

Chantilly CONNECTION

Fair Oaks ♦ Fair Lakes

WELLBEING

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'It was a Brutal, Unprovoked Attack'

Man convicted of killing clerk at Franklin Farm Sunoco.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Born in Nepal, Resham Bajgain came to America for a better life for himself, his wife and their young daughter. They settled in Centreville, and Bajgain worked full time at Wegmans and part time at the Franklin Farm Sunoco Station.

He was working at the Sunoco in the early morning hours of July 4, 2018 when a teenager destroyed his dreams and ended his life. Last week, in Fairfax County Circuit Court, a jury convicted Mohamed Abdullahi of first-degree murder and recommended he spend 60 years in prison.

"It was a brutal, unprovoked attack," said Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Mark Sullivan. "This defendant willfully, deliberately, maliciously and premeditatedly strangled and beat the victim until he was dead."

Police responding to what they thought was a robbery saw Abdullahi – who matched the suspect's description – in the parking lot and arrested him. They also found Bajgain's lifeless body on the floor, behind the counter. Yet instead of being remorseful, said Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Ryan Bredemeier, Abdullahi was proud of what he'd done.

"When told he was being charged with murder, he said, 'Just murder, huh?'" said Bredemeier. "And when police tell him they don't know the victim's name, he said, 'Of course you can't identify him, his face is smashed in.' He then bragged, 'Imagine being me, right now – just 19 and already caught a body.'" And during Abdullahi's trial, police Officer Richard Boaz said he heard him say these things.

THE ENTIRE CRIME was caught on the Sunoco convenience store's surveillance camera, and the jury watched it. Police officers and others also testified in court. A customer, Stephen Briscoe, entered the store during the incident, and Abdullahi ordered him out and then followed him outside and tried unsuccessfully to borrow his phone. Abdullahi also tried to snatch another person's phone through his car window before returning inside. That's when Briscoe called 911, and officers arrived within three minutes.

Police Officer Andrew McPherson testified that Abdullahi wouldn't stop running and get on the ground when he told him to, so Officer Aaron Ciarrochi pepper-sprayed him. Officer Nathan Updike said Abdullahi shouted racial slurs at them and charged at Ciarrochi before being taken into custody.

Then K9 Officer J. Kevin Clarke went inside the store to talk to the clerk to see if a crime had occurred. "There was merchandise strewn about and blood in several locations," he said. "The clerk [Bajgain] was tucked up under the counter; I observed no vital signs."

Also responding was fire Capt. John Haywood, a paramedic. He said Bajgain, 40, had "a head injury with bleeding and a skull deformity, plus face lacerations. He was confirmed dead at 1:38 a.m."

Meanwhile, patrol Officer Erik Davis checked the



Abdullahi



Resham Bajgain, the victim

"Seven times [Abdullahi] said, 'You are going to die.' That's intent – and he made that promise come true."

— Mark Sullivan, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney

parking lot for weapons and discovered a fire extinguisher lying on the ground about 100 yards from the Sunoco. He testified that he saw a "red substance on it and a dent in it."

On the video, Abdullahi walks into the store and calmly tells Bajgain that his friend was just stabbed to death. "Please let me use your phone, or I'm going to take it," says Abdullahi. "I'm going to call my older brother. My best friend was just killed ... for something I did."

Bajgain dials the number Abdullahi tells him to, but the call doesn't go through, Abdullahi starts trashing the store, knocking merchandise around. He yells at Bajgain, "What is the first number to use this phone?" But Bajgain doesn't understand what he's saying, and an angry Abdullahi hits him, and continues the blows after the clerk falls to the ground.

"Tell me the first number, or you will die tonight," says Abdullahi. "I don't understand," says Bajgain. Then Briscoe enters and leaves, with Abdullahi following him out. Bajgain stands but is clearly dazed from the beating. Abdullahi returns and knocks him to the floor several more times, repeatedly screaming, "Use the phone," and threatening his life.

Bajgain never fights back, and Abdullahi strangles him until he falls again. Abdullahi then looks around, sees the fire extinguisher, grabs it and – while still holding onto his victim – swings it into Bajgain's head. He then leaves and the clerk takes his last breaths before dying.

Dr. Jocelyn Posthumus, the forensic pathologist/medical examiner who did the autopsy on Bajgain, said he'd sustained 23 blunt-force trauma injuries to his head, seven to his neck region, 10 to his extremities and three to his torso. Blood vessels in his eyes had hemorrhaged, and he'd inhaled blood. He also had fractures to his nasal bone, top of skull, base of brain and larynx (part of the windpipe).

