



Meet the candidates

Profiles of those running for Three Village school board

A3



Middle Country Public Library gears up for Museum Day

Also: Review of 'Unfrosted'

B1

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Photo by Samantha Rutt

Three Village Dads Foundation embarks on next phase of Merritt-Hawkins Homestead restoration — A4



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Three school board seats, one a partial term, up for grabs in Three Village

BY MALLIE JANE KIM
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Four candidates are vying to serve on next year's school board in Three Village Central School District. Terms are up for incumbents Shaorui Li and Susan Rosenzweig, who are both running to stay on the board. Newcomers Stanley Bak and Amitava Das have also thrown their hats in the ring.

In addition to the two full terms up for grabs, a third partial-term seat was left open by former board member Jennifer Solomon, after she resigned last summer for personal reasons. At the time, the board opted to wait until this election to fill her seat for the term's final year, rather than spending additional money on a special election last fall.

Whoever earns the third highest number of votes will fill this one-year term.

The candidates, profiled below in alphabetical order, opened the two-week campaign season by introducing themselves

at a May 6 Three Village Civic Association meeting.

Stanley Bak

Bak teaches computer science at Stony Brook University and runs a research lab investigating the safety of artificial intelligence, which he said involves budgeting and managing billions of dollars in funds.



Stanley Bak. Photo courtesy Stanley Bak

He suggested the main issue facing the district today is financial.

"We need a long-term financial plan," he said. "One that acknowledges that taxpayers exist and one that can sustainably provide excellent programs and services for our students."

Bak, who was a member of the district's

cellphone committee last fall, praised the district's recently strengthened policy, but added that its success hinges on enforcement.

He also pointed out that, though elementary schools comprise more than half the grade levels in the district, the board does not currently have representation from elementary families. His oldest child has started elementary school, with two others following.

"As a parent with three young children, I have a vested interest in the long-term health of all of our schools," he said. "Representation matters. I will help bring this perspective to our board."

Bak published information on his priorities at the website bakforboard.com and emphasizes that he is running independently and will not accept any funding from outside groups. He has received public support from the Residents for Responsible Spending Facebook group, and is a participant in the Three Village Parents Alliance, which has advocated for things like later secondary school start times.

Amitava Das

Das, a parent of a junior high student in the district, said his experience in technology management has given him a firm foundation in communication, collaboration and compromise toward a shared goal of serving clients while being fiscally responsible.



Amitava Das. Photo courtesy Amitava Das

"These are things from a business perspective that I hope I'm able to bring to this role," said Das, who is an

engineering manager at a major global technology firm. He indicated he hopes to "work with the staff, the teachers, the taxpayers, the parents — I hope to gain your

CONTINUED ON A5

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Historic Merritt-Hawkins Homestead opens to the public

BY SAMANTHA RUTT
EDITOR1@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

The Three Village Dads Foundation, with support from Town of Brookhaven District 1 Councilmember Jonathan Kornreich (D-Stony Brook), unveiled the refurbished historic Merritt-Hawkins Homestead property on May 6.

The 9-acre estate is now open for the community, students and teachers to traverse.

With a half mile of freshly groomed trailways accompanied by various educational signs, a little free library and park benches, the 3V Dads hope the property will become a known feature in the Three Village community.

“The property was like a blank canvas for us — there’s a lot to think of what this place could turn into. We were very excited to sign on and we appreciate Jonathan and the town for trusting us,” said 3V Dads president, David Tracy. “Our first goal was to transform the outside ... and it is now a usable property and a green space for the community.”

Though now open to the public, the work



The Three Village Dads Foundation, Three Village school district representatives and members of the community celebrate the opening of the Merritt Hawkins Homestead property along with Brookhaven Councilmember, Jonathan Kornreich. Photo by Samantha Rutt

of the 3V Dads restoration is not yet finished. The nonprofit looks to continue working on the interior of the house to restore the historic

1800s feel.

