Minutes of the Literary Club
Sept. 17, 2012

President Albert Pyle welcomed back sixty members and six guests for the season's opener. The already festive atmosphere was intensified by news that our friend Nikko Ranieri has seen one of his inventions recently adopted by the FDA; loud cheers erupted. Further, our colleague Jerry Kathman has once again brought before us new selections of alcoholic beverages, including Skinny Girl Wine, being marketed by his firm, LPK. I don't know what the focus groups are saying, but the Literary Club heartily endorsed their presence among us.

Rich Lauf did the opening honors, and he chose as his subject a man who was able to recite from memory Shakespeare's "Tempest," when he was 12, who kept his wife-to-be waiting 13 years before marriage while he sought financial independence and who spoke 28 languages before he died.

The man, Sir William Jones was influential from an early age, first using his facility with language to translate for royalty, then to do a Persian grammar and dictionary to assist Englishmen wishing to learn Persian before heading east. At age 24 he took up the law, soon enough publishing an essay on the Law of Bailments, some of which still finds relevance today.

In 1783, when he was 47, Jones was appointed a justice on the Supreme Court in Bengal. In India, he quickly recognized the difficulty in dispensing justice to a population whose culture was so different from his own. The best way around this, he decided, was to learn Sanskrit, out of which most Indian traditions had evolved. Ever the autodidact, Jones accomplished this, too – and went on to argue convincingly that Sanskrit was the precursor of many modern languages, including Greek, Latin, Persian and their derivatives. For this, scholars regard him as the father of modern linguistics.

Rich's interest in Jones, he told us, is rooted in a conviction that Jones was not only a "great man" by any definition, but that he was also exceedingly "clubbable" by our measure. Citing two fine gentlemen's clubs that Jones belonged to in England, Rich later noted his founding of the Bengal Asiatic Society, which exists to this day in Calcutta.

Rich took pains to compare the virtues of the assembled in our own club to the remarkable qualities of his subject. And while I

appreciate the gesture, I'm not buying it, at least in my case. Jones, as described, was a genius the likes of which the world has rarely known.

Minutes of the Literary Club
Sept. 24, 2012

Round two of the new season found David Cave presenting on the role of substantive conversation in social interaction. Entitling his remarks "Conversing, and with Nietzche," Dave induced fifty members and three guests to see where he would go with them.

The path was not easy. "To create the self," Dave said early on, "our own individual style, and for adopting a receptive non-defensive, dialogical engagement toward other ideas, toward people and toward what life brings our way, is the subject on which I wish to speak tonight."

He then distinguished between "talk" – "the emitting of a sound in the form of sustained speech" – and conversation – "an act of speaking and listening whereby each responds to the other." He came down in favor of the latter as a "meeting of minds," a rising "to a greater self-expression," a chance to be "elevated as a human being, of one with a mind, an outlook, a set of experiences, all historically conditioned."

Said another way, Dave feels good conversation is a great thing. He laments its demise in the face of the national groupthink occasioned by the 9/11 attacks and by the polarization of our political parties. He noted the abuse of it enabled by technologies that "give us the misleading solace of having communicated with another without having to deal with the messiness of communicating face to face."

The paper cited different kinds of conversation, like internal dialogue or personal journals. It offered some history of conversation, a la English clubs and French salons.

Nietzche, Dave said, "practiced conversation as a means to develop the self." By way of example, he then traced the great man's philosophical evolution, including his relationship with Schopenhauer and his famous assertion that "God is Dead." There was much more – enough, in fact, to persuade any skeptics that for Dave, philosophy itself may be the greatest conversation topic – and all the rest is talk.

Following David's presentation, Ed Burdell reported on clubhouse maintenance. Normal cleaning, notably the rugs, and interior painting, notably the kitchen, were completed over the summer. In late spring,

the exterior trim was painted its current crisp black. We are working on a plan for improved lighting. We have had preliminary discussions with an architect concerning a redesign of the kitchen for greater efficiency and improvements to both the bathroom and the emergency exit passage. We are reviewing options to improve the HVAC. Ed said not to anticipate major expenses before next summer.

Respectfully submitted,
Polk Laffoon IV

Minutes of the Literary Club
October 1, 2012

Sixty-five members and three guests gathered to hear Howard Tomb's plaintive chronicling of his brother Geoffrey's struggle with alcoholism over the past quarter-century: the years of onset, in the eighties and early nineties, with his denial, his pugnacious rejection of Howard, his shocking performances at family events, and finally the black-outs, shaking and vomiting that led him to seek help. First came a 28-day treatment program in Miami, where Geoffrey had been working as a food and feature writer for The Miami Herald for more than a decade. After that, it was Alcoholics Anonymous, where Geoffrey has missed nary a daily meeting for 19 years.

But this was no unremitting *Days of Wine and Roses.* Howard paced his narrative with memories of his brother's fragile upbringing – Geoffrey was not a healthy child – his wayward path as a student and first-time job-seeker, then his rapid rise as a reporter and restaurant critic at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. In 1979, "out of the blue," Geoffrey received a job offer from the prestigious Miami Herald, and we were quickly plunged into the politics and personalities of the newsroom.

Howard's paper was peppered with wry observations, as in "Geoffrey (with a 'G' as in Chaucer)" or "There is no one more self-centered than a 13-year-old boy who had been an only child for most of his life." It shifted between Geoffrey's personal and professional lives with just enough detail to bring each of them sharply to life.

At the end, reporting on Geoffrey's success, Howard's mask of objectivity fell, and we could hear real emotion as he gave us the good news: Geoffrey was lucky to have a wife that stuck by him, an editor

who thought he was worth saving and a family who never stopped loving him. “Lucky to be alive,” he concluded. Applause was intense.

Minutes of the Literary Club
October 8, 2012

Before 54 members and eight guests, Lew Gatch took us on a fishing expedition to Boca Grande, Florida – where, in the late spring each year, the largest concentration of tarpon in the western hemisphere return to spawn. Tarpon is one of the world’s great game fish. They are big -- up to 280 pounds – and handsome, and they put up a hell of a fight. For several years, for two-to-three days each time, Lew and his son have made this pilgrimage, and the memories are among Lew’s happiest.

In “Bow to the King,” the paper’s title, taken from a term specific to reeling in a tarpon, Lew shared some of what he has seen and learned. We heard about tarpon generically, about the guides and the anglers and the sport show TV boats that chase them, and about several of Lew’s experiences with each of the above.

In crisp, well-paced prose, he told us about fishing in calm water and in rough, about the frenzy attendant to cutting loose a tarpon once brought alongside the boat, about reeling in one that put up a seemingly wild fight . . . that turned out to have been hooked in the eye, not the mouth, and about another that struggled – epically – for more than two hours, only to reveal itself as a hammerhead shark with a tarpon in its mouth.

Lew cast his story in “Old Man and the Sea” prose, referring to himself as “the man” and “the son” throughout. So it had a kind of mystical overlay. The one thing we didn’t hear, and I’m not sure what this means, was about the one that got away. When Lew goes fishing, apparently, there aren’t any that get away.

Minutes of the Literary Club
October 15, 2012

On this night, our own Mr. Chips. Henry Payson Briggs, told 55 members and six guests about three of the six years he spent as an “interim head” of three different independent schools in Los Angeles, in McLean, Virginia and in Norfolk, Virginia. These experiences were

greatly enriching for Peter, and for us. Quite different from one another, the schools enabled him to meet fascinating and accomplished people, to exercise his own considerable skills as a school administrator, and thus to make a positive difference in his short time on each campus.

The first stop was the St. James school in the bowels of Los Angeles, with a 70 percent Korean student body, and 20 percent black and Latino. It was the year of the O.J. Simpson trial, and much of Peter's time, he said, was concerned with preparing for the nasty reverberations that were bound to ensue if Simpson were convicted. That, of course, didn't happen, but the insights to local feelings concerning the L.A. police, to Korean culture, and to the power of music in this unlikely setting were all revelatory.