"Below the Adam's apple, the bone was broken on both the right and left sides," she stated. "This indicates significant neck compression, indicative of a strangulation." She said the eye hemorrhages also resulted from strangulation, and his mouth also suffered severe injuries from a "significant impact."

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Man Found Guilty of First Degree Murder

Jury recommends 60-year prison sentence.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Wegmans."

In Virginia, after finding someone guilty of a crime, jurors get to recommend that person's sentence to the judge. So after convicting Mohamed Abdullahi of murdering Resham Bajgain, July 4, 2018, at the Franklin Farm Sunoco Station, the jury deliberated on the sentence it believed he should receive.

First, though, both the prosecution and defense called witnesses and again addressed the jurors. And since they'd already found Abdullahi guilty, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Ryan Bredemeier was now able to tell the jury about his prior convictions.

Loudoun County convicted Abdullahi of two counts of assault and battery, two counts of felony assault on a police officer, and one count each of destruction of property and felony malicious wounding, plus possession of alcohol by a minor.

Then Bredemeier asked Bajgain's cousin, Thakur Dhakal, to tell the jury about the victim and the impact his death had on his loved ones. Dhakal said they were born in the same town in Nepal, played together as children, attended school together and were friends. Bajgain also has three brothers.

After marrying and having a daughter, he worked in India to earn money to feed his family. He eventually came to America on a diversity visa, but it wasn't easy.

"His wife Dipa came to the U.S. in 2014 and lived with my wife and I for the next three years," said Dhakal. "But it took more than 2-1/2 years to get him here, so he stayed there and raised his daughter. She was 6 when he died."

Finally, in September 2017, Bajgain and his little girl arrived in the U.S., and joined his wife in Dhakal's home for a couple months. "We were each other's immediate family and best friends," said Dhakal. "I found a job for him and an apartment for them and they moved out. He worked one day a week at Sunoco and nights at

DHAKAL said Bajgain's death devastated his wife and child. "Dipa called me, crying, saying there was a detective at her door, telling her Resham was dead," said Dhakal. "Then she moved back to my house and is still there. Initially, she was so devastated, she couldn't do anything – she was crying all the time. My wife had to care for her, and I took care of her bills."

He also took time off from work to notify all the family members in Nepal and handle the funeral arrangements. Dipa was still unable to deal with daily life, so Dhakal also took her daughter to and from school. But he, too, feels the pain of Bajgain's loss, saying, "Even though he's not here, he lives in my heart – and it hurts."

Public defender Negin Farahmand then had Dr. Jonathan Deright, a clinical and forensic neuropsychologist, testify. He discussed the development of the adolescent brain, in general, but said he hadn't examined Abdullahi or his records. Deright said the brain's prefrontal cortex contains the personality, impulse-control and decision-making area that doesn't fully develop until the mid-20s. He also said being abused or being in a violent, negative environment could cause someone to have more bad brain connections than good ones.

Abdullahi's sister, Shamza, 22, said their family has seven siblings and moved to various cities with their parents, who were strict and physically punished her brother when he got into trouble. She said he has ADHD and didn't graduate high school and, while trying to get a job and his GED in early 2018, their parents kicked him out of their house.

Next, Luann Schutt testified that Abdullahi, a friend of her youngest son's, lived with them in Franklin Farm from February to July 4, 2018. Describing him as kind, funny, considerate and respectful, she said he was immature, but had no behavioral issues at her home. "At the time he committed this offense,

SEE JURY, PAGE 6

NEWS

Civil War History Told Through the Relics

Local historian is turning his collection and homegrown war lore into a book.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

When the Fairfax County Parkway was being built years ago, it was a gold mine for Jon Hickox and his metal detector. He started finding Civil War relics at the construction sites, learning what he could along the way. He is now an avid collector and local Civil War historian, in addition to being president at the Winery at Bull Run.

"I've learned by following in the footsteps of soldiers," he said. "Most of the stuff I've found was days away from being covered with asphalt," he said, pointing at a Union sword scabbard tip with ornate engravings. "I found that when they put in the Fairfax County Parkway," he said.

Hickox is now working with fellow Civil War historian Chuck Murrow on a book about local Civil War stories that are handed down from generation to generation. "We're trying to collect all those stories, which are the focus of this book," he said. "We just started on it." Chronologically, the book is starting in 1861, and moving forward to the First Manassas battle, the Winter Camps and the battle at Ox Hill. He predicts the book will take about two years to complete.