“Hopefully this fall we begin work on the inside of the house. It is an old house, built

in 1802 — but it looks like somebody lived there in the 1980s. So it needs to go back to a transformation of the 1800s,” Tracy shared.

Ronald McDonald House holds ceremonial groundbreaking at Stony Brook Children’s Hospital

Ronald McDonald House Charities NY Metro held a ceremonial groundbreaking event for its new house, to be built on the Stony Brook Medicine campus, to provide

a safe, secure and comfortable environment for families of children who are receiving medical care at Stony Brook Children’s Hospital. Construction is set to begin later this year with completion scheduled for 2026. Of the \$30 million needed to complete the project, \$24 million has already been raised.

This will be the first Ronald McDonald House located in Suffolk County, and only the second on Long Island. The other Ronald McDonald House is in New Hyde Park in Nassau County, located adjacent to Cohen Children’s Medical Center.

The three-story, 60,000 square-foot building will include 30 private bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms for families, a media center, outdoor playground, interactive playrooms, a community kitchen providing free meals made by volunteers and fully



Suffolk County Legislator Steve Englebright, SBU President Maurie McInnis, State Senator Mario Mattera and State Senator Monica Martinez at the Ronald McDonald House groundbreaking ceremony on April 30. Photo from Legislator Steve Englebright’s office

stocked pantries, a fitness center, meditation room and laundry facilities.

“We’ve been planning this for 10 years and now we’re finally able to provide for families in Suffolk County the way they need,” said Matt Campo, CEO, Ronald McDonald House

Charities NY Metro. “All of our programs provide a place for families to rest and recharge so they can focus on the health and well-being of their child.”

“This facility will stand as a beacon of hope, compassion and support for families facing

their toughest challenges,” said Dr. William Wertheim, interim executive vice president for Stony Brook Medicine. “Our partnership with Ronald McDonald House Charities highlights the strength of collaboration, and I am delighted to be joining our resources and expertise to meet the diverse needs of our community.”

“The soon-to-be-built Ronald McDonald House will be able to serve as a respite for patients and families whose infant or child is ill by offering a place to stay, food to eat and a place to rest and recharge that is in close proximity to the hospital,” said Carol Gomes, CEO, Stony Brook University Hospital. “There is nothing more cherished than the ability to be able to focus on the care of your child without having to worry about daily life logistics.”

“It’s been a labor of love recruiting the financial support to make this house a reality,” said Cynthia Lippe, chair, RMHC NYM Stony Brook House Fundraising Committee. “Our entire committee is proud of our work and know we have the momentum to raise the final funds to open the house to the public.”

School board

Continued from A3

input and your support and understand what your needs are.”

Das served on this year’s Budget Advisory Committee and volunteers as a computer science teacher for sixth through ninth grades with SchoolNova. He said by email that he previously served on the technical advisory board for Per Scholas, an organization that trains a diverse workforce in technology and helps connect newly-skilled talent to businesses.

He recognized the “tireless effort” of the teachers, administration and staff, but added that he’s also a taxpayer. “There’s a need to balance that aspect of it,” he said. “Are the dollars going toward the right programs, being spent in the right way to deliver the best product for our shareholders — which is us, the taxpayers in the district?”

Das, along with Li and Rosenzweig, is endorsed by the Three Village Teachers Association. He said in a phone call that he hopes to reimburse his portion of any campaign costs — typically, TVTA pays for advertising, including lawn signs and a postcard to each union member, past and present.

TVTA president Brian Pickford confirmed to TBR that this option is open to any candidate.

Shaorui Li

Li, also a district parent, has served on the school board since her election in 2021. She is an electrical engineer with 17 years of experience, including at Brookhaven National Laboratory, and is currently heading a microchip-development startup to advance the field of quantum computing. She shared that she has given lectures in the elementary schools regarding NASA projects she was involved in, and has served as a mentor for Science Olympiad.

These STEM skills, she indicated, along with the leadership and management experience she’s gained throughout her career, are what she brings to the table. “I just want to contribute my analytical skills and my love of solving problems and engineering to the board,” she said.