Before he left, Peter was able to persuade the school's board to initiate a capital campaign to buy up some of the distressed property abutting the school's, the better to forestall the students watching close up the seedy behavior that characterized the neighborhood. To help him out, Peter enticed three notable grandparents: Peter Ueberroth of 1984 Olympics fame, Charlie Munger, who is Warren Buffett's partner, and Peter O'Malley, president of the L.A. Dodgers. Our speaker had warned us going in that he was going to name drop, and he did not shrink.

The years in McLean, at the Potomac School, and Norfolk, at the Norfolk Academy, were equally adventurous, with incidents like the Saudi ambassador and his wife seeking admission for their five children, who would need bodyguards on the McLean campus, or evangelist Pat Robertson requesting an audience with Peter in Norfolk to vent his unhappiness over his granddaughter going to Princeton. "I understand you're a Harvard man," Robertson said, "so I don't understand why they hired you here, but at least Princeton is not as bad as Harvard. What can I do for you so you might persuade Tim (the girl's father) to make a more satisfactory choice that my wife and I are comfortable with?"

As I hope I've indicated, this was a very rich paper.

Minutes of the Literary Club
October 22, 2012

In 1962, Mike Kremzar told 54 members and six guests, he insulted a Napa Valley vintner by spurning his kind offer of free samples, saying: "No thank you, I'm from the East and don't care for Muscatel." Then he proceeded to swill every sample the guy brought

before him, slipped quietly into the bag, and to this day, he says, he is still not sure his one-year-old son didn't take the wheel driving home!

But Mike's intentions for his paper were sober. He wanted to tell us how California wine got respect over the past 50 years and, by implication, how that evolution paralleled his own as a connoisseur.

He told us how wine first came to California – by Spanish priests – how it is made, and how, in the mid-sixties, a vineyard owner on a sales trip to Beverly Hills had "the audacity to demand that his wines be priced at the same level as the best French wines since he believed that the quality was the same." At the time, Mike said, agricultural and scientific researchers at the University of California Davis and at Fresno State were cracking the codes of good winemaking.

Fast forward to 1976 when a writer for Time Magazine covered an obscure competition between French and California wines, in France, judged by Frenchmen. To everyone's astonishment, the American wines triumphed. The write-up in Time sent wine-lovers in America flying to stores to procure the winning brands and nothing was the same again.

Mike told us a lot more about wine, but as I said, he also gave evidence of his own development as a connoisseur. In the late sixties, P&G assigned him to Europe, where, "I drank as much bad French wine as I did good, until I figured out which was which. Because the French wines were usually blends of several grape varieties, I did miss the unique flavor of each variety that I had come to appreciate in California wines, but I soldiered on anyway."

Such doggedness, I suspect, now assures Kremzar dinner guests an enviable selection of wines.

Minutes of the Literary Club
October 29, 2012

The annual dinner, which hosted 71 members, was spirited and rewarding, not least because John Diehl was delivering his 25th – and last – paper in his much acclaimed role as Club historian. John's subject was Eslie Aabury – As, as he liked to be called – a distinguished member of the Club for 62 years.

A celebrated Cincinnati surgeon throughout the mid-twentieth century, and a breeder of thoroughbreds, As was most of all beloved for his warmth, his gentle humor and a talent for living that brought him legions of friends and admirers and a wealth of marvelous experiences.

In pristine prose, John recounted just a few of these:– As' resurrection of a run-down Kentucky farm into his showplace Forest Retreat, his meeting with Queen Elizabeth at Ascot, his invitation to judge the Brazilian Jockey Club's annual yearling show (including a two-week, all-expense paid trip to Brazil). We learned of his passion for the Mayo Clinic, where he trained for five years, his love of Trollope, his fascination with the impact of religion on people's behavior, his prowess at bridge, golf and shooting and his great devotion to the Literary Club.

It was a ringing testament to one of yesterday's greats by one of today's, and the assembled gave John a standing ovation.

Albert Pyle followed eloquently with the President's annual address, focusing first on John and the rare quality of his contributions to the Club. Then, evoking the Club's earliest days, he mused about the customs, homes and urban environment of our earliest members, noting that they were quite young, domestically unencumbered and generally enlightened. He speculated how they might have responded when, in 1856, James Buchanan was nominated for president in Cincinnati on a platform that insisted on states' rights with regard to slavery.

Still musing, Albert next characterized those young men's counterparts today – expected to share parenting at home, working beside smart, accomplished women at work, and he said, "It is imperative, then, that the review (now underway) of our customs and habits include a rationale we can all understand and defend to these bright young men and women who ask just what it is we do here and why we do it the way we do."

The room was very quiet, but Albert, in a courageous display of leadership, was determined to show his cards.

Respectfully submitted,

Polk Laffoon IV

Minutes of the Literary Club
November 5, 2012

Before 57 members and three guests, Gareth Howell – who is of Welsh descent – compressed nine centuries of speculation concerning possible Welsh involvement in the settling of the New World into a single paper so thick with names, dates, places and quoted passages that

his passion for the topic overrode the discipline of his scholarship. It was loaded with information, but it was too much to ingest.

More or less structured on an unofficial quest, through the past millennium, to find a tribe of Indians whose dialect reflects traces of the Welsh language, Gareth's narrative went something like this:

In 1170, Prince Madoc ab Owain ap Gruffydd ap Cynan sailed from Wales to Mobile Bay, thus, in the view of some, discovering America. Three hundred years later, John Dee, counselor to Queen Elizabeth, assured her majesty that Madoc's voyage gave Britain title to North America. In 1634, Sir Thomas Herbert, Welsh envoy to Persia, published a book of his many travels citing his certainty that Madoc had discovered America. He referenced Indians who seemed to know Welsh.

Fifty years later, one Morgan Jones, a military chaplain sailing to America, recalled similar evidence of bilingual savages, and Edward Lhuyd, recently appointed keeper of the Ashsmolean Museum in Oxford, proposed that Herbert's book and Jones' tale offered "incontestable proof" of the "Madoc tradition." America, he suggested, "should have more justly been called Madocia."

Well, it went on from there, referencing forts and mounds of uncertain – but possibly Welsh – provenance, Poet Laureate Robert Southey's epic poem "Madoc" – Indiana Jones in 400 pages of blank verse, Gareth said – and so forth. There were more explorers and more writers – even an observation by the painter George Caitlin – all making the case for the Madoc Indians. But nothing conclusive.

Nothing, I suspect, that is going to unseat Christopher Columbus in our mythology.

Minutes of the Literary Club
November 12, 2012

In his amusing warm-up to a very serious discussion of jazz, Steve Marine invoked memories of Perry Como singing "Round and Round;" kidded us about claiming to have been at Woodstock because we – some of us, anyway – might like to think we were, and challenged us to recite the lyrics of "Red Rubber Ball" by the Circle – which Steve said he could do in a heartbeat, although he takes no pride in the fact.

These and other musical memories, he said, may now seem wonky and immature. But they served a purpose. They introduced him to music, and thus began to lay the foundation for his lifelong passion for

jazz. More of the foundation came from his parents, whose happy quarrels over the relative greatness of Art Tatum vs. Erroll Garner punctuated many an evening. And more still came from the high school athletes whom Steve perceived to be cool, and part of their coolness was in their appreciation for the jazz records his parents played.

In his paper, read before 50 members and two guests, Steve asked: Is jazz serious art music? And: Is jazz American classical music? Contending that it is both, he then set out to prove his thesis. He defined his topic as the various styles we instinctively think of as jazz – i.e., "bebop, cool, hard bop, modal and free jazz – characterized by rhythmic complexity, sophisticated and innovative harmonies, great technical proficiency, improvisation and that 'swing' feeling."

He then suggested that it should be examined from two perspectives: first, "an historical analysis of common evolution and mutual influence," and second, a "deconstruction of the elements of each for evidence of what is common *and* distinguishing."

