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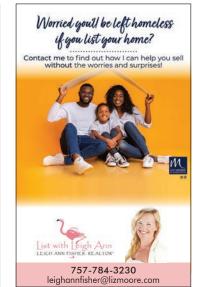
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Meredith Collins, Publisher

Putting together our diversity issue took on a different tone this year as our country is in the midst of a tumultuous reckoning over racism and other forms of discrimination. There are different thoughts on the degree and nature of the problem and how to move forward in a more positive way. I think most people would agree that change is needed and the promise of that change can't happen quickly enough.

I've always believed that diversity

is usually strongest at the individual and personal level and becomes more strained at the organizational or system level. The issues are far more complex than that, but we present here several stories of individuals who are taking direct steps and making exceptional efforts to make our community a better, more diverse, and more embracing home for us all.

I could write on for days and never come close to saying something as straightforward and appropriate as one lovely lady we interviewed, Mrs. Miranda Pressey Sadler, who advises: "Live every day as if it's your last day, because we never know when God is going to call us home. Love everybody, be kind to people. Be caring and kind and loving, because you never know. The next day is not promised to you, and you have to live every second like it's your last." NDN

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HILLARY STERLING



DISABILITY DOES NOT DEFINE HER

By Narielle Living

Hillary Sterling is bright, funny and vivacious, and she loves sharks, bunnies, old movies and the New England Patriots, but not necessarily in that order.

Born and raised in Northern Virginia, Hillary relocated with her family when they came to Williamsburg. The family came here for a number of reasons, but mainly because they loved the area. When she was in Northern Virginia, Hillary had a job washing people's hair at a hair salon. "Elderly people would come in and get their hair done," she says. From that experience, she knew she wanted to work with older people in some capacity. "That's when I fell in love with them."

Initially, when she came to this area, Hillary's sister, who lives in Virginia Beach, got her a job with a mortgage company. While that job was okay, it wasn't exactly where she wanted to be. Then Hillary found The Arc of Greater Williamsburg, an organization that strives to improve the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities through community activities and advocacy. The Arc not only provided Hillary some fun socialization but also helped her get a job through the Wheels4Work



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program.

According to The Arc, Wheels4Work was established in 2019 to provide guidance and training for those who wished to continue their education or to be prepared and equipped to be successful in a meaningful job. Supported employment or continuing education are a priority with this project.

When she first began going to The Arc, Hillary says she was a little shy but that soon changed. "Then everybody got me going," she says. "You just have a good time. Some of [the people] are in wheelchairs but they were still hanging out, and there's all different ages. Some are younger, some of them are older like me. I just wanted to have something to do." Hillary says that the people she socializes with at The Arc have some form of disability.

Through the Wheels4Work program, Hillary was able to get a job at Windsor Meade, which was perfect for her. "I work in the bistro, bus tables, put stuff together, work in the dining room and serve people," she says. It was ideal because finally she was able to work with her preferred demographic.

Throughout the pandemic, Hillary continued to work. She describes having to wear a mask at work, as well as having to work with a reduced number of tables that met social distancing requirements. "Now we're starting to open up stuff. We had a big barbecue the other day, and all the tables in the bistro were open." According to Hillary, during the height of the pandemic, the residents at her facility did not use the dining room. Instead, food was delivered to their living quarters. "We would take the chairs in the bistro and move them over to the corner and get a table out so we could have everything set." She describes an assembly line process that they organized to facilitate putting the meals together. "One person would get the condiments, the ketchups and stuff like that and the chips, and then another person would staple the receipt on there, and then they would have another person that would tie up the bag."

During the pandemic, Hillary says that there was lots of extra cleaning going on at work. "They had to do a lot of cleaning, and they were repainting the bistro and taking off the molding and putting new molding around the floor, so we had to move to a smaller room. It was a little tighter, but my boss wanted someone to stay in the room. That was probably me. I put the bags down and stapled and stayed in there until the food came out."

Hillary loves her job because she loves working with older people, or as she puts it, "cheek pinchers," because of their propensity to pinch her cheeks. "I get to work with elderly people. I've always wanted to work with them, but I couldn't find a job in Northern Virginia, so I stuck with the hair salon. I told [the residents] that I don't have a lot of grandparents around, so you guys are like my grandparents, and I love taking care of you."

According to Donna, Hillary's mother, Hillary's disability occurred when she was three years old. At that time, she had been diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and the only option was surgery. Donna says that after the tumor was removed from her brain stem, the subsequent treatment created some health issues. "The treatment that she had made her kind of diminutive in stature and caused some of her brain functions to be a little less than okay." In addition, Hillary appears to be much



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younger than she really is, which both mother and daughter find amusing. "People think I'm 13 or 16."

Despite continued health problems, Donna says that Hillary has been a trooper through it all.

In her spare time, Hillary does not like to just sit around the house. When she's not working or cleaning her room, she enjoys getting together with her friends from The Arc and hanging out. Sometimes they will do simple crafts, but she is not really keen on doing too much of that. "I get frustrated with crafts," she says. "If I'm doing something simple like my niece and nephew are doing, then I'm okay with it. And there's some things that I still can't use, like popsicle sticks." She says it is difficult for her to manage doing crafts with popsicle sticks, and she does not enjoy sewing, either. "If I have to do it, I do it over and over again to get the hang of it. I mostly like coloring or painting something simple."

She also enjoys going to the beach, hanging out with her niece and nephew and antiquing.

In addition, Hillary collects memorabilia. One of her favorite rock bands of all time is KISS. "I saw Gene Simmons, and I fell in love and started collecting stuff, but I'm very frugal," she says. "When I started collecting Elvis Presley stuff, I had too much of it, so I got rid of the stuff that wasn't really valuable."

Her next love is for the New England Patriots football team, who know her from the letters she has written to them. "I have a football signed by Belichick, and a football signed by the Patriot's Gronkowski, Tom Brady, the whole team."

Her next passion, interestingly, is sharks. "We went to the Outer Banks, and she was in the shallows," her mother says. "She had a boogie board; she was about seven or eight, maybe nine, and a sand shark jumped on top of the boogie board." Since then, Hillary has collected shark's teeth and photos of sharks and of course, has watched the most famous shark movie of all: "Jaws."

"People think that they're man eaters, and they're capable of taking a bite out of you, but mostly you'll just die because you're losing a lot of blood," she says. Hillary has a soft spot for most animals. "I love spiders. I don't kill them."

Her two rabbits, Biscuit and Gravy, are named because of their coloring. "They are boy bunnies," she says. "One looks like a white biscuit and the other one looks like brown gravy." Caring for the two animals is a lot of responsibility, Hillary admits, and it is not something she takes lightly. "That's a lot of responsibility. But I like having something to do."

Outgoing by nature, by her own admission, Hillary doesn't often get mad about the little things in life. "But if somebody says something about my grandparents or something, or my heritage, I kind of get upset."

As Hillary's mother, Donna, notes about her daughter, "I guess you really can't judge a book by its cover. It seems we've seen more diverse people down here, believe it or not, than in Northern Virginia because everybody's so insular there. In Hillary's case, though, it's been kind of fun in a sense because people say she looks 13 and she's really older."

Hillary Sterling may not be a woman who opens up immediately to strangers, but anyone who has the pleasure of speaking with her and getting to know her will find a person full of diverse interests, a kind heart and an engaging manner. NDN

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When Katrina Landon was born in 1956, she arrived in a segregated Williamsburg. Of course, she was not aware of it at the time, but she was born in the "white" hospital. When she started school, she attended an all-white school. Black pupils were admitted during her fourth-grade year. Her parents chose to send her to private school where there were black students, but very few. She returned to public school in the 10th grade where she befriended students of all races. These early events in her

life were influential in shaping her worldview, and as an adult, propelled her to work for racial justice in her job as a secondary school teacher and as a board member of the Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists faith community.

"While in high school, my African American friends and I really did not talk about race," Katrina says. "Most likely it was because we had emerged from a period in which there had been issues with integration in public

schools, and I think most of us just wanted to get to know each other and to forget the problems that had occurred a few years earlier."

Katrina was voted most talented in the first graduating class of Lafayette High School. She performed in shows with the Williamsburg Players, and after high school, she studied applied voice for a year at Peabody Music Conservatory in Baltimore. She then transferred to Virginia Commonwealth University where she continued to major in voice in their music







department.

"After two years, I realized I was not committed to the discipline of practicing two to three hours a day, or singing music I really did not enjoy singing, so I changed my major to sociology," Katrina says.

Performing has always been an important part of Katrina's life. She has fond memories of snow days spent singing at the home of another talented high school contemporary, Bruce Hornsby.

"Bruce and I knew each other as kids. He was a year ahead of me in school," Katrina says. "I sang with Bruce while he played Elton John and Leon Russell songs. He had a natural talent at the keyboard, and I was known for my singing, and so it was a lot of fun. I still chuckle when I think about how many from my class thought I would be a big rock star, but it was Bruce who became the star!"