Li praised the board’s efforts in gaining input from all stakeholders for the new cellphone policy as well as in fine tuning the Budget Advisory Committee based on feedback. “The intention is to have input from the community,” she said. “We actually keep changing how [the

BAC] will be and probably going forward it will keep changing — the goal is to make it more effective.”

Li invited residents to reach out with questions about district policy to her or any board member, as she said she values understanding community concerns. “The role of the board member is not simply voting ‘yes’ or ‘no’ based on personal preference,” she said. “As a board member, I would actively research ... listen to our community and make decisions based on inputs from a broad range of resources.”

Susan Rosenzweig

Rosenzweig, the current board president, was also elected in 2021. She said her



Susan Rosenzweig. Photo courtesy Susan Rosenzweig

background in radio and television news have served her well as a leader on the board. She pointed to her ability to approach situations with a neutral position — focusing on facts and data in decision making — as well as her ability to communicate

thoughtfully and clearly.

“I believe these qualities have helped usher in a new era of openness with our community,” she said, adding the board has “a renewed rigor in thoroughly analyzing all of our decisions for their impacts not only on our staff and our students, but on the district’s fiscal health and our overall well-being.”

Rosenzweig has made a full-time job of volunteer opportunities related to her children’s education, including on the board of trustees at Play Groups preschool and as PTA president at all levels. She has also been a leader for Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts.

She called the district’s new cellphone policy “a good start,” but indicated the whole community needs to chip in to help kids — especially since students involved in advising the new policy recognized the distraction and pressure that comes with the current cellphone culture. “We’ve only got them for seven hours a day,” Rosenzweig said. “The rest of the 17 hours, we need help.”

Voting details

Voting will take place on May 21 at Ward Melville High School between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. Early voting is also available this year, and information can be found on the district’s website on the Budget Information page under the Board of Education menu. A PTA-sponsored Meet the Candidates event at the high school is scheduled Thursday, May 9, at 7 p.m., and will be livestreamed on the district’s YouTube channel.

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Garbage truck driver indicted for crash that killed motorist in Hauppauge

Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney announced on May 3 that Jaswinder Singh, 52, of Bellrose, Queens, was indicted for Criminally Negligent Homicide and other related charges, for allegedly driving a sanitation truck at an unreasonable speed and crashing into multiple vehicles that had been stopped at a red light on the South Service Road of the Long Island Expressway in Hauppauge. The collision caused the death of Joseph Kelly, 24, of West Islip, who was in one of the other vehicles.

“This defendant, who was allegedly driving a 19-ton truck, had a responsibility to drive prudently and cautiously. Instead, he is alleged to have been speeding, causing him to crash into a line of cars stopped at the traffic light, resulting in the loss of Joseph Kelly’s life,” said District Attorney Tierney. “Today’s indictment reflects the solemn duty of law enforcement to hold individuals accountable for their actions, particularly if their alleged crime results in the loss of life.”

According to the investigation, on July 3, 2023, Singh was allegedly driving a sanitation truck from Brooklyn to a commercial establishment in Suffolk County, where it was to be outfitted before being put into service with the New York City Department

of Sanitation. At approximately 8:50 a.m., Singh, who was allegedly headed eastbound on the Long Island Expressway, exited at Exit 57 onto Express Drive South in Hauppauge.

Singh allegedly continued to drive on Express Drive South at a high rate of speed that was as he approached a steady red light where cars were stopped. Singh then allegedly failed to slow down or apply the brakes of the truck, causing him to crash into the back of multiple vehicles that had been stopped in front of him, and barrel through the red light at the intersection.

The 38,900-pound garbage truck allegedly first collided with a Honda Civic that was being operated by the victim Kelly, causing a chain reaction of multiple car crashes. Kelly died on impact. The multi car collision involved damage to five vehicles, including a school bus, and left a debris field of approximately 300 feet.