The bulk of the paper, then was devoted to a dissection of these issues that would make any professor of musical theory proud. It is a thicket of history, terminology and interpretation that I could not presume to encapsulate here. Suffice to say, with great admiration, that Steve has indeed come a long way from the "Red Rubber Ball."

Minutes of the Literary Club
November 19, 2012

Aaron Betsky spoke to 53 members and five guests about his love for American college campuses, especially two of them, Yale and the University of Cincinnati. He regards campuses, maybe along with skyscrapers, as the nation's greatest architectural achievement.

Yale's campus, with its beautiful enclosed quadrangles of neo-Gothic, neo-Georgian and boldly contemporary designs, struck Aaron the undergraduate, and Aaron today, as a series of complete and beautiful communities whose inhabitants could live, learn and play in self-contained environments which, importantly, "worked to create a clear model for an ideal American society as a place where young people from disparate backgrounds could come together to form an effective elite."

UC's campus, with its long, downward curving walkway – the Mainstrasse – and with its many new buildings – some of them of

"exceptional quality" – has a different impact. It is, Aaron said, "a meeting place of both people and of learning , culture and socialization within the complexity and contradictions of the modern city." Further, it is "a perfection of what many of us now think of as the American ideal, namely the multi-cultural, multi-facilitied urban core of encounter, in a way analogous to how the campus devised a century ago offered an idealized version of the rural America Jefferson saw as our true natural habitat."

The paper included a cameo biography of James Gamble Rogers, Yale's primary architect, some general history of campus evolution and glimpses of some other university settings. But its real power was in Aaron's ongoing philosophizing about his topic. I leave you with this: "To this day, the American college style is the very emblem of a relaxed, entitled way of appearing that sells clothes all over the world. But it was, and is, also a complete and integrated world, a place apart and a fairytale vision you can inhabit for a few years."

Minutes of the Literary Club
November 26, 2012

It was a trifecta; three papers themed to Ohio politics and justice, all extremely well received, before an audience of 74 members and six guests. One Literarian there with an out-of-town guest said to me afterward, "I told my guest you don't have to come again . . . because it doesn't get any better than this."

The first paper, by Bill Sena, celebrated former Cleveland Mayor, Ohio Governor and Senator Frank Lausche, as one of the mid-twentieth century's great political figures – a warm, good humored, stubborn and incorruptible man of the people who, as Bill put it, was "willing to talk and listen and change, but not change his principles."

Lausche was elected governor five times and senator twice before succumbing (in a primary) to John Gilligan. He believed in low taxes and budget surpluses, and he delivered both. No friend of labor, he may have lost his bid for a third senatorial term in 1968 because of that position. Once out of office, he played a lot of golf, which he adored. Said Bill, "Many said he could have been president had he spent more time on Capital Hill than at Burning Tree."

Fred McGavran then read Joe Dehner's paper on Anthony Celebrezze, the son of a trackwalker for the Wheeling and Lake Erie

Railroad who became a five-term mayor of Cleveland, Secretary of Health Education and Welfare under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and a U.S. Court of Appeals Judge for 30 years.

The charm of the Breeze, as he was known, is well illustrated by Lyndon Johnson's recounting of an incident during the 1960 presidential campaign when he was stuck in an elevator with the mayor. I learned two things, Johnson said later. We both needed to lose a little weight. And "if it had to happen, there is no one I would rather be stuck with than Tony Celebrezze."

The heart of Joe's paper was in its depiction of Celebrezze's four intensely held operating principles, served up with one good example of each: For instance, the Breeze refused ever to be beholden to another person. When his HEW salary proved too little to support even a modest lifestyle, he resigned the job, prompting Johnson to say he was "the first cabinet secretary to go broke while working for the White House."

It was quite a story.

The last paper, by Tony Covatta, recounted his 14-year struggle to win clemency from the State of Ohio for convicted murdered Shawn Hawkins. It was a story of long odds, many setbacks, political calculations trumping simple justice and, finally, of Tony's unflagging persistence in the quest for what he knew to be right. In July of 2011, just days before the scheduled execution, Governor John Kasich granted clemency. For Tony, it was his best day as a lawyer in 33 years.

For many in this room, this paper was unusually moving. Some reasons for that may include writing that was clear and unemotional, with carefully calibrated detail. Tony recalled showing his grandchildren the great monuments of Washington while the Supreme Court was deciding unanimously to refuse to hear the Hawkins case.

On a higher level, Tony confessed his belief, as a lifelong Democrat, that the Republicans who could help his client would not. He was wrong. They did. From that, he found himself asking whether all of us mightn't do better to try harder to see both sides of an issue, to apply – as Kasich did – lessons from our own lives to the lives and needs of others. "How wrong we all are in this sad period of American and Ohio politics that we do not see the essential humanity in those on the other side," he said. More than one member has told me he felt tears welling.

Respectfully submitted,

Polk Laffoon IV

Minutes of the Literary Club
December 3, 2010

Genghis Kahn, the Mongolian warlord of near mythic brutality, was the evening's topic – but with a twist. Was he responsible for the many atrocities that history assigns him, or should his descendants more properly be blamed? Dusty Anderson, reading without prejudice before 64 members and four guests, asked his audience to decide. He said we would vote when he finished the paper.

For background, Dusty took us to the steppes of Eastern Asia and told us of the horseback and hunting culture from which Kahn arose. The man had a strong will, a magnetic personality and a genius for military organization which manifested itself in a decimal system of command: groups of ten, one hundred, one thousand and so forth – so that any order had only to be given to ten men.

They were tough hombres. Their weapon of choice was a "very strong" longbow, accurate to a hundred yards. Sometimes, we learned, they even lived off of mare's milk. Kahn was also a harsh disciplinarian, quick to execute if anyone failed to comply with orders.

Although he initiated an invasion of China, he did not live long enough to complete it. He also destroyed one central Asian city Utrar – in the present Republic of Uzbekistan – and much of the surrounding kingdom . . . this in response to the murder of one and insult to two of his ambassadors to that particular kingdom. But the great commander died before he could do more, even had he wanted to.

The balance of Dusty's paper was consumed with the conquests of Kahn's descendants: China, parts of Russia, Persia and Eastern Europe – but amid such a welter of names, places, time periods and digressions that when the time came to vote on whether Genghis Kahn had committed crimes against humanity, no consensus emerged. With all due respect to Dusty, he divided us as the Mongols did their foes, leaving them not quite sure exactly what hit them.

Minutes of the Literary Club
December 10, 2012

In “The Blind Calf,” read before 56 members and four guests. Steve Phillips gave us fiction that almost qualified as fable, so steeped was it – ultimately – in ethical and moral considerations.

I say “ultimately” because, for most of the first half, Steve’s focus was Tennyson, Indiana and the characters who populated it. The descriptions were lively and true.

There was the Chesney gym, where boys practiced basketball, because they lacked a gym of their own. There were baseball games and shooting matches and a barber who “always finished his work with a generous Vitalis douse.” All of this was told in retrospect by Caleb, a Tennyson native who had spent his adult life elsewhere, but now, aged, sick and in pain, had returned to southwest Indiana for a last look and, as we later learned, for his own suicide.

With the stage thus set, we were well prepared for Steve’s larger concern, which were the events unleashed by a misdeed on the part of Caleb’s father, many, many years previously. In a nutshell, the father had lied to one Alma Barton – an impoverished friend – about the value of a coin that the man had come by . . . and traded his family’s blind calf (which the boy Caleb adored) to get the coin for himself. Although it was extremely rare and correspondingly valuable, he did nothing with it. Upon his deathbed, he told his adult son Caleb the story, gave him the coin, and told him to set it right.

Caleb made contact with Barton, now 90 and in a nursing home. But he didn’t reveal the existence of the coin. He kept it hidden, just as his father had, and sent Barton just a little more money each month than his father had. Barton eventually died, and Caleb made no effort to contact his child, although he could have. Now, Caleb had determined, to “set it right” as best he could. He located Barton’s grave, dug a hole at the base of the head stone and buried the coin. Then he shot himself.