As she continued her coursework at VCU, Katrina delved more deeply into the study of race and race relations. African American Studies was not a prominent pursuit for white students in the 1970s. She recalled an impactful moment as the lone white student in a black professor's class.

"I realized how little I knew about African American history and the sociological aspects of race," Katrina says. "I had never heard of Malcolm X or [W.E.B.] DuBois. The professor made it clear he didn't like white students in his class. But I stuck it out because I wanted to know what it feels like to be in the minority and your voice is not wanted."

At around age 25, Katrina felt "called" to pursue a teaching career. "I thought about how much teachers shaped my life and took me under their wing," Katrina says. "They were instrumental in keeping me focused on music and acting." Katrina spent 35 years in education, wearing many different hats along the way. She taught U.S. history, social studies and world history at the secondary level. She taught for 18 years in Roanoke schools where she also mentored new teachers and managed the International Baccalaureate program. For the past 10 years, she taught at Woodside

High School in Newport News.

"I knew I had a gift to work with all types of learners and the ability to put people at ease in my classroom," Katrina says. "I've always worked in an urban environment. It is important to me to draw out the voices of the marginalized in the classroom. I encourage my students to really question what they learn in history."

One of the reasons Katrina believes that teaching is a noble profession is the impact teachers can have in their students' lives. A particular "a-ha" moment involving a difficult student that "no one wanted to have in class" stands out. This student was hostile and frightening. When he made contact through social media about 10 years ago, Katrina was apprehensive about what he might say.

"He wrote me a beautiful letter that proved he had indeed changed his attitude about people and life," Katrina says. "He said he kept hearing my voice telling him to open his mind. He said I was the reason he was still alive. That was so profound. As a public-school teacher,



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you never know who you're going to teach and what impact you can have on their lives."

Katrina retired in June. She reflected on how she and the profession have changed in three decades. "I have no regrets. I loved teaching," Katrina says. "I always concentrate on the positive. A good teacher is always a good student. Virtual learning [during CO-VID] required me to take a crash course in using technology, but I said I'm going to give it my best. I'm sure I will continue to work with kids in retirement, maybe as a tutor."

As she enters retirement and begins a new chapter, Katrina will focus on her involvement in the Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists (WUU) faith community. She was elected board chair recently, after serving on the board for three years as membership co-chair. WUU came into her life in January 2017 when she attended the local Women's March and met people from the congregation "who were putting their beliefs into action" in support of many social justice causes. As a youngster, she

attended Episcopalian services. In 1992, she discovered the Unitarian Universalist faith while living in the Blacksburg/Roanoke area.

"I wasn't really a religious person at that time," Katrina says. "I was drawn to the lack of dogma of the Unitarian Universalists faith. The focus is on the free and responsible search for truth and meaning and on the worth and dignity of every person. The beliefs are diverse and inclusive."

The WUU congregation has about 250 members from different races, backgrounds, political orientation, walks of life, gender and sexual orientation. Services have been conducted virtually since the pandemic began. The board is working on a plan for when and how to safely re-open.

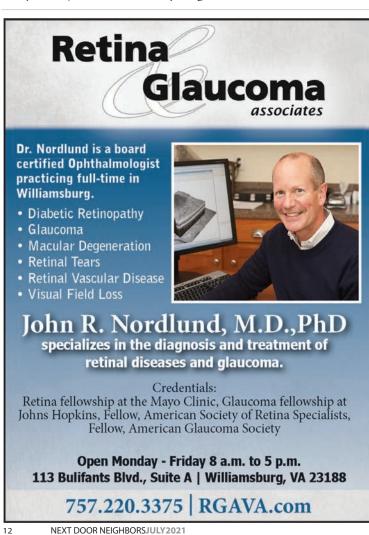
"We're looking forward to a year of celebration with some outdoor events. I'm genuinely concerned with the spiritual and emotional health of our congregation coming out of the pandemic," Katrina says. "I want us to focus on how we can best provide the spiritual and emotional support that people need."

When she moved back to Williamsburg 10 years ago, Katrina ran into black friends from high school and had many purposeful conversations about race relations while they were growing up.

"We talked about why I never saw black kids at the pool or at the beaches when segregation was very much alive," Katrina says. "I had never thought about it. They told me how they had to be aware that there was a white Williamsburg and a black Williamsburg, and they needed to know how to act in both worlds."

While race relations in Williamsburg have improved over the years, Katrina thinks there is still work to be done.

"I think it is important that allies of people of color live their daily lives in such a way as to be an 'up-stander' and ally to their friends of color. It's not just about protesting. It is also about how you live your life and speaking up to injustice when you see it happen." NDN





SHARRIEFF DE'JOHNETTE Moving History Forward By Narielle Living Murawski Photography

Sharrieff De'Johnette grew up in this area, and his roots trace back to his mother's family who were from Toano. Educated in the local schools, Sharieff attended Virginia State University where he majored in history and political science. "My bachelor's degree is in history education. I then went on to teach in Virginia's public schools, then I became an assistant professor in higher education." Sharrieff recently completed his final degree work and now has

a doctorate in education. "I just defended," he says. "I'm a first-generation college student. So, I'm the first of my family, if you will, to break that glass ceiling in education by obtaining my doctorate in education."

Sharrieff's interest in education, specifically the education of African Americans, has led to the creation of a project he calls The Heights Community Project, which focuses in part on the history of the local Bruton Heights School and the journey the school represents. "Bruton Heights is, in my view, a combination of the journey for education in the city, but it's also a national experience." He explains that public schools in the south for the most part did not exist until after the Civil War. "It wasn't until the Civil War ended that public schools came to the south as a general rule." While everyone may have wanted an education, funding was always an issue. And, of course, in the post-







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Reconstruction era there was also the issue of funding separate schools for the races.

By the late 1800s, William & Mary had donated space for the establishment of a school for white children. The schools for black children, however, were largely in rented spaces scattered throughout the city and the county. Sharrieff says that Public School Number One was for the white kids while Public School Number Two was for the black kids. Williamsburg in 1871 did what was practically unheard of at the time: they posted notices for the election of teachers, and the city council chose to pay a portion of the salaries and rent for the spaces.

Of course there was an immediate need for teachers of both races in the spaces provided. Initially, the James City County Training School housed the black student population, but the building soon fell in heavy disrepair because of lack of funds and an alternative was sought. "Due to structural integrity problems resulting from unequal funding [of the schools], you get the rise of Bruton Heights," Sharrieff says.

Today, Sharieff's mission with The Heights Community Project is to focus on the radical politics of black people of James City County, Bruton District of York County, and Williamsburg, Virginia who developed a school on a parcel of land called Bruton Heights School and "Bruton Heights," respectively. The main work of The Heights Community Project is to engage in the radical Black traditions and enrich Williamsburg, Virginia and beyond.

To do this, he has begun to engage in a series of social media outreach campaigns to interact with and educate the community at large. "Social media is powerful," he says. "A lot of people criticize the internet and social media, but in fact my dissertation is built on social media, so I have a bias."

The idea for The Heights Community Project germinated from two events in Sharrieff's life. In 1991, he wrote an essay for an NAACP program. "I won," he says. "I ended up representing my city, and along with others across the peninsula, we went to Houston, Texas to compete." Once there, he saw other black students from across the nation gathered for the competitions. "All the northern and western states won all the medals. I was horrified by that. It was like a sweep."

The next event occurred at his high school. "My school had a black history event, and I thought the rule was that nobody could miss the event. What I recall seeing was that the white students started calling out. They didn't want to attend the event at all, and the administration was allowing this. I was stunned. I just knew I was angry, upset, but why, it just didn't feel right."

The final event that led him to develop his project is his powerful love of history. "The instructors at my high school really impressed history upon me. They really talked everything through very well for me. I noticed as I looked through the books that I never saw any of what was known as vignettes about black contributions. And I remember pulling the assistant principal to the side. He was another black male in the building, and I said, I don't understand why there aren't any black contributions as vignettes. He encouraged me to write a letter to the school board, protesting this. They took my letter to the school board as a protest. So that kind of triangulates it."

When Sharrieff was in high school, he talks about the fact that the diversity he saw was a diversity of ideas and thinking. He also notes that



within each group of people there is always a stratification of ideas and thinking. "Even within the black community, people make the mistake of thinking that because everybody is black, they just get in or on the same page. That's not true. It's never been true. There's class stratification within the black community, just like there's class stratification in the white community." Sharrieff, who is 47 years old, remembers the days of middle school dances. "When the music shifted, you can see on the dance floor the population shifted. When what was understood back then as the white music came on, it was rare to see the black kids on the floor. That's not to say that we didn't appreciate, for example, Led Zeppelin or those kinds of bands, but there was definitely a divide."