The judge ordered Singh to surrender his passport, placed him on supervised release and suspended his driver’s license. Singh is due back in court on May 17. If convicted of the top count, the maximum sentence allowable under current New York State law is one and one-third to four years in prison.

—SUFFOLK COUNTY D.A.’S OFFICE

POLICE BLOTTER

The following incidents have been reported by Suffolk County Police:

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Do you recognize this woman? Photo from SCPD

Wanted for Petit Larceny

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Sixth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate the woman who allegedly stole merchandise valued at \$350 from HomeGoods, located at 4810 Nesconset Highway in Port Jefferson Station, on April 26 at 11 a.m.



Do you recognize this man? Photo from SCPD

Wanted for Petit Larceny

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Sixth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate a man who allegedly stole approximately \$460 worth of Pokemon cards from Target, located at 265 Pond Path in South Setauket, at 4:12 p.m. on April 25.

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Teen arrested for DWAI/drugs after fleeing scene of fatal Centereach crash

Suffolk County Police arrested a teenage male for driving a stolen vehicle while impaired by drugs after he attempted to flee the scene of a fatal motor vehicle crash in Centereach on May 4. A 16-year-old male was driving a stolen 2008 Land Rover LR2 eastbound on Middle Country Road when he crashed the vehicle into the rear of a sedan being driven by Marion Napolitano, 73, who is undomiciled, at approximately 9:10 p.m.

Napolitano was transported to Stony Brook University Hospital where she was pronounced dead. A 50-year-old male passenger in the sedan was transported to the same hospital for treatment of serious injuries. Their identities are being withheld pending notification of next of kin. The teen, who was not injured, attempted to flee the scene on foot but was apprehended by an off-duty Suffolk County Police officer.

Detectives are asking anyone with information on the crash to call 631-852- 6555.

East Northport Middle School student arrested for making threat of mass harm

Suffolk County Police arrested an East Northport student on May 6 at approximately 3 p.m. after she made threats of mass harm to several students. Second Precinct Crime Section officers responded to East Northport Middle School, located at 1075 5th Ave., after a student made a verbal threat of mass harm to other students at the school.

Officers located and isolated the 13-year-old student, and an investigation was conducted. There were no weapons brought to the school. She was arrested at the school at approximately 3 p.m. and transported to the Second Precinct. The student was charged with Threat of Mass Harm, a Class B Misdemeanor, and released to her parents. She will be arraigned in Suffolk County Family Court on a later date.

Visit www.tbrnewsmedia.com/police for more press releases from the Suffolk County Police.

— COMPILED BY HEIDI SUTTON

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers offers a **cash reward** for information that leads to an arrest. Anyone with information about these incidents can contact Suffolk County Crime Stoppers to submit an anonymous tip by calling 1-800-220-TIPS.

Eye on the Street: Mother's Day

BY SAMANTHA RUTT
EDITOR1@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

As Mother's Day rolls around, TBR News Media took to the streets throughout our coverage area, asking locals what this special day means to them.

It's a day which makes people remember the importance and significance of mothers in their life, and to express love, appreciation and gratitude toward mother figures for their unconditional love, support and sacrifices. TBR wants to know, "What does Mother's Day mean to you?"

— Photos by Samantha Rutt

Seema Pandya, Smithtown

I think it means the honoring and passing of traditions and wisdoms of mothers to mothers to mothers. Usually, I spend time with my kids, calling my parents and wishing them well.



I used to work at a restaurant in Colorado and for Mother's Day they would make chocolate-filled buns with raspberries and they looked like breasts! They were so clever. It was a bun with a chocolate areola and a raspberry for the nipple

Jordan Mahmood, Stony Brook

Mother's Day is a day to appreciate my mom for what she does. She is a single mom and she literally means the world to me and my family. Each year we celebrate by spending time together and doing whatever it is she wants to do — it's really nice spending time with my mom.