What happened to the coin? Something interesting. But I’m not going to tell you. Why ruin a good story? And as I said, this was almost a morality tale. You deserve to discover why for yourself.

Minutes of the Literary Club
December 17, 2012

Chris Miller did his usual crackerjack job for our Christmas program, conducting nine musicians and 11 singers in song and merriment. “Christmas, Christmas, what can you say? Here it comes

again and never goes away!” At least 64 members and four guests shared Yuletide cocktails, consumed a delicious turkey dinner and, when called upon, joined our entertainers in song. As the wassailing intensified and more members streamed in, I lost count of the participants but not of our blessings – it was a grand celebration.

The papers followed suit. Bill Friedlander’s charming recollections of telephoning as a youth, with requests to the operator for a number, or using a crank on the side to signal your party, morphed into learned opining on the handheld devices we’re using today and speculation about the advent of IWPs, or “internally wearable phones” in the not-too-distant future.

Allan Winkler’s paper, read by Jerry Kathman, was an affectionate look back at some of the author’s own lessons learned in 45 years of teaching, like the young Finnish girl backhandedly complimenting him on his guitar-playing by saying how “really bad” it was – meaning he was gutsy to do it at all. Each lesson, in its own way, left Allan feeling a little chagrinned, but none more so, perhaps, than his memory of succumbing to Ronald Reagan’s radio and television skills -- so great, Allan said, that after one address he had to shake himself in recognition that he didn’t agree with one thing the great communicator had said.

Paul Franz, bemusedly labeling himself as “superannuated,” addressed the challenges of his recent retirement from P&G in ways both scholarly and eloquent. The question: “What are you going to do?” he said, has dogged him from the get-go. He is not going to develop the action plan suggested in “10 Secrets for Creating and Living a Fulfilling Retirement,” a book written by two fellow Proctoids. And no matter how delicious it looks, he said, he will not be posting on Facebook something he is about to eat. Rather, Paul pledged, he is going to follow the prescription of 19th century essayist Charles Lamb, and “come to be known by my vacant face and careless gesture, perambulating at no fixed pace, and with no settled purpose.”

I hope, though, that at the least Paul will make time for more meditations. Because this was quite wonderful.

Minutes of the Literary Club
January 7, 2013

The theft of the Mona Lisa in 1911 is an odd chapter in the long and ignominious history of global art crime. Abducted by a hapless

Italian who was a former employee of the Louvre, the famous painting turned up a little over two years later in Florence, where the thief, one Vincenzo Peruggia, said he hoped to see it repatriated to its native Italy.

Offering it to an antiquities dealer, who enlisted the help of Giovanni Poggi, the director of the Uffizi, Peruggia quickly found himself arrested. Italy was jubilant. France was embarrassed. With a court appointed psychiatrist testifying that Peruggia was "intellectually deficient," a jury sentenced him to a year and 15 days in jail.

Jim Fitzgerald recounted these proceedings before 53 members and six guests, adding such detail as, "Of more than one million works of art in the Louvre, only Mona Lisa received her own mail. Many were love letters, and some were so ardent that for a while she had been put under special police protection. Only a year before in 1910, an admirer, 'facing a lifetime of unrequited love,' had shot himself in front of her."

We also learned that a friend of a friend of the young Pablo Picasso, "a charming and polished Belgian vagabond," enjoyed stealing small artifacts from the Louvre as a lark. He often joked as he left the artist's apartment, "I'm on my way to the Louvre. Anything I can pick up for you?"

Jim concluded his tale with a charming and polished conceit of his own. Noting that the original model for the Mona Lisa was born into the family Gherardini, he told us that a Web site he discovered, Geraldini.com, explains that the Gherardini name is perpetuated in the surname Fitzgerald in Ireland, and there is correspondence between the Fitzgeralds and the Gherardinis to prove it.

And so, he asked us, could Lisa Gherardini, the model for Da Vinci's masterpiece, be his long lost 16th century cousin? Jim had fun with this one.

Minutes of the Literary Club
January 14, 2013

Before 58 members and five guests, Bob Watkins gave us not *a* Horatio Alger story, but *the* Horatio Alger story, that is, a biography of the reclusive, 19th century author who wrote a series of books about the rags-to-riches rise of his adolescent male heroes. Ironically, just after Alger's death in 1899, these books became exemplars of the American success story, about how to overcome obstacles to achieve one's goals. They equated moral heroism with economic success, and in so doing,

made their plucky protagonists, mythic prototypes of the American captain of industry.

Alger's own story is hardly remarkable. Born to a Massachusetts preacher, he grew up wanting to write, but needing to consider the ministry to make ends meet. Finding limited success as a freelance, he entered Harvard Divinity School in 1857. Later drafted into the Union Army, he was rejected for service because he was too short – only 5'2". At that juncture, he decided to write children's fiction.

At the same time, out of concern for money, he became a minister of the First Unitarian Church of Brewster, Massachusetts. His tenure was brief. Rumors of improprieties between him and young, male members of the congregation forced his resignation and a hasty retreat from Brewster. Now impelled to write for a living, he conceived the idea of a young boy in the city – in this case a bootblack – making good. His first book in this genre, "Ragged Dick," set the formula for all that followed. None were as successful as this first one.

Bob prefaced his narrative with several curious facts. First, because Alger was so private, and asked that upon his death his sister burn all his letters and correspondence – which she did – much about his life is lost. Second, a fictional biography, published in the 1920s almost as a spoof, became accepted as gospel until, some fifty years later, its author blew the whistle on his own work. Third, a serious biography was published in 1985. Bob's paper gave us benefit of that.

Minutes of the Literary Club
January 21, 2013

I knew I was in trouble – I think we all knew we were in trouble, all 47 of us and three guests – when Howard Lodge started to describe the "few-to-many problem." It came early in the paper, a paper that reflected neither focus nor clarity, but that seemed, at least early on, that it might be tracing Howard's career path with observations about the steps along the way.

"The few to many problem," he said, "arises in mathematics – for example, three dimensions describes much of the space we see (forgetting space-time for the moment). The three coordinates of space, width and height span the three dimensions of space."

Such issues, Howard explained, intrigued him as he contemplated a career in academe. "Suddenly the power of behavior observation in the modeling problem became clear to me. Behavioral data needed mathematics to describe it. In turn, the mathematical models needed a firm grounding in physiology, otherwise the mathematics could be elegant but not relevant."

In the long, abstruse and technically challenging remarks that followed, Howard told us that a desire to put some cash flow into his life moved him from academia to research, to financial modeling, and to portfolio management. At one point, he implied that he was an egghead, and I thought that if that were apt – and within the context of this paper I think it was – then I was a meathead. Only a meathead could fail so utterly to appreciate the subtleties of Black Sholes modeling, derivative theory and Dodd Frank legislation that Howard subsequently explored.

But I may sell myself short. In the aftermath, I asked one of our colleagues, who has spent a lifetime in finance, if he understood what we had just heard – and he had not. Howard, I suspect you felt you were giving us something timely and provocative, but I'm afraid your colleagues found it a muddle, one in which we could see neither the forest nor the trees. We look forward to greener pastures another time.

Minutes of the Literary Club
January 28, 2013

Fifty-four members and two guests gathered to hear budget papers by Lou Witten, Chuck Judd and Rich Lauf.

Lou's paper, tracing the evolution of Arlington National Cemetery from southern estate to national shrine, was straightforward history. Focusing first on Arlington House, the gracious Greek Revival mansion that is the centerpiece of the cemetery, Lou told us how it was built by George Washington Parke Custis, the adopted son of George Washington, and how, over the next three-quarters of a century, it finally passed from Parke Custis' grandson to the federal government.

Along the way, of course, the terrible intrusion of the Civil War, with Union soldiers overrunning the place and making the grounds into a graveyard, did much to shape it for what it would become. Lou concluded with the emergence of the "Tomb of the Unknowns," surely one of the most sacred spots in America – but one not to be augmented,

because with contemporary DNA testing, it's unlikely that anyone is unknown anymore.