The path for Sharrieff to attend college was laid by his family, both his parents and, more specifically, his aunt. "My mother's sister is the one who laid the groundwork for me," he says. "My mother regularly talked about having worked at NYU [New York University]. My mother's sister went to Hunter College, then

she transferred to NYU so that's all I knew." With that kind of connection, Sharrieff initially determined he wanted to go to NYU. "I wanted to go really for the legacy of it. I didn't know anything about this thing called black colleges and universities, but it was actually my senior guidance counselor at Bruton High School, I love her to death, and she's the one who handed me an application to Virginia Union University. Initially, I got accepted early admittance to Virginia Union which is located at Richmond." At that time, Sharrieff's ambition was to become a lawyer. "I wanted to be a lawyer so bad," he says. "I wanted to be the next Thurgood Marshall." But sometimes fate has other things in mind for people and it turned out that Sharrieff ended up attending Virginia State University and graduating.

Sharieff has devoted his life to showcasing the history of our area, with the specific goals of working with individual black persons, organizations, and institutions to improve daily life for the African Diaspora, providing an intercommunal social media news service, providing a Black studies course and a symposium. These are no small goals, but Sharrieff is up for the challenge. "I want to bring together the project that black people started back in 1619," he says. "We found a way to survive and build community." Bruton Heights School, he says, was intended to be more than a school. Sharrieff asserts that its mission was to be a community hub. "I want to revitalize that. I want to bring it back. But how? My project attempts to literally reimagine Bruton Heights School and all of that social-political energy for the virtual world. It marries my love for politics, history, education and social media."

The premise behind Sharrieff De'Johnette's project is to reflect upon what existed once and bring back the positive from what was, learning from mistakes and changing the future.

"It keeps within the motto of what the black parent said long ago, when her name or his name is not a part of the record, but she said, 'We live here. It is our responsibility to do what we need and must do for our children and ourselves, even when the teachers and the light are gone.' So that's what the project endeavors to stick to."



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Fostering Diversity within the Church

By Caroline Johnson

Though Arthur "Art" Wright lives in Richmond, he's quickly adjusting to calling Williamsburg his second home as the senior pastor at Williamsburg Baptist Church. For Art, his time with Williamsburg Baptist Church started as a supply preacher via Zoom last April and May. "I preached for them three times and had a great experience but never met anyone in person," Art says. "I had no idea of what was to come."

After supply preaching again in August, he was asked to be the interim pastor with the caveat that there was the potential to apply to be the permanent senior pastor in the future. Art moved through that process and was brought on as senior pastor in November of last year. Though this is his first job as a pastor, Art isn't new to working in the Baptist community.

"I was a professor of spirituality at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond and theologian in residence for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or Virginia," Art says. "I love study-

ing the Bible, scripture, narratives and literature in any form." This came naturally to Art as he grew up in the United Methodist Church and married into a family of Baptists. "One of the neat things about being a New Testament scholar and professor is it's a unique intersection between literature, history and spirituality," Art shares. "It was a natural progression for me to be in this career as I remember in middle and high school having a suspicion that I would end up as a pastor one day."

Though he enjoyed his time spent as a professor, Art finds a lot of intersections between his previous work and his current work as senior pastor. "Education is formative but as a pastor, I get to be with folks in both the wonderful and sacred moments like weddings and the hardest moments like funerals." Art says. "My job is to spend time with people and build relationships, similar to when I was working with students, and now I get to do it in a new way."

A native Virginian, Art grew up on the

Northern Neck and attended Averett University in Danville to earn his bachelor's degree. He went from college to seminary at Union Presbyterian where he received his Master's of Divinity and Ph.D. After his first year of seminary, he met his wife, Beth, at a summer camp in Bath, Virginia.

The two were married in 2007 and have two young children, Adrian and Julian. Beth works as the Director of Alkulana summer camp, and the family has settled into their new role as an integral part of Williamsburg Baptist Church. While Art welcomed life in his new position, he was blessed to join an already dedicated staff of three, Kim Gehr, Deb Fisher and Tim Brewster, who have become wonderful colleagues and supporters to work with.

Williamsburg Baptist Church holds core values that were established to create a diverse environment that is truly welcoming of all as a moderate-to-progressive community of faith. Some of their core values include welcome over exclusion, community over institution, and engagement over indifference. This environment has been one that's an honor for Art to be a part of, as he shares the beliefs that were already ingrained in the church's DNA prior to his onboarding.

"One thing in particular that is the bedrock of what we believe is that the divine message to the world is acceptance, despite all flaws and selfdoubt, and we encourage people to come as they are," Art says. "This is one thing that we as a church are trying to communicate as loudly as we can, as many churches have done the opposite throughout history."

Along with believing in acceptance wholeheartedly comes the task of inviting and seeking to add diversity into the church, making it a place that fosters transformation, creativity and inclusivity. "We don't want a church full of people who all think and believe the exact same way," Art says. "There's a reason the movement of the Holy Spirit is described as dancing, as it can be chaotic but beautiful at the same time."

Before joining on as senior pastor, Art found that Williamsburg Baptist Church already had a plan for diversity and inclusivity in place. As a welcoming and affirming church, all are welcome and affirmed in their congregation. They believe that anyone who walks through the doors of their church should be invited to participate fully in membership and in the community they've built on these principles.

Williamsburg Baptist Church frequently has a rainbow flag or banner out front communicating this message, which has been torn down a few times. When it gets torn down, a new one goes up, sharing the message of acceptance for all. "When we all can acknowledge that we're all broken people who are struggling in some way, we can come alongside one another and encourage and support each other through life experiences," Art says. "I think that being honest about what it means to be human increases our empathy and understanding for others and increases our ability to exist in a diverse context."

In a time where polarization is more common than togetherness, Art seeks to foster a community that listens to one another from across the aisle. His goal is to create a community of faith where people can live, worship, learn and be in community together in a way that allows them to be their authentic selves while also recognizing that what binds us all together is greater than what divides us.

"Diversity is what the kingdom of God looks like, and I believe that a church shouldn't be homogenous, theologically, politically or ethnically, as that's not who God calls us to be in the world," Art says. "Jesus' ministry was a ministry of acceptance and extending divine hospitality to everyone, which I think the Church so often minimizes as there was so much diversity behind what Jesus did."

"For me, diversity and inclusion run the gamut of life experiences, as it's not only for those identifying as LGBTQ+ but also means being a church where you feel welcome from cradle to grave and everything in between," Art says. "Even if faith comes hard to you, we recognize that most of us have doubts at times or even frequently." While no person or church will do this perfectly, Art wants his congregation to be a safe space where anyone and everyone can be fully themselves, heal from past trauma and be together in a place that creates a better community of faith for everyone and Williamsburg.









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LINDA PALMER



A Champion

By Lillian Stevens

In a town rich with volunteer opportunities, there are many professionals willing to share their time and talents.

"I'm doing a job that I love," Linda Palmer says. "One that is very real. I work with children and families who are in the court system due to abuse or neglect. I'm getting to know people while also helping them, and that feels really rewarding."

Linda volunteers at Colonial CASA, Court Appointed Special Advocates, where her role is exactly what the organization's title suggests: she serves as an advocate for children.

"Volunteers are trained and supervised before being assigned to a family," she says. "As advocates, we are the voice of the child in the courtroom. The court appoints each child an attorney, or guardian ad litem, who watches over the child's legal rights. I'm more likely to be the one thinking about whether they have a coat to wear to school."

With friend and colleague Tracy Gharbo, Linda also co-authored a book geared toward youth experiencing foster care.

At CASA, Linda and Tracy's first priority is to get to know the families to which they are assigned and get an inside view. Hers is not an adversarial role.

"We might talk to teachers, neighbors or family friends," she says. "We are there to help support the child. We take notes on every interview and interaction. Then, before a family goes to court, we write a report of our recommendations for the judge that offers our bird's-eye view. This includes things that are working well as well as areas where things could be going better. If the child had opinions or perspectives, we include that



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in our report. From there, the judge makes his or her decision."

While Linda does go to court, it's to show support for the family. She does not have to tes-

Foster care is a system in which a minor is placed into a state-certified private or group home. For those harboring a perception that children in foster care situations come from poverty-stricken households, Linda wants to dispel that myth.

"We are involved with diverse demographics," she says. "It really runs the gamut; our clients come from a variety of ages and financial circumstances. Families are families, and their dynamics are complicated no matter what their backgrounds are or how perfect things might look from the outside."

With friend and colleague Tracy Gharbo, Linda also co-authored a book geared toward youth who are experiencing foster care. Linda and Tracy's book, is entitled Reshuffled: Real Stories of Hope and Resilience from Foster Care. The book is intended to encourage young people growing up in foster care settings but the stories it contains would resonate with just about any audience.