Tyler Stephenson-Moore, Queens

I love my mom a lot. Mother's Day to me is just like the day-to-day stuff, acknowledging all the sacrifices she's made, honoring her for everything she has done for me.



Usually, I'll go to Queens to see her with cards and flowers.

Rubens Meza-Henderson, Centereach

The United States was the country that enacted this holiday. I can say that because before the enactment, nobody cared about that — but now many countries in the world follow the U.S. example.

Typically, because I am in the restaurant



business, every Mother's Day I work. This year is going to be an exception. Mother's Day is a very special holiday because we honor the person who has the privilege to carry life in their womb, we were born through that person, honoring that act

is very important.

I do believe in the Bible and one of the commandments says that you have to honor your parents. The Bible encourages you to honor your father and mother and there are many ways to honor them. One way is behaving well and another is through words — you have to express your gratitude. I was with my mother a couple of weeks ago in South America. She was a little sick, but she's well now. I took time off to go see her, to honor and love my mother.

Jen and Jillian Dunn, Setauket



On Mother's Day, Jillian values time well spent with mom Jen: "I really don't get to spend too much time with her, so just being able to see her is a gift — that is what is most important to me." Jillian usually takes her mom out to

lunch and goes for a nice walk through one of their favorite spots, Avalon Nature Preserve.

Jen loves to spend time with her family on Mother's Day: "This year my son is graduating that weekend, so we will take a trip down to see him." On a typical year, Jen and her family like to celebrate with a daytime activity like a drive out east or a day exploring local farm stands. "One of my favorite things is picking out flower flats and the kids will help me plant them."

Steve Frederico, Stony Brook

My mother has passed and there isn't a day that I don't think about her. But on Mother's Day we always commemorate her.

I seem to quote her unconsciously — she had these infamous sayings, like, "It's a great life if you don't weaken."



Stephanie Moncavage, Coram



I love my mom. We spend the day golfing and then my sister and I will make her a nice dinner — of mom's choice of course.

Jacqueline Ann Haggerty

PREPARED BY TIMOTHY HAGGERTY
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Jacqueline Ann Haggerty, 89, passed away Saturday, April 6, in Simsbury, Connecticut.

Jackie was born in Flushing, Queens, to Mathilda and John Brown in 1934. She attended the School of Nursing at St. Luke's Hospital in New York City, where she met Denis Haggerty, who was attending Columbia University.

Jackie later received her bachelor's degree in public and community health from St. Joseph's University. She enjoyed a second career as a Girl Scout camp nurse in New York, Massachusetts and Wyoming. She sang

at a Papal Mass in Rome with her church choir. An avid member of the League of Women Voters, she also helped found a nursery school and volunteered for a variety of community groups.

Jacqueline is predeceased by her husband, Denis; her son, Christopher; and daughter, Mary Lynn King. She is survived by her sons, Peter and Timothy, as well as her granddaughters, Caroline and Kathleen King and Gina and Jessie DeMarco, and her great-grandson, Enzo Penna.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated at St. James R.C. Church in Setauket on May 17 at 10:45 a.m. followed by a burial. Donations may be made to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation at www.jdrf.org.

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Patriots tame the Lions

BY BILL LANDON
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Longwood Lions were no match for the visiting Patriots of Ward Melville, Monday, May 6. By the bottom of the fourth inning, Longwood trailed 5-2 after which their bats fell silent. Ward Melville stormed further ahead in the top of the 5th, when Julianna Russ drove in three runs, Avery Wierzbicki plated a runner as did Izzy Parente.

SPORTS

With these five runs, the Patriots took a 10-2 lead. Russ' bat spoke once more in the top of the seventh inning scoring Wierzbicki to take an 11-2 lead into the bottom of the inning.

Longwood down to their last three outs were unable to answer the call as the Patriots prevailed with the 11-2 victory in the League I matchup.

Ward Melville's Russ pitched a complete game allowing five hits.

The win lifts Ward Melville to 8-8 with two games remaining before postseason play begins.