Chuck Judd followed with some blank verse that, he said, he had been moved to write after falling down in the Marjorie P. Lee home recently. Here is an example:

Puccini's finest in my opinion
An opera of French Bohemians
Human Beings of the Best kind
Love story, of course must be

Jean and I would hear it staged a
At the zoo or at the metropolitan
Today I listen to a recording
And dream of days with Jean

I think all present found it charming and moving to see Chuck take the podium once more. He won a standing ovation for his effort.

Rich Lauf's horror stories about his experiences with VA hospitals over the years were offered as a polemic. When you entrust something as complex as health care to the federal government, he told us at the outset, you are almost certainly inviting chaos. Clearly Rich's recollections of the doctors and proposed services he encountered in VA settings backed that up. As I listened, however, I could almost see a lapel pin of the American flag flashing in neon. No matter -- Rich's travails would not have left even Barack Obama unmoved.

Minutes of the Literary Club
February 4, 2013

Gibby Carey took 59 members and eight guests down a Memory Lane of green Maryland springs, happy Adirondack summers, elusive Maine fishing holes, patient fathers instructing eager sons and seven decades in pursuit of a passion that has given him not only endless pleasure, but gratifying insights into the business of life.

Gibby began fishing when he was seven, when his father finally deemed him old enough to be invited along, and from that moment, he has never taken less than total joy in any repeat of the experience. His father, a strict but loving mentor, suffered Gibby's early gaffes and saw

to it that the boy would catch enough fish to find the pastime compelling. Over the years, Gibby said, he learned many of life's lessons with his waders on – chief among them patience and the grace to bear disappointment with a smile.

His remarks carried us not only to many of the more attractive fishing spots in the Northeastern U. S., but ultimately, to Canada, Russia, South America and New Zealand. For Gibby, however, the real magic of fishing has been the opportunity it creates to build enduring relationships with people near and dear – his father, perhaps foremost, and then his sons, his wife, and many lifelong friends who enjoy the same sport.

No angler I, I confess that our reader's descriptions were sufficiently alluring (how 'bout that: sufFISHently aLUREing?) that were Gibby ever to offer himself, say, as a fishing guide in a Country Day School auction, I would be tempted to bid quite high!

Minutes of the Literary Club
February 11, 2013

Joe Dehner's debut paper was all about North Korea, and it was informative, funny, fact-filled and provocative. Speaking to 59 members and three guests, Joe started with a long, tongue-in-cheek introduction in the guise of a North Korean "host" speaking to the passengers on a plane to Pyongyang.

"Do not believe the erroneous western reports that Air Koryo has the world's worst airline safety record," said this host. "Our Illyushin jet aircraft is as modern as any produced – by the former Soviet Union. If your country would lift sanctions against ours, we could replace its engines with new ones from GE. I can assure you – these engines have been working well – so far."

Impressively, Joe sustained this tone for nearly half the paper as he suggested many ironic similarities between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the U.S., not least their mutual view of their own exceptionalism; their dislike-but-tolerance-for China; their regret that the Soviet Union is gone – even though they celebrate its disappearance; the big income disparities of both nations; their mutual success at filling prisons etc.

With the plane finally "landed," Joe brought on his own insights and observations about this isolated, angry and mysterious country. We

heard why the nuclear card is such an important one for North Korea, how the monarchy works, what are the chances for reunification with the South and how might that be accomplished. Hint: Joe thinks it's inevitable, but certainly not imminent. He also thinks the impact of isolating North Korea from the rest of the world is nothing but counter-productive. In short, he gave us a lot to chew on.

Minutes of the Literary Club
February 18, 2013

I don't know how much of Chris Miller's paper, "Thistle," was fiction and how much was fact; I don't think it matters.
Almost certainly there was a good deal of both in this tale of Bill Gorman, the son of a nomadic, post-War gypsy family who grew up as a musical prodigy – a "freak of nature" he called himself – and finally ended up as a commercial pilot, frequently delivering caskets in the middle of the night. We also got a crash course in the growth of the funeral industry in 19th century America, with special emphasis on Charles Miller, one of Cincinnati's earliest and most well-known funeral directors.

If it sounds like a lot of disparate ingredients crunched into a single can, it was . . . but Chris worked hard to make them cohere. Reading before 53 members and 11 guests (eight of them his own!), he started in the voice of the pilot, offering vivid detail about flight navigation and vintage Miller musings about his cargo: "My cargo's a coffin, boxed up, of course. I sometimes think that up here is as close as any of those buggers will ever get to heaven."

The bulk of the paper, then, was a flashback to the pilot's early years, his polar pull to, and talent for, all things musical and how that musical career developed. Spending all of his late teens and early 20s gigging in nightclubs across the Midwest, narrator Gorman ran into any number of zany characters, not least the string player who could "fart in perfect pitch," and a night of sexual adventure that even Danielle Steele might envy.

As compelling as that was, I think the great thing about this paper is the unmistakable voice of Chris himself, as in an aside like: "this is really what the shit is all about." Who else among us could make *that* sound literary?

Minutes of the Literary Club
February 25, 2013

Two of this evening's budget papers told us about something called the "Soiree," a monthly get together of eight Literary Club members, first convened in 1995 and disbanded some years later as participants moved away or ran into health problems. They met for supper at La Normandie and frequently discussed political issues.

For Frank Mayfield, whose budget this was, the Soiree "proved a venue for sharing political views about current events and contested issues, especially those in need of balanced dialogue and constructive solutions." For Joe Tomain, it was "a template for the historical, cultural and literary conversations at the Club."

This budget, however, given before 57 members and two guests, was also a vehicle for Frank to share fond memories of the year he was running for City Council and secured a lunch, in Washington, with Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen. Similarly, it was an opportunity for Joe to ruminate on a line once uttered by Soiree member Nick Clooney, that "we deserve a society better than we are." Joe heard the line again recently in George Clooney's movie, *The Ides of March*, prompting him to think wistfully, "the Soiree lives!"

In fact, both papers were vessels for an idiosyncratic stew of not-always-related thoughts, some humorous, some historical, and in that they were similar to the third paper, by Bob Dorsey, which was loosely tied to his experience picketing on Fountain Square, in 1996. In addition to learning what the picketing was about, we heard short histories of the right of assembly and the Whiskey Rebellion, as well as Bob's take on Marge Schott, the meaning of "major league," the Bengals' regrettable reluctance to allow other teams to use their facilities and, finally, his grandson Andrew's winning of the Colorado State Championship in Denver in December.

Thank you, Bob, for not letting the budget format shortchange us in any way!

Minutes of the Literary Club
March 4, 2013

For those who recall wistfully advanced seminars in English literature and for diehard enthusiasts of 17th century English poetry, Ducky Wadsworth's explorations of his graduate school years studying the likes of Robert Herrick, Fulke Greville and Walter Savage Landor must have come as a relief from the crudely accessible topics that so many of us traffic in from week to week.

Here was Ducky, for instance, talking before 54 members and three guests about iambic rhythms, inverted feet and the importance of the caesura in revealing a poet's truest intentions. Here, too, were passages to stimulate the classicist within us. I quote: ". . . Continental humanists, who privileged genres of poetry that favored what the Romans called *sermo*, or conversation . . . . what was sought was a language, like that of Montaigne or Bacon in prose, that could sift down into the nooks and crannies of private mental experience."

Some of what Ducky gave us was unmistakably amusing, like this epigram from J.V. Cunningham:

> Lip was a man who used his head.
> He used it when he went to bed
> With his friend's wife and with his friend,
> With either sex, at either end.

And some of the discussion of classroom experience and student-teacher dynamics was compelling. The academic egos, the hard-won permission to audit a class, a reclusive but brilliant department head who turns out to be an OK guy, and an unprepossessing but brilliant student who rose to become poet laureate of the United States – all rang true. But the paper was an hour long, and much, like the digressions into metrics, the arcane verse and the complex historical context were difficult to follow.