"The book contains stories from 22 contributors," Linda says. "We have a collection of stories told by people who survived difficult challenges, representing so many different corners of culture. They are such powerful stories. In every story we learn how they came to foster care and what they experienced and give them the chance to impart coping skills that helped them."

Reshuffled came about through sheer serendipity. "CASA employees and volunteers are required to complete continuing education hours," Linda says. "One evening, Tracy and I were headed to William & Mary to hear a speaker."

The speaker was Jelani Freeman, a prominent attorney in Washington, D.C. and former foster youth. He told his story about growing up and getting in trouble.

"He said he found himself on a downward trajectory," Linda says. "But he also told us that he'd found a book that really spoke to him and somehow inspired [him]."

After Mr. Freeman's presentation, Linda and Tracy approached him, suggesting that he pen his story in a book for foster youth who might find encouragement for their futures. Mr. Freeman didn't have the bandwidth to write a book, but he did offer his story as the first chapter of the book Linda and Tracy ultimately put together.

"We felt compelled to put stories like his out there because we felt we had a responsibility to encourage the youth," Linda says.

The two approached their colleagues at Colonial CASA about their idea. "They were very supportive," Linda says. "So, they made the entre for us to talk to the State CASA coordinator for the Commonwealth of Virginia, Melissa O'Neill, who was willing to meet with us. She was so gracious, and actually introduced us to our first interview, Terry Morris, an honest-togoodness rocket scientist at NASA in Hamp-

Dr. Morris' story is hard to imagine. Not only did he come from an abusive home, at the age of 13 his mother drove him from their home in Chicago to Tupelo, Mississippi where she left him alone on a street corner. After some time of living in barns and eating from dumpsters, he wound up in the foster care system there.

Other stories come from a wide variety of

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people and places, including one from a teacher who grew up in a monastery and refugee camp. Asein Ta teaches fifth grade in Richmond. He was born and raised in Burma and mostly grew up in a Buddhist monastery. When both parents died, he was taken to a refugee camp before finally being sent to California, then Virginia. He learned English while staying with his first foster family, ultimately graduating from VCU.

Other stories hail from attorneys, artists and even a state legislator.

Delegate David Reid is a retired U.S. Navy Commander who also serves as the Democratic Representative to the Virginia House of Delegates. At the age of 10, his father took him to the Methodist Children's Home in Richmond. Eventually, he was placed with a foster family. When his foster-turned-adoptive dad took a job in Oklahoma, the family moved there where he flourished and graduated from college.

After the death of her father, Utah native Tylar Larsen moved to Poquoson to live with her aunt when her mother turned to drugs. While in high school, Tylar attended a Young Life event and met a counselor who would later not only become a mentor but adopt her. Today, Ty-

lar works as a photographer and pays it forward by guiding and mentoring other high schoolers as a Young Life leader.

The stories, all of which emerged because "someone knew someone who knew someone," are presented in such a way that they preserve the authentic voices of those who tell them. "It was the most inspiring and gratifying thing we've ever done," Linda says.

Every contributor to Reshuffled would agree that their journeys shaped the people they are today. There is a common thread to all these stories. Nearly every person found a mentor along

"Everyone needs someone in their corner," Linda says. "That someone might be a teacher or a coach, or even a neighbor. It's not necessarily a formal arrangement, maybe just someone going out of their way or concern and support for those who for one reason or another are struggling."

Linda grew up in Norfolk. After receiving her undergraduate degree from William & Mary, she earned a Master's Degree in Educational Counseling from the University of Virginia, effectively launching her career as a school teacher in Virginia Beach and Norfolk. Her husband Butch, whom she met in college, is also from Virginia Beach. They moved to Williamsburg in the early 1990s. Eventually, Linda transitioned from teaching to keeping the books for their construction company, which allowed a flexible life as a young mother.

"Life happens," she says with a laugh. "And you find yourself doing what's most useful for your family. So, for many years, I kept the books and did lots of volunteer jobs."

In order to be a more diverse and understanding people, Linda believes it's important to understand the challenges that youth in foster care are facing. "That doesn't mean you have to become a foster parent, but you can certainly help out in some capacity, maybe show interest and encouragement."

For her part, Linda Palmer will continue lending her time and talents to Colonial CASA. "I really and truly feel such a rush working with resilient people who face obstacles and overcome them." NDN

Reshuffled will be available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble and wherever books are sold. Sales proceeds will benefit Colonial CASA.



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LAVINIA BOLLINGER



At this time of year, many families are getting ready to send their children off to college. Some students will attend locally, some will attend out of state, and some, like Lavinia Bollinger, will get on a plane and go to another country to attend college.

Born in Malaysia, Lavinia came from a family where education was extremely important. "We come from a very nomadic family, so edu-

cation overseas was not something foreign," she says. "But for my parents, it was pretty incredible what they did because it was for four daughters."

Her father was a high school principal and her mother taught literature. "My dad was very farsighted in the sense of how things needed to be for his daughters in comparison to a lot of other people," she says. "One of the sad things I think that they did realize was that they had to send their children overseas. The reality of us coming back wouldn't be strong but being the parents they were, they wanted the best for their children."

Lavinia says that this choice her parents made deeply influenced her and her sisters. "We gained so much and then we went all over the world. My oldest sister went to George Wash-









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ington, I went to Minnesota, my second sister went to Leeds. The oldest got a degree in journalism, I got a degree in psychology, my second sister is a medical doctor, and the baby went to Australia and did her master's at Notre Dame for Sacred Music."

Today, the sisters still live in various locations throughout the world, but they manage to talk with each other and stay in touch. "My father passed away about 20 years ago," she says. That loss was difficult for the entire family. "That was hard because he definitely was a Goliath in our life. My mother is still around. She's incredible." Lavinia notes that raising four forward-thinking daughters in Malaysia must have been a bit of a challenge for their parents, but they did an amazing job, and she is grateful for all they gave her. "Growing up in Malaysia was a bit of a challenge, and they knew we would do better in the West."

When Lavinia came to the United States to attend college, she attended school in Minnesota. The physical difference between the two places, especially the weather, was a shock to her system. "I'd never seen snow in my life, so I was determined to go where there was snow." The one thing nobody had told her, however, was that it wasn't just a little snow. It snowed a lot and it snowed for eight months out of the year. "I loved it," she says with enthusiasm. "Minnesota has a very special place in my heart, it's beautiful."

When she arrived at her new home, she made friends with other people who were Malaysian. Her new friends convinced her to cross the border into Canada to visit. "They drove me out in a blizzard so that was really quite the shock."

The other cultural difference that Lavinia had to adjust to was the difference in food. Not simply the different types of food, but the portions. "I remember my first meal was at a restaurant. They brought the food out to me, and I looked at my best friend and said, are you kidding me? This can feed three people, and she's like, Yeah, that's what we do." The one surprise for Lavinia, which was a good surprise, was the experience of eating tater tots, a food she had never had before moving to America.

The one point that Lavinia stresses repeatedly is the warm and embracing attitude of the people in Minnesota. "I think the Midwest was a great place to go from Malaysia," she says.

"We really came from a culture of a village to Minnesota, especially the town we were in." She says that the town was much like Williamsburg. "They were very motherly and kind and it was just arms open." People often asked her about her culture and heritage, which she was happy to talk about.

"Malaysia is a very diverse country, but the diversity is broad," she says. "Sometimes we think of diversity as just different cultures." But it's more than that, she says. Diversity occurs within cultures, and she was reminded of this when she lived in Minnesota. "You go there and you think, okay, everyone's Midwestern, but then you realize the diversity of the Polish group, and then the German group or the Swedish group." At that point, she realized how varied people are within their own groups, and how important it is to recognize that diversity extends throughout a demographic. This is crucial, she believes, because it helps to understand people better and to see that there are subgroups of people in every culture. "For me, I grew up understanding that breakdown in my culture, but to see that in the Western hemisphere was eye opening."

After all that snow, Lavinia decided to try a location that had more

warmth and sunshine, so she moved to Florida after college. "I did the college program at Disney World and from the college program I did my psychology internship at Disney, which was fantastic. It was a crazy dream come true because we grew up watching the wonderful world of Disney every Sunday in Malaysia. It's something you'd never dream you would do in another country."

After completing her internship, it was time to step into the world and get what she calls a "big girl job." With a degree in psychology, she chose to work at a place called the Center for Drug Free Living as a case manager. "That was a center for juvenile offenders, and it was definitely a great experience." It was while working there that she met the man who would become her husband. "He was a training officer." They married and had children, and Lavinia became stepmother to daughter Hannah. "She's my kid, too."

Lavinia and her family lived in Florida for a little over a decade before she received a job offer here in Virginia. Ready for a change, they came north and settled here. "We moved here in 2013 and never looked back." Today, Lavinia is a behavior analyst who works with children with disabilities. She loves her job and is glad they made the move to Williamsburg.