❶ Ward Melville center fielder Avery Wierzbicki makes the catch. ❷ Shortstop Quinn Amari makes the play. ❸ Amari throws the runner out at first. ❹ Izzy Parente hits a line drive.

Photos by Bill Landon

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Ward Melville 11 • Longwood 2

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Announcements

SCHOOL NUTRITION ANNOUNCEMENT

The Three Village Central School District plans to apply to the New York State Education Department for an exemption from serving breakfast in their five elementary schools during the 2024-2025 school year.

This yearly exemption will be based on the results of a survey taken by parents of elementary students.

If you have any questions, please contact the Child Nutrition Office at 631 730-4505.

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Editorial



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National Nurses Week, a time for recognition

In the heart of the medical field lies the nurturing presence of nurses.

As National Nurses Week unfolds from May 6 to 12, it's time for communities everywhere to pause and reflect on the indispensable role nurses play in our health care ecosystem. Beyond being health care providers, nurses embody the essence of compassion, advocacy and expertise. They are heroes whose contributions resonate far beyond the confines of hospital walls.

They are not just caregivers; they are companions on the arduous journey of illness, offering solace and support when it's needed most. In moments of vulnerability, it's often the gentle reassurance of a nurse that brings comfort and hope to patients and their families. In this role, nurses serve as a beacon of empathy, providing not just medical care but also emotional sustenance.

Nurses serve as invaluable liaisons between patients, families and the broader health care team. They bridge the gap between complex medical jargon and everyday understanding, helping patients to make informed decisions about their health. Through clear communication and advocacy, nurses ensure that patients receive the personalized care they deserve. Whether it's coordinating treatment plans, advocating for patient rights or providing vital education, nurses are the linchpins of effective health care delivery.

In the intricacy of individualized health care, nurses act as threads binding it all together. They possess a unique ability to see patients not merely as cases but as individuals with distinct needs and preferences. By tailoring care plans to suit each patient's unique circumstances, nurses uphold the fundamental principle of patient-centered care.

"Nurses are the lifeline and lifeblood of our Stony Brook Medicine health care system," said Carol Gomes, chief executive officer, Stony Brook University Hospital. "They provide exceptional and compassionate care for our patients. I'm so grateful and proud of their dedication and commitment to quality care. We celebrate our team during Nurses Week and applaud their talents every day of the year."

As we honor National Nurses Week, let us not only acknowledge the tireless dedication and sacrifices of nurses but also advocate for the recognition and support they truly deserve. Let us continue to invest in their professional development, provide them with the resources they need to thrive and ensure their voices are heard in shaping health care policies. Because a health care system that truly prioritizes the well-being of its citizens is one that honors and uplifts its nursing workforce.

Letter to the Editor



Stony Brook University's Staller Center for the Arts. Photo courtesy Stony Brook University

At SBU's Staller Center on protest night

Last Wednesday evening, May 1, my wife and I, along with our teenage grandson, went to the campus of Stony Brook University to enjoy a wonderful concert given by the Stony Brook Wind Ensemble of the Department of Music.

Imagine our surprise, as we walked to the front door of the Staller Center and found the adjacent grassy area to be hosting a large group of pro-Palestine protesters. We had no problem telling who they were, because they were echoing chants provided by a person wielding a megaphone, most were wearing masks, the grass was covered with small tents and sheets of blue plastic, and many were holding poles flying the flags of Palestine. There were also quite a few signs and posters, carrying messages such as "From the River to the Sea," "Globalize the Intifada" and "By Any Means Necessary." We found the whole operation to be interesting and educational, and we approached the assemblage to observe and take pictures with our cellphone cameras. If we had any thoughts that we might be welcome, these were quickly dispelled by a young lady in the group who told us where to go (not to the Staller Center), and provided visible reinforcement by flipping us the bird, which we dutifully recorded on my grandson's camera.