My own Waterloo came relatively early on, when our presenter read a sonnet entitled "Caelica, I overnight was finely used." At its conclusion, Ducky said, "You'd think the meaning of this poem blindingly obvious," but quickly observed that it was not to one Dame Helen Gardner, a noted academic at the time he was in school. Recognizing that I was in Dame Helen's camp, I felt sufficiently ashamed that I had a hard time concentrating thereafter, perhaps for fear of additional embarrassment.

Minutes of the Literary Club
March 11, 2013

A moment of silence, please, for Randy Bailey, who extolled the virtues of soundlessness with oratory both earnest and enlightened in this, his debut paper. Beginning by staring outward and saying nothing for 30 seconds – which began to seem much longer – Randy went on to explain that as a member of this Club, he particularly admires papers about topics in which the speaker has no known expertise. Therefore he, a longtime actor, thought it would be interesting to talk about silence – a commodity that he trades in almost never.

Speaking to 63 of us, including five guests, Randy asserted his genuine appreciation of silence when he stumbles upon it, his regret that it isn't more available in contemporary culture and his wish that by his paper, he might, "advocate for the rehabilitation of silence." Silence affords us, he said, "a fallow time, a pause to reflect, space reserved for listening and processing." Lenten quiet, he noted, is a "chance to separate from the outside world and take the time to listen for the outside voice that can come to us in those moments."

But the world is not set up for silence. Randy's church family, he said, "can't keep their mouths shut to save their souls." Attending a Quaker meeting in Anderson, he found that the sounds of the heating system, the traffic outside, parishioners crossing their legs, voices in another room – all competed with the quiet of the worship itself.

Two takeaways: First, said Randy, "The real noise is what I carry around with me. Silence is the marker of now, the present, and I am rarely in touch with it." Second, Sometimes silence is a bad thing – as when one stands by in the face of slander or loutish behavior. Going on to talk about the place of silence in dramatic writing, notably *Othello*, Randy concluded with his desire to seek a quieter world and to leave as small a footprint as possible – but not to live apart from society.

Simon and Garfunkel, I think, would have loved it.

Minutes of the Literary Club
March 18, 2013

Jack Lindy's story concerning Kitty Martin, her relation to the town of Crockett Bluffs, and the exorcising of a troubled past was quick

to capture the interest of listeners, and then to sustain it until sandwiches were served.

Read before 58 members and five guests, the tale concerned a woman returning to the small Tennessee town of her birth after living away, successfully, for many years as an artist in New York. Now married, and well regarded for her sculpture, Kitty is nonetheless unhappy for reasons she can't pin down, and she has come back to Crockett Bluffs to cause unhappiness there as well. She is going to reclaim the income from a trust her father set up to fund Big Gap Bible College. The school is the biggest game town, but its prosperity has been greatly dependent on the money Mr. Martin left to it – for a period of twenty years. Now that period is up.

Using strong dialogue, structure and pacing and, no doubt, a career's worth of psychiatric insight into what motivates people to behave as they do, Jack then spins a credible yarn of violation and redemption. In the course of it, Kitty interacts with several key players in Crockett Bluffs: first a lawyer, then the president of Big Gap Bible College, an old-timer who runs the hardware store, and most importantly, the psychiatrist whom she had known as a child. Together with Dr. Bergman and considerabl personal pain, Kitty is able to revisit her old haunts and, finally, the horrific events that have scarred her life.

Mercifully, the whole thing ends up on positive notes, not least good news for the development office of Big Gap Bible College. I think we can all be grateful to Jack for that, for had he chosen to take it a different direction, his skills are sufficient that the aforementioned sandwiches might not have tasted nearly so good.

Minutes of the Literary Club
March 25, 2013

Harry Santen's budget, ably assisted by Nick Ragland and Bill Pratt, took as its theme "artistic companions." The three speakers delivered on that theme – before 55 of us, including seven guests – with admirable finesse.

Harry's paper, an intriguing story of finding and losing a compelling piece of sculpture, was so tightly woven and so apparently real that we could be forgiven for wondering whether it was fact or fantasy. Harry isn't saying. Enough to recall that it contained both surprise and suspense, suggesting that his sculpture, found at a flea

market, could have been an undiscovered work by Auguste Rodin. Harry fleshed out his case with research concerning Rodin's wife, Rose, his mistress, Camille Claude, and their possible influence on the sculpture he had found. At the end of the day, Harry still doesn't own a Rodin, but the rest of us are richer for what he thinks might have been.

Nick Ragland's subject was the famous photojournalist and war photographer, David Douglas Duncan. Tracing his career from World War II to Vietnam, Nick recalled that Duncan was at the Red takeover of Bulgaria, the partitioning of India, and the Korean War, always taking landmark photos.

When he was 57, Duncan met Pablo Picasso, who was 75, and a lasting relationship developed between the two. Some of Nick's most charming anecdotes recalled the byplay between the two, like Picasso cutting out from a Duncan photo of himself just his eyes and implanting them in his drawing of an owl. An owl with Picasso's eyes. *Merveilleux*!

Bill Pratt's profile of the friendship between German poet Renee Maria Rilke and, in his second appearance on this night, Auguste Rodin, was lovingly drawn and filled with Bill's special brand of poetic perception. Rilke was 27 and unknown when the relationship blossomed; Rodin was 62 and world-renowned. While they seemed to have little in common, they were united by their quest for artistic excellence – and ability to achieve it – until they weren't . . . when Rodin ended the friendship four years later. Sometime afterward, it rekindled, although never with the intensity of that first flowering. Nonetheless, Rilke drew many artistic truths from it – like the power of fragmentary perfection in art – and Bill, as you would expect, was more than adept at sharing these with us.

Minutes of the Literary Club
April 1, 2013

Sixty-eight people, including seven guests, braved Opening Day traffic and scarce parking to hear the evening's proceedings. Jack McDonough opened them with a touching and heartfelt memorial to our friend Henry Winkler, who left us four months prior.

Polk Laffoon, herein standing, then delivered a paper on the Siege of Leningrad between 1941 and 1944. Identifying it as the worst of its kind in world history, Polk described in some detail the Nazi government's aims and motives in taking on Russia at all, its calculated

attempt to starve Leningrad into submission, the subsequent deaths of nearly three-quarters of a million of the city's citizens and, ultimately, the Russians' remarkable capacity for dealing with adversity of a nature that privileged 21st-century Americans can hardly imagine. It was a grim topic, leavened only by the recognition that the Russians were, in the end, able to withstand the Nazis' noose. They demonstrated, through courage, determination and stubborn resistance, that the human spirit remains any people's strongest weapon.

Minutes of the Literary Club
April 8, 2013

Out-of-town member Jim Murray, who lives in Kalamazoo, spoke before 58 members and three guests. He dedicated his paper to former Literary Club colleagues Bob Hilton and Herb Curry.

In "Chalk on the Walk," Jim traced the progression of four scribbled messages – each in text-message form – on his neighborhood sidewalk one autumn. The messages, advancing over several weeks from LUV U to GOOD BYE, tapped into Jim's metaphysical soul, yielding restless thoughts about young love, collegiate antics, the meaning of leave-taking, the passing of time and the pain imposed by the death of his wife.

One example: "The wall that separates us from the past had always preoccupied me. How in memory my wife's face seemed so near, so near that even now I awoke in the morning expecting her warmth to be there beside me and to open my eyes to the sight as the first image of my day. Do we ever fully accept our losses in time's inevitable locking us off from the past?"

In the end, by chance, Jim learned the identity of the co-ed who had left the chalked messages. While he chose not to declare himself to her, he took solace in thinking: "There was a woman capable of great passion and pain, who had give me hope that even if I were no longer young, there were others who had taken over and continued the enormous risk-taking that is falling in love."