Many people, she says, can be confused about her heritage. "I think a lot of people get confused. You're Malaysian but you look Indian, but you can't be Malaysian because I have a friend who is Malaysian and he's Chinese. You can't be Malaysian because I have a Malaysian friend and she's Muslim. Malaysia is an incredible melting pot. You've got the Malays, who are the main culture, and they are predominantly Muslim. And then you've got the Chinese and the Indians as well."

Despite hailing from a family of nomads, Lavinia says that the one thing she misses greatly is spending the holiday season in Malaysia. "Christmas here is a very individualized family event. Back home, if there was Chinese New Year, the night before is spent with the family and the day of, it's an open house. So, all your other friends of different races and religions would come over for Chinese New Year with your family. We went from house to house, and then four months later it would be Hari Raya, which is after Ramadan. They fast at the festival of Ramadan, then there'll be open market for them to break fast. We'd all go to the open markets and break fast with Muslim friends, and then the day of they'll have open houses and the Christians and the Chinese and the Hindus and the Buddhists will celebrate and go from house to house, and the same thing at Christmas. So Christmas was always a great thing for us."

Lavinia Bollinger believes that when it comes to diversity, Williamsburg is definitely growing. "What I like about Williamsburg is that I don't hear the word tolerate, which makes me very happy. I have a problem with the word tolerate because you're putting up with, not accepting. I think it is important that diversity goes a little deeper in Williamsburg. I'd love to see us be brave about it when we talk diversity and invite other groups into our community. There's also a disparity of income that comes with diversity, and we have to be aware of that. Be open to that because otherwise it brings us to so many areas of microaggression that people don't understand. These different communities that come into your life bring so much to the table, bring so many services that you want to the table, but that also means they will exist within your area, within your community. So be brave."

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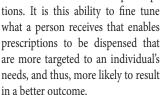
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AZZEDDINE OUELD BEN AZZOUZ A Home for His Faith By Ashley Smith

Azzeddine Oueld Ben Azzouz grew up in the bustling city of Marrakesh in the Kingdom of Morocco. Marrakesh, one of the oldest and largest cities in Africa, has become a key destination for European travelers, especially French tourists and celebrities. The city is both ancient and modern, with traditional markets called souks still thriving as well as high-speed rail. Both Arabic and French are spoken fluently by most of the population. It was in this diverse environment that Azzeddine came of age. He attended law school and loved learning. "I lived a normal life," he says. When presented with the oppor-

tunity to come to the United States, however, he did not hesitate. He considers it to be a great privilege both to have grown up in the beautiful city of Marrakesh and to live in Williamsburg, Virginia today.

Azzeddine began working as a chef at Milano's Italian Restaurant in 2000 but moved to Cracker Barrel Old Country Store and Restaurant when Milano's closed in 2015. He still works for them today.

In some ways, Williamsburg's mixture of colonial history and modern life is reminiscent of the similar dynamic in Marrakesh, though the

Moroccan city is much older. However, when he arrived in Williamsburg in 1998, it took some time to adjust to both the environmental and cultural differences. Certainly, the weather is less intense, and the area remains quieter than his former home. One of the most difficult obstacles to overcome, however, was access to a local mosque. For the Islamic community, the mosque is an important center not only for religious observances but also for education, connection to others and relationship building. Muslims also adhere to specific prayer times, and the lack of a mosque in Williamsburg at the





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time made it difficult to consistently practice their faith. Many drove as far away as Hampton or Richmond for services to fulfill their faith to Islam.

"I am proud to be a Muslim. As you know, Islam is the second largest religion and the fastest growing religion in the world. It shows Muslims how to live peacefully and equally an excellent life. It teaches us the manners, how to behave, and how to be worthwhile human beings. In Islam, there is a reason for everything," Azzedine says.

In 2011, the local Islamic community held prayer services in private homes, space at William & Mary, and occasionally, Williamsburg Regional Library. They rented rooms from public buildings to hold prayers. Due to the increase of the Muslim population in Williamsburg, they began to have a hard time finding a place with a suitable space. The nomadic nature of the group made it difficult to communicate the location each week. Utilizing public buildings presented another hardship as well. Often the library would be closed on Fridays due to holidays or the rooms would be rented by oth-

ers. Fridays are the most important day of the week in the Islamic faith because this is when Muslims gather for congregational prayer. Congregants are encouraged by leaders of the faith and then spend time in prayer together. These difficulties in securing a consistent place for worship inspired Azzeddine and other leaders to seek a more permanent location for the Muslim community in Williamsburg.

Though it took a few years, in 2017, they secured the current location at 1505 Richmond Road and the Mosque of Williamsburg officially opened. Azzedine and the board helped to structure the organization and worked on the completion of the mosque's facilities. Their primary mission is to make certain that the mosque is available to every Muslim who seeks a place of worship. In addition, the mosque provides a safe place for Muslims to practice their faith as well as to promote an environment that is humanitarian, educational, family-friendly, and most importantly, a welcoming place for all people who want to learn more about the Islamic faith so that they can foster a positive understanding of Islam in America. Mosque leaders want to have a positive impact on their congregation and on the wider Williamsburg community.

As the members of the mosque reach out to the local community and spreads the word about its availability, Azzedine says he draws inspiration from other Islamic centers across the United States. "They motivate and inspire me. They have full Islamic schools and organize events for the children of the Muslim community. I'm excited to one day have a bigger space for more social events, a school, and of course, prayers."

One of Azzeddine's personal goals is to see the Mosque grow into a larger facility that can support more community activities and eventually, a place to educate the children. While the current mosque will need more funds to grow, it is already providing for an underserved community in the Williamsburg area. The generation prior to this one had no place to practice their faith and the board of the Mosque of Williamsburg is determined to change that for future generations.

The Williamsburg community has welcomed the mosque, and those who practice Islam have



been especially thrilled to have a local place of worship. Not only has it provided a home for local congregants, but it has been a respite for travelers to attend their Friday prayers as well. The mosque offers weekly Friday prayers, daily prayers and Ramadan congregations. Though a school remains a dream for now, the mosque does offer weekend classes that teach the principles of Islam and the Arabic language to young people. The board organizes social gatherings throughout the year to celebrate Islamic holidays and holds celebrations for students attending the weekend classes.

Just as churches and synagogues across the world were affected by the coronavirus pandemic, so too was the mosque. Services had to be suspended for a period, and it was difficult for many to fulfill their duties to their faith during the height of the pandemic. As restrictions have eased, the mosque has resumed regular services with appropriate health and safety measures. The weekend classes, however, continued virtually so that students could continue to receive instruction and encouragement. In May, the mosque celebrated a successful year of learning

during the past year of virtual learning.

Azzeddine's faith is the driving force behind his work with the mosque but it also guides his daily life. "Being a Muslim, I am brought up to hold myself to the highest standards both in my personal and work life. Prophet Mohammed (Peace be Upon Him) is the most influencing figure in my life. Learning how he lived his life provides me with real life way to be a kind, diligent, and responsible human being. Throughout his life he set the example of an effective husband, brother, and leader."

It is this adherence to the high ideals of Islam that encourages Azzeddine Oueld Ben Azzouz to keep working toward a bright future for the Islamic community in Williamsburg. Though he is encouraged by the growth of the Muslim population, he wants to make certain that they have a faith home that can fully support them and their children. As the Mosque continues to grow, they hope to build relationship with other faith leaders in Williamsburg and become an integral part of the larger community in creating an even more diverse and welcoming place to live for all residents.

Next Door Neighbors

Publisher	Meredith Collins
EditorNarielle Living,	narielleliving@gmail.com
Copy Editor	Ginger White
Photographer	Lisa Cumming
Account Manager	Anne Conkling

Writers

Linda Landreth Phelps, Caroline Johnson , Brandy Centolanza, Alison Johnson, Susan Williamson, Lillian Stevens, Melanie Occhiuzzo, Morgan Barker, Cathy Welch, Christopher LaPointe, Michael Heslink, Gail Dillon, Lauren Plunkett, Ben Mackin, Laura Lane, Dawn Brotherton, Dayna Hutson, Harmony Hunter, Wheston Chancellor Grove, Ashley Smith, Kathleen Toomey Jabs, Page Brotherton, Kristine Hojnicki and Cynthia Fellows Rich, Cathy Sliwoski

Advertising Information Meredith Collins

(757) 560-3235 meredith@williamsburgneighbors.com www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com

Next Door Neighbors is a monthly, directmailed magazine serving the residents of the Williamsburg area.

Circulation: 43,700



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Serving as an Immigrant Veteran By Susan Williamson

Danitza (Dee) James grew up in Sonora, Mexico. She legally emigrated to Arizona in 1996 with her parents who were lifelong field laborers. As a green card holder, she attended high school and then one year of community college. But there was no money for the further schooling she desired. So, Dee took the route that many young green card holders take, and she enlisted in the U.S. Army.