Hickox's office at the winery looks like a Civil War museum. Guns, artillery shells, bullets and belt buckles line the walls, some with written descriptions from his research. A trunk off to the side was Captain Hearn's who was with the 11th Mississippi, when war came and they had to leave in a hurry so it was left behind. Fast forward over 100 years, and the trunk was left behind in an attic. "His granddaughter was going to col-



Bullets and belt buckles are last witnesses to the Civil War action in Fairfax County.

PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/THE CONNECTION

lege in the 1950s and found it in the attic," he said. "I bought a lot that's been passed down," he said.

There are several musket rifles that he found in creeks that are still intact surprisingly, and a bugle from a site in Manassas where they were building a gas station.

Battlefield Fairfax

The capital of the Confederacy was in Richmond, and the Union operated out of Washington, D.C. so much of the war was fought in the 90 miles in between, he said. That included both battles at Manassas, Fredericksburg and many small battles in between so Fairfax County was frequented by both sides. "If you were going south, you had to go through Fairfax County," he said. In the winter, the soldiers on both sides just hunkered down for a few months. The mud and cold made transportation difficult, so



Some rifles are in better condition than others.

at some spots, there would be 10,000 men living in tents on a few acres, so these spots were littered with artifacts.



Jon Hickox has learned so much about the Civil War through the years he is now working on a book about the local stories from that time in history.

After the war, the farmers tried to get on with life, but the area was a mess. Many were trying to forget the horrors of war, so most of what they would find while plowing the fields was dumped in wells or "privy's" which were the outhouses at that time. "They wanted the stuff gone," he said.

Behind the Glass

In the Winery dining area, the walls are lined with glass display cases, adding a certain charm to the place. After all, a place can't be named "The Winery at Bull Run," without having the Civil War be a part of it. One relic tray was full of buttons, bullets and belt buckles they found when building one of the porches on the main room at the winery. There is an 1820 breast plate that "was found by George Mason University, we think it was used by the Alabama soldiers," he said.

He tracks all the different infantry divisions through the relics and learns what company was where throughout the campaign. The volunteer Maine Militia went through the area, and Hickox got a diary of one of the soldiers, and found out they used their initials, VMM, to also stand for Very Mean Men jokingly. With the belt buckles, soldiers collected them and reused them as functional trophies of war, Hickox said. Sometimes the Confederate soldiers "wore them upside down," as an anti-Union statement, he said of the US belt buckles.

The artillery shells Hickox found could be lethal too because of the explosives they contain. Even if they are found in a creek, the gunpowder may still be inside, so Hickox works with a man in Richmond to disarm them, doing all the drilling underwater to minimize the chance for sparks.

Not everyone is supportive of relic hunting and some believe they should just leave the stuff in the ground as a silent memorial, which Hickox agrees with in cases of national parkland or private land. A button won't survive forever in the ground though, and the lesson that could have been learned will be lost if it deteriorates completely. "Without these things being saved, we don't know who was there," said Hickox. Preserving these items is "rescuing history from construction sites," he said.

Ramp From Route 29 North To I-66 East In Centreville To Close Temporarily

The ramp from northbound Route 29 to I-66 East in Centreville will be closed for approximately one month beginning on or about Sept. 9. Traffic will be directed farther north to Route 28 North, stay to the right and follow signs to I-66 East. The closure is needed for construction of the new I-66 bridge over Route 29. The ramp from southbound Route 29 to I-66 East will remain open. Drivers should expect additional construction-related detours and traffic changes as work progresses at the Route 29/I-66 Interchange. Learn more about the I-66 Outside the Beltway Project and sign up for project updates and lane closure alerts at Transform66.org. On Twitter, follow VDOT Northern Virginia at @VaDOTNOVA.



Beginning on or about Sept. 9, the ramp from Route 29 North in Centreville to I-66 East will be closed for approximately one month. Traffic will be detoured farther north and will access I-66 East from Route 28 North.

WELLBEING



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PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTIAN ELLIOT

Yoga can lead to body awareness which can be a gateway to better self-awareness, advises Christian Elliot who is pictured here. September is National Yoga Month.

Get on the Mat, Boys

Raising awareness of the benefits of yoga for men during National Yoga Month.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Take quick scan of most yoga classes at East Meets West Yoga Studio in Vienna, Virginia and you're likely to see the mats being occupied primarily by women. That is changing, says studio owner Dawn Curtis. A recent Harris study shows that while women make up more than 70% of yoga practitioners, the number of men has increased from 4 million to ten million over the last 7 years. Practitioners are working to raise that number even higher this September - which is National Yoga Month - by emphasizing the health benefits for men. "We've seen an increase of men in yoga classes, but also an increase in the number of male yoga teachers and men who are coming into our yoga teacher training program," said Curtis. "We've had a lot of older men of the Boomer age taking classes because they're realizing that the exercise routine that they've been doing hasn't increased their flexibility." Because yoga classes often begin with an inward focus, those who practice it might be more inclined to develop body mindfulness off-the-mat. Exercising bodily-awareness during activities such as weight lifting can help prevent injury. "Breathing and body awareness can both be gateways to better self-awareness....," said Christian Elliot, owner, TRUE Whole Human. "Everything about modern convenience is geared toward making it easier for you to meet your basic needs with-

"Men don't always realize how stressed they until they start talking yoga classes."

