (made and donated by Lynn DeFehr's daughter) and the window were about 20 yellow jackets!

I hurried back inside as the wasps, now agitated, began climbing out from behind the canvas. Janet coolly taped the painting to the window, leaving just a tiny hole at the top, then went outside to monitor the wasps' activity as I armed myself with a coffee mug and file folder. She rapped on the glass to encourage a few wasps at a time up through the opening and I trapped them in the cup, using the folder as a lid, and ran them outside. I must have made 15 round trips, gathering a small audience along the way.

A cluster of shyer wasps still remained on the window sill. I quickly moved the painting and swept as many as I could into the recycle bin with the file folder, again using the folder as a lid, and ran the whole thing outside. We caught the last few stragglers under the cup one at a time.

Our hypothesis is that there were eggs on the window sill that chose that day to hatch, because the wasps seemed clumsier than normal. I'm happy to report that nobody got stung and no wasps were harmed.

Janet said this was one of my "other duties, as needed," and we both had a good laugh.



Coming Soon to a Theater Near You

Bellingham At Home will sponsor—and introduce!—an encore showing of *En Man Som Heter Ove* at the Pickford Theater on September 10 at 6:15 pm. Perhaps you know it better as *A Man Called Ove*...

The movie, much loved by audiences and critics alike, is part of the Pickford's year-long 20th anniversary celebration, in which the theater is highlighting 20 of its most popular movies. Each of them is just \$3.

Here's Rotten Tomatoes' take on the film: Stepping from the pages of Fredrik Backman's international best-selling novel, *Ove* is the quintessential angry old man next door. An isolated retiree with strict principles and a short fuse, who spends his days enforcing block association rules that only he cares about, and visiting his wife's grave, *Ove* has given up on life. Enter a boisterous young family next door who accidentally flattens *Ove*'s mailbox while moving in and earning his special brand of ire. Yet from this inauspicious beginning an unlikely friendship forms and we come to understand *Ove*'s past happiness and heartbreaks. What emerges is a heartwarming tale of unreliable first impressions and the gentle reminder that life is sweeter when it's shared. Please plan to join us for a fun evening!

The Gift of the “Gifts of Aging” Interest Group

By Janet Simpson

Good conversation has been the center of this monthly interest group. In the comfortable home of Angela Mercy and her husband Nick Waslenko, with refreshing herbal iced tea and healthy snacks, we start with a general topic and go from there. One month we discovered how many people were writing in some form and what their purpose was, and went on to explore what physical things we’ve held onto from the past and the way they support our future. Last month we talked about how we feel about people offering help and about using a cane or walker. Do we see ourselves as “old”? What have we gained or lost?

So far there have been four to eight people attending. I like that we have men and women and an age range from the late sixties to the eighties. It's been rewarding to have the time to simply reflect on different aspects of aging and explore and share thoughts with others in a leisurely way. I find myself thinking about the topics for quite a while afterwards and often looking at my life a little differently.

Generally we meet on the second Thursday of the month from 3-5 but in September we're meeting on the 20th. Call Angela (360-603-0064) if you want to try it out.

Volunteer Social: A Good Time Was Had by All

Sixteen volunteers attended our volunteer social on August 15. We enjoyed home-made cookies baked by several members and thank you notes written by many BAH members and organized on a display by Volunteer Committee chair Angela Mercy (center left photo).

This was an opportunity for volunteers to make connections with each other and share their experiences. Several attendees said it was the relationships they built with members and the opportunity to meet new and interesting people that kept them motivated, but they clearly got a kick out of each other as well.



A Tip of the Hat to...

Volunteer Nick Waslenko

By Kate Birr

Many thanks to Nick Waslenko for helping me find my new computer!

It's many years between one computer and the next for me, and I always feel like I need an immersion course when I start looking for a new one. I put in a request for a volunteer to help me make an informed decision. Nick answered the call. He was knowledgeable but not trying to sell me anything. He had recently done his own homework and visited the Microsoft store in Seattle, where he had tried out the kinds of computers I was also considering. He helped me figure out what features I didn't need and what I really did need (or want). As important, he reassured me that the jump to my next computer wasn't as scary as I feared.

I'm very pleased with my new Surface Book 2. I just hope Nick (or someone else as knowledgeable and nice) will be volunteering when I need a new computer seven years from now.

Senior Cohousing: Another Way to Age in Place

By Lauren Phillips

"Purists think that 'aging in place' means you grow old in your own home vs. a nursing home," said Sally Abrahms. (www.longevitynetwork.org/exclusive/housing-lessens-loneliness) "But 'home' can also be moving somewhere else where you have friends and connections. One possibility is cohousing."

One of the major benefits of cohousing for seniors is that it promotes, actually requires, social activity. According to Abrahms, one in three people aged 50+ are divorced, widowed, or never married; in many cases, children are far away or uninvolved in their lives. She cites studies showing that isolation and loneliness can be as damaging to older adults as smoking and are linked to a 26-32% rise in premature death.

There are 165 cohousing communities throughout the country, plus 140 more in the land development stage, and many of these include seniors who enjoy living in a blended community with residents of all ages.