"Army recruiters target young people from Latino and African American communities because we are looking for opportunities," she says. She does not regret her six and one-half years in the military, because it did lead to opportunity.

On September 11, 2001, Dee was just beginning basic training at Fort Jackson, South Caro-

lina. Until then, she had never been away from Mexico or Yuma, Arizona. She had no concept of the World Trade Center in New York City.

Citizenship and education were two of the benefits she was offered as a recruit. "The mission always comes first," she says. She was deployed to Iraq where she served in transportation and as a gunner for patrol escort missions. She had planned on applying for citizenship while stationed in Baghdad, but then was transferred to Germany and other posts. She became a citizen after she left the military.

Many people are not aware that non-citizens with green cards serve in the military, but in fact, Dee says there are 250,000 service members who are not citizens, yet give their time and sometimes their lives for the United States.

"There are people of Asian, South American and even Canadian nationalities serving," she says.

Murawski Photography

Dee is now serving as a member of the newly formed armed forces and veterans affairs sub-committee of the League of United Latin American Citizens, LULAC, which was founded in 1929. One of the concerns of the subcommittee is the number of deported veterans.

"Many veterans return with PTSD and other issues which sometimes result in substance abuse," Dee explains. "If they are convicted of a felony, they are deported after serving prison time even if their family is here."

Dee hopes that recent national issues with policing as well as local police/veteran interactions can be improved by additional education of law enforcement as to the military culture, es-

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pecially the mental health aspects of those returning from active duty. She feels that is particularly important in areas like Hampton Roads which have such a high population of active duty and retired military.

The league provides education through social media and tries to provide citizens with the names of their legislators, letter templates and other means of making their voices heard. The group advocates for basic human rights, health care, and safety. They try to educate immigrants on their rights and the resources available to them.

Since leaving the military, Dee has completed a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Southern California online. Her training is in macro social work, which pertains to affecting policy and community. She chose that school because of their excellent social work program. Although she is currently employed as a civilian at Langley in a position that is not related to social work, Dee hopes someday to work in public policy. She has completed Answering the Call, an experience which invites military veterans to consider further service to their country in policy and possibly in politics.

Dee's graduate social work class has begun a project to assist deported veterans. Members of this year's and last year's classes are involved in setting up tele-health services for both deported veterans and their families through a shelter for deported veterans located in Mexico near the California border and known as The Bunker. The shelter residents are provided with iPads and the recent graduates volunteer to provide group

Dee met her husband, Jade, while serving in Germany. Jade grew up in Aberdeen, North Carolina and is a veteran of four tours in Iraq. As a result, he suffers from a traumatic brain injury. The couple settled in Williamsburg in 2010, liking the safe, welcoming community, willing to help each other, as well as the culture and history of the area. They enjoy living in the Stonehouse neighborhood.

"Williamsburg is very military friendly," Dee says. She belongs to a veteran's running group and says that local businesses are always welcoming them to use their facilities as a meet-up location. She says her stress relief is running on the Yorktown Battlefield.

Dee and Jade are movie buffs but had to curtail that activity to home movies when the pandemic hit. Since they were often separated during deployments, the couple cherishes their time together, just hanging out at home and walking their dogs, two adopted Golden Retrievers that the couple initially fostered. The younger dog, Riley, was provided service animal training by an anonymous donor and assists with Dee's PTSD. The dog can detect Dee's migraines and helps when she is sleepwalking or suffering from nightmares. "The trainer said this dog will jump through fire for you, but only for you." She agrees with this assessment. "When my husband asks the dog to do something, the dog just looks at him." The older dog was ten years old, covered in fleas and missing teeth when they adopted him. But five years later, he is happy-go-lucky and still with the family.

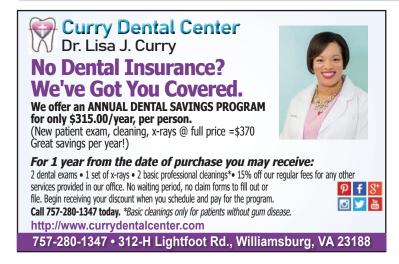
Danitza James remains proud of her service and grateful for the opportunities it provided. But she is very aware of the difficulties both veterans and immigrants face. "Yes, there are immigrants who are criminals and come here for the wrong reasons," she says. But she wants people to be aware of the many immigrant veterans, the service they have provided and their struggles, both within and after military service. NDN

MIRANDA PRESSEY SADLER

Loving Every Day

By Narielle Living

Local resident Miranda Pressey Sadler was born and raised in this area. She describes her childhood as being happy. "I would say I had a good childhood," she says. "My dad was the worker in the family and mom stayed home and raised us." Miranda says that she had six siblings, and her mother started working outside the home for Colonial Williamsburg when they were all a bit older. "I didn't really want for much," she says. "I didn't get what I wanted, I







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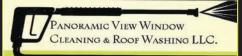
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Lisa Youngers





got what I needed. I had a pretty good child-hood."

When she was younger, Miranda would not have guessed that she would spend a lifetime in the town she grew up in. "I was like most young girls. I had a dream of living in a big city and living in this big apartment with a nice job and having everything in my house in white, even down to my white dog. Oh, yeah, I was a Harlequin romance reader," she says with a laugh.

Initially, Miranda started college with the intention of becoming a teacher. But after a short period of time, she realized that was not a good career fit for her. "I came home and I worked for a little while, then I went to nursing school and became an LPN." Unfortunately, in 1998 Miranda injured herself while working, and she had to retire after that.

"It was a big adjustment because I had to get used to not working," she says. She remembers always wanting to be a stay-at-home mom, but when the time came for her to stop working, her two children, a son and a daughter, were already old enough to take care of themselves. Miranda notes that there have been a lot of changes in this area since she was young, including more houses and commercial real estate. "I grew up on Iron Mountain Road, where New Town is right now. That was all woods when I was growing up." She remembers being allowed to go out to Casey field and pick pecans from the pecan trees that grew there. "We were allowed to go pick them. They would fall off the tree and nobody was picking them anyway."

Of course, she says, things were different when her children were growing up. "I would like to say that they see things a lot differently. They look at things a lot more different than I did as a child." Miranda says that when she was young, she was taught not to worry about adult issues. Today, she notes, children learn what is going on more quickly and are somewhat more involved in family decisions. "Even though you don't tell them everything, you do tell them things going on in your family."

Today, Miranda has five grandchildren, four who live in the area. "My daughter, her husband and their four children are here. My son's daughter lives in Delaware."

When commenting on the topic of diversity in our community, Miranda says that she doesn't often think of the different races in this area. "When I was growing up, my mom worked in people's homes. She did it for a little while, and the people that she worked for made sure that her children were exposed to what their children were exposed to. So, when they had summer camp, we went to summer camp, because one of the families she worked for made sure we went to summer camp." She says she knew of the disparities that existed and she was aware of the simmering tensions, but for her, life was a bit more relaxed.

When Miranda attended school, the issue of desegregation was occurring. "When schools integrated, it didn't bother me because I had already been exposed to being around other races," she says. "I became fast friends with a lot of the school students that I was with, not only that but some of the students that I went to camp with were some of the students that came to the school that I was in, so I remem-

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bered them."

When schools were desegregating, Miranda and her siblings had different experiences. "It was good for me but my second oldest brother, he integrated at James Blair during his senior year. He had a hard time dealing with it." Many students did, she says, because they were asked to transfer during their final year of school and leave everything they knew. "They were at Berkeley, and Berkeley was all black. His last year in school, the schools totally integrated and a lot of the students, a lot of the black students, didn't like it. They wanted to get Berkeley on their diplomas, but they ended up coming to James Blair." Today, James Blair is a middle school, but it first opened as a high school in 1955.

Today, Miranda says, she believes the issue of diversity has gotten worse. "We still see things as black and white, and it's hard when you're trying to raise your children, trying to raise my grandchildren, to accept anybody you look at as just a person. You have to look at their heart. I was always taught to look at the person's heart,

don't judge the color of their skin. Once you know a person's heart, you know whether they are real or not, you can tell. So that was what I instilled in my grandchildren and my two children when they were growing up, and we were told the same thing as kids when we were growing up."

Miranda says when she was younger, she would often play with kids of different races. Her children's experience was somewhat different, but they learned from their mother to accept people for who they are and not judge. Her daughter, who went on to continue her education after high school, now has her own business. She is part of a networking group where she meets with other business owners weekly. "It's a variety of businesses that get together, and when she goes there, she's the only black person in the group but it doesn't bother her because she's accepted for who she is. She always said, don't support me because I'm black, support me because you need me. That's her motto."