**—Dawn Curtis,
East Meets West Yoga**

out moving," continued Elliot. "As we age, often what happens is we move less, thus becoming stiff." "Yoga makes you more flexible and your muscles and joints are more lubricated, you're less prone to injury," added Curtis. The practice's reputation as stress reliever is credited with the uptick in male students. "I've seen men use yoga as a stress management tool," said Curtis. "Men don't always realize how stressed they until they start talking yoga classes. Anytime you're doing yoga you're going to have stress management and relief. "Just one yoga class has proven to lower cortisol [stress] levels," added Luann Fulbright, Director, Dream Yoga Studio & Wellness Center in McLean. "I also have worked privately with many students on anxiety and panic disorders with success. This is a dominant reason folks come to yoga." Improvement in sleep is another asset to be gained from adding a yoga practice to one's life, says Curtis. "Yoga can lead to better sleep patterns because the mental stress that we have is held within the body," said Curtis. "Once that's released you can relax, fall asleep and stay asleep." An overall sense of well-being is subtle, but definite benefit of yoga, advises Curtis. "Yoga provides more balance, men typically musical their way through things which means over-activity," she said. "Yoga teaches them to slow down and not push their way through. I often hear people say, 'Yoga makes me a better person'. That's because they're less reactive because they aren't feeling stressed. You have to do it on a regular basis though to benefit from it."

Write

The Connection welcomes views on any public issue. Letters must be signed. Include home address and home and business numbers. Letters are routinely edited for libel, grammar, good taste and factual errors.
Send to:

Letters to the Editor
The Connection
1606 King St.
Alexandria VA 22314
editors@ConnectionNewspapers.com

CALENDAR

Submit entertainment announcements at www.connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar/. The deadline is noon on Friday. Photos/artwork encouraged.

ONGOING

Registration Open: NVSO. The Northern Virginia Senior Olympics features more than 60 events that challenge the mind as well as the body. New games this year: jigsaw puzzle and line-dancing. The games run Sept. 14-28. There will be no on-site registration. Visit www.nvso.us.

Chantilly Farmers Market. Thursdays, 3:30-7 p.m., through Nov. 11 in the parking lot at St. Veronica Catholic Church, 3460 Centreville Road, Chantilly. Visit www.community-foodworks.org/chantilly for more.

FRIDAY/SEPT. 6

Ready for School Storytime. 2-2:30 p.m. at the Chantilly Regional Library, 4000 Stringfellow Road, Chantilly. Early literacy storytime program for children ready to be on their own without caregivers or siblings. Ages 4-5. Call 703-502-3883, TTY 711, for more.

SATURDAY/SEPT. 7

Native Plant Festival and Sale. 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park's Cabell's Mill, 5235 Walney Road, Chantilly. Spend a day shopping, playing games, winning prizes and enjoying food at the "Native Plant Festival and Sale" at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park. Enjoy games and crafts for the kids and take a guided nature walk. Learn why to plant native plants and purchase native plants for your yard. Discover why invasive plants are a problem and participate in an "invasive pull" to win prizes. Take a wagon ride for \$2 and purchase lunch at one of the food trucks. Call 703-324-8730 or visit

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/eclawrence.

Fellowship Tea. 2-4 p.m. in Centreville Baptist Church's Fellowship Hall, 15100 Lee Highway, Centreville. Western Fairfax Christian Ministries will hold a Fellowship Tea with a three-course, gourmet spread and a program called "Why Girlfriends are Important." Raffle tickets available for purchase. Women of all ages are welcome. \$15/person or \$25 for two. Register at donatenow.networkforgood.org/wfcmttea. To volunteer to be a table host or for more information, contact Jennie Bush at jbush@wfcma.org.

SUNDAY/SEPT. 8

Early Railroad Tools Exhibit. 1-4 p.m. at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. The Fairfax Station Railroad Museum will have a special exhibit of early railroad tools. Come learn how these tools were used to build and maintain railroads in the 19th century. Ages 16 and older, \$4; 5-15, \$2; 4 and under, free. Visit www.fairfax-station.org or call 703-425-9225.