Minutes of the Literary Club
April 15, 2013

Tom Lorham's splendid paper, "The Iron Lady," gave us a view of Margaret Thatcher that – no matter how much you might think you knew about her – was both additive and riveting. Read before 64 people, including five guests, it coincided almost precisely with Mrs. Thatcher's funeral, thus lending the evening a rare topical relevance.

In the course of his remarks, Tom covered pretty much everything to do with his subject – her modest background, her educational accomplishments, her early years in the workplace, her election to Parliament in 1959 and her steady rise to Prime Minister 20 years later. But what was so compelling was the way Tom owned his subject: What made her the "iron lady," he said, was her "moral certitude, a workaholic lifestyle, and the determination to do anything to succeed."

In the first half of the paper, Tom dwelt on Thatcher's philosophy and rise to power; in the second, on what she did with it: the miners' strike, the Falkland Islands, the alignment with Reagan and more. But again, the beauty was in his perspective. Speaking of Maggie's "philo-Semitism," Tom said, "The Jews, for Mrs. Thatcher, personified values that she sought to re-instill in the British people. They had earned their success through hard work, self-help and lifelong learning. They had received nothing from any organization or state, earning everything by their sweat and by their genius."

Then, to help us to know the lady better still, he offered this spin: "We may cast doubt on such simplifications, but simplifications were the intellectual currency in which Mrs. Thatcher traded, for she saw no fault in simplicity. Truths were self-evident. Only deception required endless complexity."

Every sentence counted. Deep knowledge and intelligence infused the prose. Lucky were those who heard this paper.

Minutes of the Literary Club
April 22, 2013

The evening began with a much-anticipated paper by Nicholas Ranieri, our beloved steward for many years. Nico, as we call him, is – in his day job – a research biologist for the Food and Drug Administration. In 2005, Nico developed the concept for a counterfeit detection device for pharmaceutical products. It took five years to refine and gain approval, but this year Nico learned that it is soon to "go global" with a grant from the Skull Foundation. It will go to Africa and Southeast Asia.

Nico gave us a fascinating and appropriately detailed account of his experience and achievement. The Club was greatly impressed, as reflected in the long applause.

Next, a strange tale of medieval times came to us from Rollin Workman, read by Dale Flick before 64 members and three guests. Beginning with a recollection of the famous legend of the Pied Piper of Hamlin, Rollin focused his story on one of the abducted children – who was said to be a distant ancestor of one of Rollin's high school friends.

According to family lore, imparted by the friend's storytelling grandmother, this young man – named Jan – was taken by the Pied Piper, later left to gypsies, and finally sold to a potter named Kleinfeld. There he lived a good life, grew up, inherited the pottery business, married, had children, lost his wife at an early age, became depressed, then seemingly came out of it, and went on to live productively until he died at age 53.

Or did he? Here is where the tale turns strange. Jan had two lifelines on his palm. His gypsy friend, Nufo, trying to read them when Jan was young, gave up because he couldn't tell whether Jan's life was going to be long or short. At age 53, after making thorough preparations with his children for a demise he seemed to anticipate, Jan disappeared from the town, never to be seen again,

Except . . . he was seen again. A glacier abutted the town, and on the day that Jan disappeared, his frozen body was discovered in a piece of ice that had chipped away. It absolutely was Jan, but it was a much younger Jan – the Jan who had wandered off depressed the day his wife had died.

What happened? Nufo, who had been talking to him on the day of his disappearance, observed the frozen body, observed that the more mature Jan had disappeared, and wondered: Could Jan have died twice?

And I wonder: Could Rollin have been a writer for Rod Serling and the Twilight Zone when I was a child? I can almost that squeaky theme music now.

Minutes of the Literary Club
April 29, 2013

It was a budget night, and "epiphany" was the theme of the budgets. Sixty-six members, including five guests, were in attendance.

Paper I: John Tew started us off by describing three medical epiphanies: The first, which came to Alexander Leaf, chair of the Department of Medicine and Physician in Chief at Mass General in the 1960s, involved Leaf's recognition that nutritional changes and exercise could act powerfully to prevent heart disease. His recognition inspired a new order of medical practice based on concepts of preventive medicine.

The second, triggered by a 1974 article authored by Norman Cousins, gave rise to the whole concept of holistic, integrative or complementary medicine. Battling for his life with an auto-immune disorder, Cousins learned that laughter, Vitamin C infusions and a cooperative physicians were his best medicine. For John, a parallel epiphany was that hope and the natural drive for survival are "among the most important exercises in human life force."

A third epiphany, more recent in its manifestation, is that the regeneration of brain neurons is not only possible, but is occurring. Extending and implementing this knowledge, said John, will be critical in impeding the advance of brain disorders associated with aging.

Paper II: What does a retired CEO with a bias towards learning do with his fresh abundance of free time? Well at least one reads Dante's Divine Comedy, all 14, 233 verses of it, in concert with a study group of his wife and several others, in a bi-weekly examination that lasted the better part of a year.

For Bill Burleigh, the riches of Dante's classic were an epiphany at once intellectual, emotional and spiritual. Told with Bill's own blend of scholarship and wit, we learned – and came to believe, as Bill did – that "Dante's epic may be about himself, but he is Everyman. His story is about everything of meaning in human life. Where are we going and what is the path to lead us there?"

A clue: Said Bill, "Love is the answer to the deepest questions of life and the deepest needs of the heart."

Paper III:

The final revelations of this eve,
Came from Robert Smith, with tricks up his sleeve,
Like . . . to regale us in iambic verse,
That mine is not as graceful is my curse.

Said Robert of his own epiphany,

Something crumpled, he almost didn't see,
A newspaper lying on a subway floor,
With an ad for a job he had to explore.

He got that job, and I tell you brother,
From there one good thing led to another,
Family medicine in Chapel Hill,
For seven years it remained his thrill.

But then, still restless, Robert looked around,
There was a position here – he liked its sound.
He liked Cincinnati; he liked this club,
So he took the job – and here's the rub:

After 34 years he reflects our best,
Paper after paper, test after test,
He organized this budget, and much more,
With gifts so numerous that I can't keep score!

Minutes of the Literary Club
May 6, 2013

Before 58 members and three guests, Peter Lowry took us back to the days of polio scares and iron lungs, noting that from 1916 until the mid-fifties, there was a serious outbreak somewhere in the U.S. every summer, and that annually about a half million people died from the disease. Most of them were children.

Indeed, Pete said, the disease was particularly terrifying because it seemed to focus on families of the middle or upper classes – people accustomed to ordering their habits to live healthy lives. Ironically, we learned, polio is in some respects a "disease of cleanliness" – a virus that attacks the coating of nerves. This coating, called myelin, develops over time in young people . . . but it seems to fare best in less cleanly, or even unsanitary, conditions. Once people started paying attention to hygiene, the beneficent conditions leading to myelin generation were challenged, and polio took root. Thus its emergence in the early 20th century.

Pete had a couple of personal reasons for writing about the disease. For one thing, he was a victim in Cincinnati's deadly epidemic of 1952. Admitted to the hospital for he knew not what, he learned from

the boy in the bed next to him that everyone in his ward had polio. “The last kid in that bed died,” the boy said of Peter’s berth. “That’s one of the beds they put kids in who are going to die.”

Mercifully, the outcome for Pete was benign. Although the treatments were painful, he walked out of the hospital a month after he had entered it, and I might add, entered pulling himself on his elbows and forearms because he had lost the ability to walk.

As a survivor, a father and a physician, Peter has predictable praise for the polio vaccines of Doctors Salk and Sabin, developed in the mid-fifties. But as a man of science, he is skeptical that something like polio won’t descend on us once more. When a friend said recently she was grateful that we live in a time when such scourges will never happen, Pete thought, “Never is a long time.”

Following the paper, Jim Barone and Richard Hague were elected to membership.

Minutes of the Literary Club
May 13, 2013

I can only hope that the 66 members and three guests gathered to hear Dick Wendel’s paper, “Transplantation,” treated the cocktail hour with restraint – because attention needed to be paid.