The concert featured around 65 wonderfully talented musicians, all of them students at the university, one of whom happens to be another grandson — and we enjoyed it immensely. The concert ended around 9:30 p.m., and we went outside to find the protesters still in place, practicing their chants and carrying their Palestine flags. By this time, however, they had been joined by two dozen or so uniformed members of the New York State Police, who were standing in a group and watching them.

Everything appeared to be under control, so my grandson and I went over to the officers and started a conversation with one of them, who happened to be a sergeant. He was very pleasant and accommodating, told us who they were and why they were there, and seemed to really enjoy talking with my grandson, who is a big fan of the police. The sergeant told us that there was a deadline of 11 p.m., and the protesters would be vacating around then. That

was a little late for us, since the next day was a school day, so we wished them luck and went home.

The next day, we tuned in to News 12, and we learned that the protesters were indeed gone, with 29 of them having been arrested. I was thinking about revisiting the grassy area, to see if the protesters have returned, like the swallows in Capistrano. If they have, I was thinking of giving them a few tubes of Super Glue, so that they could glue themselves together, as other protesters have found helpful. This would present a more challenging dilemma for the police officers, but I think they could figure it out.

*George Altomose
Setauket*



Stony Brook University Police posted around campus on Thursday, May 2. Photo by Samantha Rutt

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Opinion

Sharing my first London trip to see Churchill, Big Ben and other icons

I took my first trip to London with my wife and I never felt like we were far from home or from living history.

In Uber rides, the music of Justin Timberlake, the Pointer Sisters and numerous other American artists provided the soundtrack for our visit.



**D. None
of the above**

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF

Walking around the city and descending into the tube, advertisements for American products such as Pepsi and movies such as “The Fall Guy” and “Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes” adorned the sides of hackney cars, the iconic red double-decker buses and the walls of the tube.

The cars on the tube were much narrower than I expected, as people sitting across from me tapped my feet without standing or stretching.

For a country that drives on the left, I was mystified by the “keep right” signs. If they drive on the left, why do they walk on the right?

London has its fair share of “must visits,” such

as the Tower of London, Big Ben and Parliament and the Churchill War Rooms. An imposing and impressive testament to the history of the city and the country, the Tower of London forms a small metropolis with its enormous towers and stories of prisoners. Graffiti on the walls bears the name and religious convictions of those confined to the tower and in some cases tortured or killed.

Big Ben was larger and more elaborate than I imagined. It reminded me of an earlier visit to Mount Rushmore, where I found the size and pageantry of the four former presidents magnificent and moving.

The Churchill War Rooms provided a close up view of the remarkable fortitude and foresight of the celebrated prime minister. At the age of 65, Churchill spent considerable time underground.

When he learned that the facility was vulnerable to a direct hit from a German bomb, he complained in a letter displayed on the wall of the memorial that Patrick Duff, who was permanent secretary of the Office of Works, had “sold him a pup.”

The government added concrete and, after a nearby bomb shook the bunker, Churchill lamented that the bomb didn’t strike close enough to test the reinforcements.

Veterans of the shelter, many of whom rarely

saw sunlight underground, shared stories about going under sunlamps to increase their vitamin D, about Churchill’s need for quiet, and about their secret life.

The arms of one of Churchill’s chairs in the cabinet room bears the marks of his fingers digging into the wood, as he listened to testimony, prepared action plans and reacted to news.

Throughout his tenure during the war, Churchill traveled extensively, visiting everywhere from the United States, to Cairo to Moscow, rallying support for the war and visiting foreign leaders and dignitaries, sometimes for more than a month. The Prime Minister, who was almost 71 when the war ended, traveled over 100,000 miles during those tumultuous years. Observers shared parts of his routine, which included two baths a day and three meals per day.

Churchill, who was involved in everything from planning the war effort to offering advice about military technology, pointed out that the government named a tank after him “when they found out it was no damn good!”

Aside from our historical visits, we enjoyed listening to, and watching, people. Like so many other big cities, London attracts guests from around the world, as French, Spanish and German blended

with Japanese, Chinese and Arabic languages.