But there are also 13 established senior cohousing communities, with another two in the building process and 13 more in formation. As you might guess, California has more than any other state, followed by New Mexico and then Colorado, but there are also ones in Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Florida.

What Exactly Is Senior Cohousing?

As described by SeniorLiving on their website, senior cohousing is a type of living community that combines private homes with clustered living spaces: 20-40 single-family or attached homes built around a common area so that everyone shares the same lawn space and walkways. There is also a shared common house that typically includes a large kitchen and dining room where communal meals are held once or several times a week, laundry facilities, living rooms, and often guest rooms. Many have gardens, workshops, fitness rooms, etc.



Artist's rendering of "Quimper Village Common Square" by McCasland & Durrett Architects.

Unlike retirement communities, a cohousing community is formed by its founding residents, who together decide how they want to construct the neighborhood, set universal housing standards and designs, develop community policies, and set community rules. Each resident owns their own house or condo and is part of the homeowner association.

Artist's rendering of Quimper Village Common Square in Port Townsend, WA.

What Is It Like to Live There?

If you live in cohousing, you are expected to participate: to help with communal chores (e.g., gardening, cooking), to attend the many meetings this type of consensus living requires, to show up for celebrations or arranged outings or other social activities. This varies from place to place, of course, but shared decision making, shared lawn and house tools, shared problem-solving, shared expenses come with the territory. So, too, do helping hands reaching out when you need them: friends to help you through rough patches, neighbors to help you celebrate a new grandchild, someone to brainstorm with you when you are tackling a new project and walk your dog if you take sick.

Interested in taking a closer look? There is one cohousing community in Bellingham, Bellingham Cohousing on Donovan Street, and it is intergenerational; once a year or so a unit becomes available although there is a long waiting list. To learn more, you can fill out a contact form on their website (bellcoho.com) or stop by their daily coffee hour at 10 am every morning and talk with current residents.

Some Online Resources for Further Exploration

SeniorLiving.org. SeniorLiving is a database that covers all senior living options, with aggregated and standardized information from hundreds of sources and many articles; they also offer senior housing advisors who will consult with you by phone.

Aging@cohousing.org . Aging in Cohousing is an initiative launched by Coho/US (Cohousing.org) Coho/US in 2017 to support the creation of age-friendly cohousing communities in the US.

Quimpervillage.com. Quimper Village in Port Townsend, with 28 homes, is the closest senior cohousing community to Bellingham and the only one in Washington.

BAH Book Group Launches a New Direction

By Nanette Davis

The BAH Book Group starts a new focus on September 28, when we tackle the topic of health, illness, and transitions. As seniors, these concerns occupy much of our time, so why not address them up front in our reading circle?

We'll start with the newest book (an instant New York Times bestseller) by the critically acclaimed author of *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich: *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer*. Now, that's a provocative title!

In addition to having written three previous books about health care in this country, Ehrenreich, 76, is also a breast cancer survivor and knows the health care system only too well on a personal level. After enduring dozens of tests, probes, surgeries, and check-ups, she questions the claim that modern medicine can overcome the ravages of age and death. Why trick the public into thinking that end-of-life treatment is both necessary and sufficient for the good life, she asks. You'll enjoy her sweeping social critique of all the absurd measures we take to keep young and on this side of the grave.

We'll meet this month at my house, September 28 at 4 p.m. Bring a friend for a rousing discussion of a highly controversial subject. Call for directions: 360-671-1686.

Become a Better Photographer

Whether you are just beginning to use your camera or are hoping to move from competent to wonderful, this BSAC class will speed you on your journey, with essential basics, helpful tips, and a new understanding of how to get those great shots. Your instructor is professional photographer Carol Sheppard.

Photography, says Sheppard, “is the happy marriage of art and science, but a photographer who lacks passion for his or her art is just an individual with a camera. Great photography requires all three: art, science, passion.” Get a taste of each at this free session, Wednesday, September 5th, at 10:30 a.m. in Room 2.

Membership Matters

Spotlight on Susan Vaughan



Susan Vaughan lives on three and a half acres in a peaceful corner of Whatcom County.

“Because we’re close to the bay and mouth of the Nooksack, we have a lot of raptors, along with deer and coyotes; even the famous wandering black bear from Ferndale cruised through. One day we counted 13 eagles hunting. We also have the gentle owls because there are a lot of voles and rabbits, a favorite of the coyotes as well. Years ago we had our property certified as an organic Wildlife Sanctuary and I continue that stewardship.

We raised our animals, including horses and chickens, and gardened under those guidelines.”

For 28 years, they shared the land with eight “beautiful and loving” llamas that they raised, donating their fiber to WWU’s fiber department, the local 4-H club, and Lummi Elders for their ceremonial activities.

“We enjoyed ‘llama education days’ on our farm when the babies were born, offering birthday cake, drinks, Polaroid pictures, llama leading, and horse rides to the many neighbors, friends, and children who visited.”

Naturally, Susan has always looked to the outdoors for fun: riding their horses into wilderness areas; hunting deer, elk, and birds with friends; crabbing and saltwater and freshwater fishing; and organic vegetable and fruit gardening—with friends and people at the Senior Center sharing in the bounty today. People who have attended BAH potlucks will testify to the fact that she is a terrific cook.