Written in the voice of a scientist 125 years old, in the year 2056, “Transplantation” reported the imagined progress of a program of 26 years duration, to transplant carboniferous life throughout the Milky Way galaxy. Labeled the Last Frontier Project, this program, which launched in 2030, was spawned by the collective realization of world scientists that life on earth is unlikely to be found anywhere else in the universe. Thus, said Dick, “Humanity is doomed to extinction unless it establishes settlements elsewhere . . . where some star system might offer environments compatible with human life.”

From this point, the paper offered a retrospective look at how the nations of the earth had come together to support such a project – not easily, as you might guess – and what was involved in bringing it to fruition. For English majors, like me, who found “Rocks for Jocks” demanding enough, this was challenging stuff. Words and concepts like Fermions, neutrinos, Higgs Bosun, phage particles and entanglement technology peppered the text.

In the contemplation of how actually to transport earthly life to some distant star, Dick said,: "They realized that to create a basic ecosystem would require two types of eukaryotic cells, or mature cells with membranes. The first cell type would be green algae that converts light energy and carbon dioxide into organic compounds while producing oxygen. The second would be a simple cell animal that metabolically consumes oxygen and produces carbon dioxide."

But it's good to be pushed – I know Dick believes that because several other paragraphs made that one look easy! In the end, of course, we can't know what will happen with the Last Frontier Project, because it will be light years in the making, and so it's only really just begun.

Following the paper, President Pyle introduced the topic of revisions to the Club's constitution and bylaws, which have been under study for many months. Paul Franz then noted that the Club was initially organized before the current Ohio constitution was adopted. Therefore, he said, the Club needs to file articles of incorporation with the Secretary of State. Paul moved to delay consideration of Literary Club constitutional amendments until that work is completed. Several others, including Tom Bennett, seconded his motion. It passed without dissent. Tom Cuni suggested that members use the intervening time for comments and discussion. Albert Pyle endorsed that idea.

Minutes of the Literary Club
May 20, 2013

Before 63 members and five guests, Tony Covatta took us on one of his occasional flights of fictional fancy, this one dealing – as have others – with his imaginary friend, Tom Blakely. In this installment, a very young Tom is working for his Uncle Walt, who owns a Cincinnati insurance agency and is only too happy to expose his nephew to the real world as filtered through the special lens of the Brothers Three, a "neon sewer," in Tony's words, that offers liquid comfort to those in need.

A rollicking tale of urban mischief and courthouse capers, Tony's tale dealt primarily with the efforts of Uncle Walt's friend, a lawyer named Paul Martino, to retrieve for his hapless client, Van the Tree man, a rundown truck. It seems that Van, in need of cash to buy a bigger, better truck, had sold his vehicle to a scoundrel who gave him a bad check in return for the title.

I won't take you through the many amusing machinations that, eventually, lead to the securing of the truck. Suffice to say that Tony's way with words, his sure sense of irony and his inimitable humor, make for a very good read. Here's how he introduces us to the Brothers Three: "On the bar itself were jars of pickled eggs, pigs' feed and garlic pickles. Has anyone ever seen another person eat one of these items? I hope not. In the middle of the room were a few forlorn Formica-topped tables, and at the other side darkly upholstered booths, the leather seats leaking poisonous fibers from incipient crevasses."

There is also a prostitute found innocent of wrongdoing because her offer of a "three-way" could have been mistaken for an invitation to Skyline. There is the Elder grad judge who was a pulling guard in school on the same team with Walt Blakely as halfback. "Had it not been for brawny Weskamper" – the judge, Tony intones – "Walt Blakely might well have spent his adult life in a wheelchair."

It was all wonderful, and if the many names and twists of plot came a little too quickly to follow in the delivery, as some observed later, well . . . it is the price we paid for Tony's high-wire tomfoolery.

Following the meeting, Jack McDonough was elected present of the Club for the 2013-2014 year. Paul Franz was elected VP. Bill Sena, Mike Kremzar and yours truly will continue on as treasurer, clerk and secretary, respectively. Joining Allan Winkler and Bill Friedlander as trustees will be Bill Pratt.

Minutes of the Literary Club
June 3, 2010

Fifty-four members and ten guests heard Albert Pyle report the sad news of Richard Neurock's passing on May 26. Then Albert read for Len Meranus, who was ill, Len's paper, "It's About Time."

The paper was a meditation on time, by turns clever and provocative, then increasingly scientific – and challenging. Here's an excerpt from Len's opening passages, as he ruminates on his topic: "We can do a lot of things with time. We can save it or spend it, find it or lose it borrow it, waste, take it, even steal it. Sometimes we have a lot of time. Sometimes we don't have any. Some people make time; others sell it. Sometimes those who steal time, do time."

In the course of the paper, Len told us about man's efforts – over time, of course, to record this most elusive dimension of our lives:

Sumerians devised a 30-month year, for example, with days divided into 12 segments instead of 24 hours. Until the late 19th century, most communities kept their own clocks with their own prime meridians based on the movement of the sun.

However, with the earth rotating west to east on its polar axis at a rate of about 750 miles per hour, or twelve and a half miles per minute, every twelve and a half miles eat or west of any point is a solar minute later or earlier. This inconvenient reality led to all kinds of confusion once railroads started scheduling arrivals and departures between distant points. At the beginning of the 1880s, there were 44 North American time zones.

In late 1883, then U.S. President Chester Arthur invited leaders of the world's 25 "civilized" nations to convene in Washington to identify a common prime meridian. They did so, and after three weeks of debate, Greenwich England was agreed upon. They then, as Len said, "sliced the world into 24 longitudinal wedges of 15 degrees each, and we have the efficient reference points now familiar to all.

The latter parts of Len's paper dealt with more sophisticated takes on time, not least Newton's laws, Einstein's theory of relativity and Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty. I would like to take you through each of these but, alas, I'm out of time!

Minutes of the Literary Club
June 10, 2010

Irresponsibly, I failed to count how many of us showed up for the annual outing, but it was a big number – about 80 I suspect. We spilled out of our cocktail space in the front room of Memorial Hall, overlooking Washington Park, and we filled some ten dining tables at dinner. The mood of the evening was high-decibel festive.

Jack McDonough, our incoming president, gave the paper, and an interesting one it was. The subject: Thomas Heggen, creator of the famous World War II novel, "Mr. Roberts," and subsequent collaborator on the play of the same name. Why was it so interesting? I think because it focused on a complex individual whose promise was never fulfilled, whose demons were never subdued, whose days – despite obvious talent and support from others – were not happy. At the ripe age of 29, he committed suicide in his bathtub.

Jack's telling of the story was straightforward. Heggen was born in 1919 in Iowa, then educated at Oklahoma City University and the

University of Minnesota. Smart, funny, rebellious and literarily inclined, young Tom was also a prankster, a heavy drinker and undependable – almost to the point of callousness – with the girls he dated and professed to love. Drafted into the service in 1941, he chose the navy and was eventually assigned to the USS Virgo, an attack cargo and troop transport ship. There he experienced the relationships and activities that later comprised story line of "Mr. Roberts."

Early in these war years, he married an old flame, Carol Lynn Gilmer, but saw her only sporadically as the navy moved him around. By the time he was discharged, in late 1945, Heggen, had the book nearly ready to go, but his personal life was in disarray. Not even the instant success of "Mr. Roberts" and its subsequent translation to a hit Broadway play could salvage him.

Jack told us much about the similarities between Heggen's real-life adventures and the hi-jinks in "Mr. Roberts." He told us of Heggen's womanizing, sustained drinking and inability to write more despite praise and encouragement from several noted contemporary writers whom he numbered among his friends. In the end, it was sad, but not surprising to learn what happened. It wasn't fame that undid Tom Heggen; it was his own pathology.

The evening concluded with brief remarks from Albert Pyle thanking the group for supporting him during the year, a hearty round of applause in response, and succinct salutations from Jack McDonough as the new president.