

OLLI NEWSLETTER



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Osher Lifelong Learning Institute - University of Southern Maine, Portland

Professional profile



Bob Lyons

***If your interest is Ireland,
then Bob Lyons is for you***

Bob Lyons' courses in OLLI have had a strong Irish flavor, reflecting a heritage that reaches more than a century and a half from Ireland to this country.

As he notes the Lyons family left Ireland during what is called "The Great Migration" in the 1840s. That brought Jeremiah (wife Ellen was with him) to build the railroad, along with other Irish and the Chinese, from Schenectady, New York, to Chicago. (This first Lyons owned 40 acres on what became *The Chicago Stockyards*.)

But *"the call was to the lands to the west,"* Bob adds, first to Iowa. Then, in 1880, his grandfather Will and older brother Richard lead a wagon train of 40 Irish to homestead in the Dakotas.

Bob's father, William and mother Mary - she was a successful farmer's daughter - settled in South Dakota. The one-room schoolhouse he attended was on his father's farm. As he says, *"The seeds of lifelong learning were well-rooted first in my home by my parents. We always had plenty of reading material with lively discussion at the table, and we had music too."*

His professional career was in education and included being executive director of a consortium of seven public schools near Boston which operated programs for handicapped children. He also established an alternative high school based at Northeastern University and a day care within the public schools.

Earlier he was a social worker in New York City, working with incarcerated youth and was a vocational rehabilitation counselor in Boston.

His retirement in 1996 turned his attention to digging into his Irish roots and returning and living in Ireland much of the past 10 years, obtaining material for the courses he was to offer at different OLLI's later on.

Living in Ireland, he and his wife Nona, a research scholar at University College Cork - still found time to roam Ireland *"discovering,"* as he says, *"the riches of our ancestral lands."* Bob busied himself by giving his Irish film classics course at University College Cork and at the Briery Gap Cultural Centre in Macroom in County Cork. He worked with Irish poets and writers at the Munster Literature Centre in Cork and organized a James Joyce *Bloomsday* program that was presented for two years in the designated "literary pub."

He met a young tenor, [Paddy Homan](#), and helped to produce his first CD, *"Far from the Land."* He later brought him to OLLI at USM for concerts in 2003 and 2004, thanks to support of Kali Lightfoot and Susan Morrow.

The involvement with lifelong learning programs began 12 years ago at the Institute of Lifelong Learning Education at Dartmouth, (ILEAD) which launched his career at what he calls an itinerant OLLI teacher. Northwestern is also on his résumé.

When not in Ireland, Bob and Nona lived in Maine and Massachusetts, finally settling in Kennebunk, *"where we're close enough to hear the roaring on the ocean and to fill our lungs each morning with the fresh aroma of the sea."*

This Maine connection drew him to OLLI, then Senior College. *"I sniffed it out at the time when Harry Sky was pushing the program and I'm delighted to discover what has now become OLLI."*

After the last two years at the OLLI program at Tufts University, he's now in his sixth year at OLLI here, teaching *"Irish Short Stories from the New Yorker."* Previously he's given courses here on the "Irish Film Classics (themes of Irish History,)" "Irish Readers Theater," and "Immigrant Experiences in America."

As Bob comments, *"It is the energy and enthusiasm of all OLLI members who participate in my classes that continues to inspire and motivate me to develop courses for the future. The love of learning in all its form keeps us young forever."*

Bob and Nona return to Ireland in November to launch her new book, [Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Inflective Inquiry: Mapping a Way of Knowing for Professional Reflective Inquiry](#), and he'll undoubtedly return with new ideas of course to enlighten and entertain future OLLI classes.

-Don King