Her son, who wanted to play football in high school, is known as Big Earl. Unfortunately, medical issues prevented him from playing despite his size and desire. "Sports wasn't his thing when he was in school, but he had a lot of friends," she says. "A lot of people still know him and they say, oh you're big Earl's mama."

Today, Miranda spends her time with her children and grandchildren. Her husband, Alonza, died nine years ago from cancer, and her voice has a small hitch when she talks about him. "He was my best friend. I took care of him until he died." Miranda is a natural caregiver, and she also cared for both her mother and father prior to their deaths.

Miranda Pressey Sadler would like to say one thing to our community: "Live every day as if it's your last day, because we never know when God is going to call us home. Love everybody, be kind to people. Be caring and kind and loving, because you never know. The next day is not promised to you, and you have to live every second like it's your last. When people ask me what has God done for you today, I say he has blessed me my entire life because without him, I can't do anything." NDN







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By Narielle Living

For people who have lived in this part of the world their entire lives, they know the difference between a "come here" and a "been here." A "come here" is a person who recently moved to the area. Diane Koun might not be a native, but she says that term no longer applies to her. "I was born and raised in New York City where I met my husband who was doing his residency there. We moved to Virginia a little over 50 years ago, so I'm no longer a 'come here.'"

At that time, Diane worked for the world-renowned advertising agency, Young and Rubicam. "That was a lot of fun," she says. "I wasn't a high-powered executive. I was right out of college. But it was an exciting place to be. I worked on the General Foods account on Jell-O pudding." When her then-boyfriend was offered a job in Virginia and asked her to marry him, she said 'yes' and moved south.

Because the advertising world had been based in New York City at that time, when Diane relocated to this area there were no jobs in that field available. "I ended up teaching the fourth grade for a semester," she says. "We were married in September, moved down here at the end of September, and I started teaching in the beginning of January. I taught for six months and got pregnant during that time, so my teaching career was short-lived."

Diane became a stay-at-home mom with her two daughters, who are now grown and currently live in Richmond. "I have five wonderful grandchildren."

Being a stay-at-home mom did not mean Diane didn't work. Instead, she did a fair amount of volunteer work. "I was president of the Junior League of Hampton Roads and had done a lot of volunteer work there, and I became president of the Hampton Roads Garden Club." In 1976, she and her husband decided to open a retail establishment. "We opened The Silver Vault in Merchants Square with another couple and then bought them out."

Obviously, the store carried a good amount of silver items, such as tabletop antique silver and silver jewelry. "As the years went on, I expanded into other tabletop things that were good for not just formal entertaining but informal entertaining as well." After 40 years of

running this store, her daughters began to remind her that it was time to retire. "They were right," she says. "It was a good time for me to stop, and so I closed the shop and retired."

Diane is a person who likes to remain active. "I'm not a person who sits very well. I like being busy, and so probably a little over a year after I had retired, Bruton Parish came to me and asked if I would be a consultant for them as they renovated their shop. The manager had left, and the ladies on the committee were going to Atlanta to do some buying for the newly renovated shop." She was happy to help out, and she had a good time helping them prepare everything for the opening. "Shortly after that, the rector called and asked if I would be willing to be the manager." Her initial reaction was that she'd already been there and done that, but when he made it clear it was a part time position, that changed things for her. "I was able to pick the person that I thought would be great as the assistant manager, and the rest is history. Four years later we're both still here, absolutely loving what we do."

The merchandise available at the Bruton Parish Gift Shop is varied. "We carry, of course, religious books and spiritual readings. We have religious medals; we have the Book of Common Prayer and we have Bibles. But in addition, we have greeting cards, ladies' accessories and some tabletop items. People just love the jewelry that we have." When they were able to reopen after the pandemic, they added gourmet food lines to their offerings. "We call them our southern specialty, and we have things like bourbon balls and pretzels and cookies and just wonderful things."

Like so many, one of the biggest challenges in her retail career occurred when the pandemic hit. "There was nothing to really prepare us. It was a challenge a day. We were closed from March 14 until June 1." Like many others, business was initially slow. "We watched our buying very carefully. But we have dramatically picked up. We are pretty close to, not exactly 2019 level, but very close."

Although they do not have a website, Bruton Parish Gift Shop does have a social media



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The world of retail is a great fit for Diane, and she absolutely loves it. Now, she says, she is able to do all the fun things in retail. When she owned her business, a lot of her time was spent with things like payroll, taxes, sales tax filings and general business issues. But in her role at Bruton Parish Gift Shop she doesn't have to worry about that.

"I get to do the buying. I get to do displays. I get to sell. At The Silver Vault, I had a wonderful sales staff. Here, the sales staff is totally volunteer, and I get to work with the most wonderful people in the world. They come here from all different parts of the country because a lot of them have retired here, and they bring with them the most wonderful life experiences. They are dedicated. They have a work ethic, they are reliable and they have great ideas. They're fabulous."

The pandemic hit not just their sales, however, but also their workforce. Although some of the volunteers have returned, others have not been able to. Diane says they are always looking to add volunteers to the roster.

One of the more interesting facets of the Bruton Parish Gift Ship is that all of the proceeds benefit outreach programs. "Our sales benefit local charities in the community. And in the 26 years we have been in business, we have donated over \$2.5 million. So we say it's guilt-free shopping."

The Bruton Parish Gift Shop shares their space with the Heritage Center, a small space which houses the history of Bruton Parish Church, established in 1674. "There used to be guided tours in the church every day, which we have not been able to do because of CO-VID. So, for people to be able to come into this little museum and see the history of the church has been wonderful."

When the Heritage Center was established, the gift shop lost a portion of their space, so Diane asked if they could expand into a hallway. The rector gave permission for the expansion. "This hallway is called St Mary's chapel hallway. There is a little chapel which is an

octagonal shaped extension of the hallway. And it is the most beautiful, peaceful spot for people to come and meditate." Diane says that sometimes this simple space has had a profound effect on her customers. "I had a customer one day, who was very open and said the last time she was here, before COVID, she was with her mother." The customer related that while they were visiting, her mother died, and this was the first time she had been back since that event.

Diane Koun always wants to provide an uplifting experience to her customers. She could see that this was a difficult trip for this customer, and she suggested that the woman spend some time in the small chapel. "I told her to sit. Clearly, it was a difficult trip for her, but I said, we have this lovely chapel, you might like to go in there. Sit down, say a little prayer for your mother. She came out in tears and said, thank you so much. You never know where a person is in their lives. We've had numerous people go in there, and I think they have found peace in there."







Several years ago, Dr. Carla Galusha moved to Williamsburg for a job at Eastern State Hospital. She is not from this area, but she loves her job in Williamsburg. "I actually kind of grew up all over. I worked at Central State Hospital for about six years and then I came here to Eastern and Williamsburg," she says. "When I started at Central State Hospital, I started as a member of their forensic evaluation team."

Today, Dr. Galusha supervises the clinical

services at Eastern State Hospital, which includes the psychologists, social workers, and psychosocial rehab department.

Dr. Galusha says that Eastern State Hospital offers a broad range of services to complement and enhance the mental health programs they offer. "We provide individual therapy as needed by our patients. We also provide group therapies, and those include psychotherapy groups focused primarily on the mental health needs of the patient but also may include some educational components. An example of that might be a group about life skills." In addition, they provide what Dr. Galusha refers to as the "standard kind of fare," such as anger management and anxiety management types of groups. "We also have a high number of folks who come to us through the jails in different capacities. Some come to us for a cycle of psychiatric care while they're in jail, and some come to us for what's called competency restoration." Competency restoration allows



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In addition to people seeking help for their illness, Dr. Galusha notes that Eastern State Hospital houses a population of people who have been acquitted of a crime. "They are not guilty by reason of insanity, which means that they were deemed to be insane at the time of their offense. So, they were sent to us rather than prison. They come to us and work their way through what's called the gradual release process." This process allows people to slowly begin to gain privileges based on assessment of risk and review by an internal and an external panel. But Dr. Galusha says it's not all work for the patients. "We have a number of leisure groups with activities like the fitness center and the gym. We have the music therapy groups which are extremely popular with our patients, because those are led by some really talented music therapists, and we have really enjoyable groups like arts and crafts." The goal, she says, is to provide groups that can focus on developing coping skills and treating the illness as holistically as possible.

Dr. Galusha's background began in a related field. "My background is actually in forensic psychology. I went to graduate school to specialize in that." She worked at a state hospital in Wyoming for an internship and later at the Wyoming State Penitentiary. "I also worked at the Patuxent Correctional Mental Health Center in Jessup, Maryland as their chief psychologist. Throughout my career I focused on that combination of chronic mental illness or serious mental illness, and people who are criminal justice involved."

With the trajectory of her career aimed at the criminal justice population, she focused on working with Eastern State Hospital. "The population here at Eastern has changed a great deal so that we have a very large forensic population as opposed to just a population of folks from the community that came in via civil commitment. I think I was attracted to Eastern because I had that background in both."