We enjoyed the hospitality of numerous Brits. A beefeater at the Tower of London, which was hit by a few stray bombs, suggested the site wasn’t a target during World War II because it had no strategic value.

Or, perhaps, the Germans and their killer leader “liked the Tower” and didn’t want it or the crown jewels, destroyed.

On the lighter side, we experienced a range of London weather while on a short boat trip on the Thames, as sunlight gave way to dark clouds and wind turned some umbrellas inside out.

The tour guide on the boat offered one of the more unexpected linguistic differences. He described how certain buildings were converted from commercial properties into apartments.

“Wait, what did he just say?” I asked my wife, chuckling.

“What do you mean?”

“I think he’s talking about warehouses and he said, ‘Where asses.’”

Later, when he described a queen’s residence, he also suggested this was one of the queen’s favorite ‘asses.’

Yes, we had a “eck” of a time in London and would be more than “appy” to visit again.

The most unforgettable character I ever knew

When lilacs bloom, I think of my mother. That’s not only because they bloom around Mother’s Day, although that is part of the story. My mother loved lilacs, their color, their remarkable shape of many tiny flowers making one larger blossom, their incomparable smell.



**Between
you and me**

BY LEAH S. DUNAIEF

My mother was born in Russia, came to New York with her family when she was four and lived in the house with her father, step-mother, two brothers, three sisters and one unmarried aunt in Corona, Queens until she married. And as she told me countless times, always smiling at the memory, the backyard was

filled with lilacs.

After I moved away, I sent her armloads of lilacs on Mother’s Day. Each year, she would tell me I shouldn’t have, taking deep breaths to

let me know how she loved their perfume.

Forty-one years ago, she died two days before Mother’s Day, surrounded in the hospital room by lilacs.

I wish you had known my mother. She was, to borrow from The Reader’s Digest, the most unforgettable character I have ever met. My father, who was no slouch himself, said she had enormous courage. She would go to court, representing whichever member of the family might have legal woes in connection with their businesses, and patiently explain to the judge what the problem was. She always won.

She would have been a successful lawyer, had she been allowed to finish her studies. But when her father had a stroke in his 40s, she and her older brother were removed from school and sent out to work to support the family. She seemed not to know that she was not a lawyer as she argued her case.

Without a doubt, she was the matriarch and head of the extended family. Did I mention, she was incredibly bright...about most things? Not necessarily about me, however, As you might

imagine, she had a strong personality and was accustomed to being in charge. I, on the other hand, disliked always being directed. My poor dad was habitually caught in the middle.

My father would remind me how much my mother loved me and that she was looking for what was best for me. I don’t believe that line of reasoning ever won me over, but I will say that I learned to love, and love deeply, from my mother and my father.

Is love learned? If so, I felt how much my brother, my sister and I were loved and how my parents, if called upon, would sacrifice their welfare for us in an instant. I have tried to pass along that depth of feeling to my children.

My parents did modify their lives after my sister was born. Two years younger than I, she was diagnosed with Down syndrome, a genetic disorder that is caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21. Mothers 35 and older are more prone to giving birth to children with Down’s, and my mother was 36 when my sister, Maxine, arrived.

It was my parents’ goal to help Maxine live

as normal and complete a life as they were able to provide for my older brother and me. Some relatives urged them to put my sister “away” in a home for children with disabilities. My parents never considered that, instead protecting her with abiding love and care.

Both my parents accepted the challenge of raising my sister, but the larger share of that care inevitably fell to my mother. It was not common to see a child on the street with a disability of any sort in the 1940s, when my sister was born. Some people feared differences, others just stared.

There was a social price to be paid. My parents willingly paid the social price, devoting their free time and resources to her care, happiness and well-being, making sure that my sister was properly looked after. She played the piano, loved watching baseball games in Central Park with my dad and me, and returned our love in equal measure. With infinite patience, my mother taught Maxine eventually to read and do arithmetic on a second-grade level.

My mother was a star.



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