“I was fortunate to have a wonderful husband who really enjoyed eating and was willing to try anything. Now I’ll cook up a storm occasionally and get it out of my system for a while. If I want to cook something that I wouldn’t ordinarily cook just for myself, I keep a portion for myself and share the rest with a close friend and neighbor with a large family. Contributing to a yearly bake sale and picnics also offers great opportunities for creative cooking and baking.”

Another facet of Susan’s life was being the official NW Washington Fair photojournalist for three years, “an honor I thoroughly enjoyed. We were proud our fair always won the most first and second place ribbons for our pictures in state fair regional and state competitions. The dedication and energy of all the kids and volunteers who worked so hard all year to prepare for the fair was energizing and inspiring—truly special, wonderful times.”

Now she has another inspiring focal point: her work with BAH’s Health Advocacy program. Susan was the fifth member to join Bellingham At Home, “anxious to be a part of and contribute to the organization,” and she has done just that. Initially, she was a member of the Social and Educational Committee, where she helped plan BAH activities, including

monthly Lunch Bunch outings, and now she is a volunteer advocate, ready and able to help members through medical procedures from planning and preparation through recuperation.

“After completing Medical Note Taking training and the eight-week Community Health Advocate course from Health Ministries Network, I was credentialed by Peace Health as a Community Health Advocate. Currently I’m an advocate for a patient outside of BAH, and this is deeply rewarding and personally enriching.”

Susan is also a licensed, bonded notary and—this will not surprise you—has chosen to provide free notary services to members of BAH and the other non-profit agencies she volunteers for.

Spreading the Word



Janet Simpson (pictured, seated) and Colleen Harper attended the 20th annual Senior Day in the Park to share information about Bellingham At Home. The event was held at Hovander Homestead Park in Ferndale.

Book Report **Grief Cottage** *By Sandy Stanton*

Gail Godwin’s poignant and powerful tale of 11-year-old Marcus and his Great Aunt Charlotte leads us through the summer of 2004 on a small island off the South Carolina coast. Several months earlier, Marcus’ single mother was killed in a car accident and the stricken boy was placed in a foster home. When the court finally determined that his only living relative was his mother’s Aunt Charlotte, she agreed to become his guardian—despite having no child-raising experience and having lived alone for 30 years in a one-bedroom cottage on the island following three divorces.

At 57, Charlotte earns her living as an artist, painting scenic views of the coast and old beach homes, including the rickety, 200-year-old Grief Cottage—so dubbed by islanders after its tenants, a couple and their 14-year-old son, were apparently claimed by ferocious Hurricane Hazel in 1954.

As Marcus came through the airport security gate to meet his aunt for the first time, he was greeted with a handshake by a very thin lady with “stern, beaky features and a frosty mannish haircut.” She was wearing a loose white shirt, slacks, and scuffed brown sandals. “Well, Marcus, here we are,” she said, as she guided him to her old Mercedes sedan. Once home, Charlotte led the boy to the bedroom, telling him in her gruff voice that she slept in her studio. That evening, she nibbled at her dinner while sipping a glass of wine—not her first. Surely the same question ran through both their minds: We’re going to live together?

It sounds bleak, but slowly the odd pair discovers that they're each filling a need in the other, as they learn to see each other through their hearts. The former isolation each had felt slips away as they become a family. They are bolstered in this journey by Lachicotte Hayes, Charlotte's former partner in a vintage car taxi service and now a loyal friend, and a crippled, elderly neighbor who has just lost her son—in a car accident. When Charlotte falls and injures both an ankle and a wrist (the right one, her painting hand), Marcus becomes a caregiver and a sort of guardian himself, and their relationship matures.

Meanwhile, during a visit Marcus makes to Grief Cottage, he's sure he sees the ghost of the boy that was swept out to sea fifty years earlier. Though scared, Marcus feels compelled to talk to him and seems to feel a psychic response. He tells no one of this strange relationship, not even his aunt. I'm not going to tell you any more—you'll have to find out for yourself what happens!

You'll also enjoy the engaging epilogue, which reveals Marcus' discovery of the family neither he nor the court knew he had.

Gail Godwin kept me spellbound with this captivating tale, which she has created with vivid prose, beautifully crafted characters, and emotions that range the gamut of the human (and perhaps parahuman) experience.

Is there a volunteer whose help you'd like to recognize? A book you'd like to review? An experience you'd like to write about for the newsletter? Please contact Kate Birr (kate.birr@bellinghamathome.org) or Lauren Phillips (lauren-don-phillips@comcast.net) or the office and let us know how you'd like to contribute to our monthly effort.

Bellingham At Home Contact Information

Location: Bellingham Senior Activity Center, Room 14, 315 Halleck Street, Bellingham, WA 98225

Phone: 360 746-3462 E-mail: info@bellinghamathome.org

Website: <http://BellinghamAtHome.org>

Bellingham At Home is a program of the Whatcom Council on Aging, which is a 501(c)(3) organization, and a member of the Village to Village Network.