Dr. Galusha loves the dynamic environment of the hospital. "The thing that I like the most is how much things change from day to day. It's a really exciting place to work because there's always things going on. We're serving slightly over 300 patients, and new folks are coming in and people are leaving every day. It's always different."

But first and foremost, she loves helping people. "I think most people, myself included, go into helping professions because they want to think what they do matters and that people benefit as a result of the work that you do. The other piece is that I really enjoy working with this population. To see folks come in who are maybe struggling in all aspects of their life and see them blossom and grow, and recover, and then be able to be reunited with their families, or maybe get back to work and rediscover joy in their lives... that's a really positive, enjoyable aspect of my job."

People who work in a healing profession know the toll it can take, however, and they always have to remember self-care. During the pandemic, Dr. Galusha found a balance of self-care both at work and at home. "With the complications of the pandemic, this has been a strain for many healthcare workers. Some people really struggled." She notes that while many people were stuck working from home, for her staff

and herself it was the exact opposite. "Our patients were here and they needed us. We worked hard to stay open and continue to admit people."

While the threat of COVID loomed around them, Dr. Galusha and her staff found ways to support each other. "One of the things that we started early on was called 'coffee talk.' We literally brought in coffee and doughnuts and things like that and a group of us took turns running those meetings and discussions. It was an available place for staff to stop in in the morning and we even ran some in the afternoons and evenings because we have three different shifts."

The purpose of the coffee talks was to allow employees to have a space to discuss what they were experiencing during the pandemic. "All of us are multifaceted individuals," she says. "We all have our home life, our families that we're dealing with and our children who are struggling with virtual school and their distress and anxiety about being in some cases kind of stuck at home by themselves or isolated or not able to interact with peers. Many of us had loved ones who were in many ways not as fortunate as us, and it was a struggle to be here. We all had job security, but many people didn't."

One of the things that Dr. Galusha and her staff worked on that turned out to be a surprising stress reliever was creating masks. "In the early days, we made masks. We didn't have enough PPE to go around for everyone, so we created a mask-making group that consisted of staff and patients. We worked together in shifts and sewed masks." They ended up sewing thousands of masks, enough to equip every staff member and patient with at least two masks until they were able to procure paper masks.

Throughout the pandemic, Dr. Galusha focused on self-care for herself and her family by doing outdoor activities such as gardening and camping. "That was a great way for me to spend time with my family," she says. "We created a little outdoor area for ourselves because we like doing things like camping, and we set up what we called the hammock hangout. We did camp out in the backyard and found ways to exercise. Fortunately, my kids were able to still do some sports activities. That was an outlet for them."

Dr. Galusha wants the community to know that mental illness is not something to be feared. "There is so much stigma around mental illness and around individuals who suffer from mental illness and around whether that is something that can be managed successfully. And there's so much stigma around state psychiatric facilities and the types of things that go on here. We have a beautiful facility. We have a lot of positive, uplifting, wonderful things that go on here every single day and really talented, smart, caring staff who are dedicated to fostering recovery in the folks we serve, who are really people from our community. They're the same people that you go to church with, who may be serving your coffee at Starbucks. And there is a lot of hope, and we spend a lot of time trying to instill that hope and rebuilding the patients and fostering recovery for them so that they can go back out and really live very productive, successful lives. This isn't a scary, sad or horrible place. It absolutely is a wonderful place where we are helping people and people are getting better." NDN



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Renaissance Man

By Narielle Living

When asked what he does for a living, Kyle Willis answers with a fairly general, "Kind of everything!" and he is not wrong.

Realtor*, house flipper, roofer, husband, father and car collector, Kyle's zest for living life fully shines through in all he does. The interesting part of his multiple careers, though, is that

they all tie together.

Kyle's real estate career has begun to take shape in a way he has been aiming for. "I'm actually a team leader," he says. "I just launched my own [real estate] team. That had been something that had been a dream of mine for some time since getting involved in real estate, going on three years ago."

His house flipping business fits in neatly with his role as a Realtor,[®] and he sees that as simple contracting work. "Just basically functioning as a contractor. But then, in addition to that, I am a project manager for a roofing company."

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Kyle has not always been a Realtor®, but he has always been someone who truly enjoys working with people. "Everything I did prior to real estate was management. Retail management such as running Target stores. I was in purchasing for CarMax for some years ago. So management level stuff, but I've always enjoyed working with people in teams." Because of his love of working in a team setting, his current broker at Triumph Realty encouraged him to start one.

"My broker has been very supportive. Her goal is to have a branch on this side of the water because she's based out of Virginia Beach," he says. "My team is called the James River Team."

Kyle originally became interested in real estate because he had been somewhat successful at buying and selling houses. It started with the intention of simply working on his own investments, but soon friends and family began calling with questions and asking for help.

"I've turned into a real estate agent that does a lot of referral business."

In addition, Kyle has a friend who owns a

roofing business, and he often sent him referrals when his clients needed a roof. "I'd have a listing or a house that I was buying that would need a roof, and he said 'why don't you just come and work with us?' So I've gone ahead and gotten licensed to do that, too. All these things kind of mesh well together."

The question on many people's minds today is the state of the real estate market. While homes have been selling quickly in this seller's market, Kyle notes there are very specific reasons for this.

"It's still crazy," he says. "I'm getting ready to list an equestrian property. It's five acres with a stable. Very nice. So very unique properties, sort of lower end properties and everything in the middle, it doesn't matter what you have, there's just so little inventory out there that it's going to sell fast."

People are often worried about a housing market crash akin to the 2008 debacle, he says, but this is simply not the same situation. "I think there's a misconception that we're sort of in the same situation as we were in 2008."

The issue then, he says, was that banks were giving money to people they should not have and then they couldn't pay their mortgage. Now, he says, you have to be really well qualified to receive a mortgage. "The issue is just that there's no inventory, and I think that was spurred by COVID. People didn't want people in their houses."

He speculates that perhaps by this fall the inventory might increase and bring some balance. "A lot of restrictions that have prevented banks from evicting people and foreclosing and that kind of listing is going to come on the market."

Real estate is Kyle's passion, and the roofing work he does fits in well with the greater goal of real estate. Very often people dread having a new roof put on, he says. He is quick to reassure them that it will be a fast and easy process and he will ensure it is painless.

"My goal is always to give people a great experience no matter what we're doing and then if someone buys a house and ultimately needs a roof or if someone puts on a roof and ultimately wants to buy or sell a house, that works



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really well."

When he is not working, Kyle is very interested in old cars. "I've got a number of old European cars. My favorite and most recent acquisition is a 72 Rolls Royce Corniche convertible, and has 12,000 original miles on it. I found that through a contact that I have in Pennsylvania who was involved with the estate of the original owner. So I flew up there and looked at it this past October, and it took us a few months to come to terms with everything, because it had not been driven since 1991. It had been in the garage, just kind of hanging out. I had always wanted that car, and the interior is red. White and red is my favorite color combination, and they didn't make many. I bought it, had it shipped back and it arrived the week of Christmas this past year."

While he waited up all night for the delivery of his car, his wife, Nicole, had a different reaction. "She came out the next morning to see it, and all she had to say was, 'Well, it's big.' Profoundly unimpressed," he says with a laugh.

Kyle and Nicole met in college when he

attended Christopher Newport University (CNU) and have been married for 11 years. "She's wonderful," he says. "We met at CNU the first week we were freshmen. We've been together now 16 years, married for 11 in September. We have a four-year-old daughter who is my favorite person."

"It's good to be self-employed because I do a little bit of a lot of things all the time. And it's much more flexible than working in an office or something like that because I can structure my day so that I can do what I need to do but also have time to mentor the agents who are part of my team."

Despite having so many things on his plate, Kyle recently decided to add the role of volunteer to his list. "I wanted to get involved with Meals on Wheels," he says. "I've got some friends who do that. So I'll be starting that next month. But the good thing about my schedule is that I can schedule what I need to do around what I want to do."

The ability to control his schedule works well since his wife, a nurse who works at Virginia

Commonwealth University, works three days a week.

"With our daughter being four, I want to be around. It's such an important time to be involved."

Kyle is originally from Suffolk, and he and Nicole chose Williamsburg to settle because they both love it here. "We initially came to Williamsburg because it's a beautiful area and I love the history of it. In our opinion at that time, it was going to be a great place to start a family. When we moved there in 2015, we didn't have our daughter yet. It's just a great area, and it's beautiful. I can get to Richmond or I can get to Norfolk or Virginia Beach. Its proximity to everything is nice. We love Williamsburg and have not regretted that decision at all."

The one thing that can be said about Kyle is that he has a multitude of interests and lives a multi-faceted life. "I love a lot of different things, and I always try to bring my personality into every interaction that I have, whether it's business or personal or social."





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