WEDNESDAY/SEPT. 11

Girls Who Code. 7-8:45 p.m. at the Chantilly Regional Library, 4000 Stringfellow Road, Chantilly. Come learn about coding and change the world. Okay to bring a laptop. Space is limited. Girls must register in person. Grades: 6-12. Call 703-502-3883, TTY 711, for more.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY/SEPT. 13-14

Kids Wish Kids Good Night. 7-8 p.m. at Frying Pan Farm Park, 2709 West Ox Road, Herndon. Put a new twist on the bedtime routine by



PHOTO BY MARY BIDINGER

Students from Westfield High School's Band, Chorus, and Orchestra prepare to head out for Tag Day, the music department's biggest fundraising event of the year.

Westfield Tag Day

Students from Band, Chorus, and Orchestra will be visiting neighborhoods and requesting donations to the WHS award-winning music program for the 2019-2020 school year. Saturday, Sept. 14, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. If students miss their neighbors on Tag Day, they will still gratefully accept donations made to: WHS Music Boosters and mailed to: Westfield High School Music Boosters, 4700 Stonecroft Blvd., Chantilly, VA 20151.

letting children wish a good night to the animals at Frying Pan Farm Park. Bring a flashlight or lantern for this twilight tour and learn how farm animals settle down for the night. For participants age 3-adult. \$10 per person, and children must be accompanied by a registered adult. Dress for the weather. Call 703-437-9101 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/frying-pan-park.

neighborhoods and requesting donations to the WHS award-winning music program for the 2019-2020 school year. If students miss their neighbors on Tag Day, they will still gratefully accept donations made to: WHS Music Boosters and mailed to: Westfield High School Music Boosters, 4700 Stonecroft Blvd., Chantilly, VA 20151.

SUNDAY/SEPT. 15

Bichon Bash. 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at Bull Run Regional Park, 7700 Bull Run Drive, Centreville. A fun-filled day of frolic to celebrate Bichons Frises and

SATURDAY/SEPT. 14

Westfield Tag Day. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Students from Band, Chorus, and Orchestra will be visiting

their humans. Featuring vendors and veterinary professionals. Funds raised help provide foster and vet care for Bichons that come into rescue. Rain or shine. \$20. Call 717-324-9076 or visit www.bichonbash.org/.

NTRAK Model Train Show at Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. 1-4 p.m. at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. The Northern Virginia NTRAK members will hold a N gauge Train Display. Ages 16 and older, \$4; 5-15, \$2; 4 and under, free. Visit www.fairfax-station.org or call 703-425-9225.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY/SEPT. 20-21

Kids Wish Kids Good Night. 7-8 p.m. at Frying Pan Farm Park, 2709 West Ox Road, Herndon. Put a new twist on the bedtime routine by letting children wish a good night to the animals at Frying Pan Farm Park. Bring a flashlight or lantern for this twilight tour and learn how farm animals settle down for the night. For participants age 3-adult. \$10 per person, and children must be accompanied by a registered adult. Dress for the weather. Call 703-437-9101 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/frying-pan-park.

FRIDAY-SUNDAY/SEPT. 20-22

Capital Home Show. Friday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. at the Dulles Expo Center, 4320 Chantilly Shopping Center, Chantilly. Brett Tutor, the carpenter on TLC's Trading Spaces, will headline with more than 250 companies exhibiting and showcasing the latest in home remodeling, renovation, décor and redesign. Visit www.capitalhomeshow.com for tickets.

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NEWS

Conviction in Sunoco Killing

FROM PAGE 2

Posthumus detailed the head lacerations and fractures, noting that the force of the blows to his brain "was so great that it caused the brain to shift and move inside the skull." Ultimately, she said, blunt-force trauma to the head and strangulation both caused Bajgain's death.

The jury also heard a recording of a phone call Abdullahi made to a friend from jail, three days later. In it, he complains he broke his hand while beating Bajgain and boasts that he wasn't even "turnt" – slang for drunk – when he did it.

The defense called a woman who'd let Abdullahi live with her family after his parents threw him out for previous legal troubles. She said she wouldn't let him in, a couple hours before the killing, because she smelled alcohol on him. But Officer McPherson then said he spent hours in close proximity to Abdullahi afterward and didn't smell any alcohol on him.

Before closing arguments, Judge Brett Kassabian told the jury of nine men and three women they could find the defendant not guilty, or guilty of first- or second-degree murder or voluntary manslaughter – and he explained the elements of each offense. A first-degree murder must be malicious, willful, deliberate and premeditated.

"[Abdullahi] picked up that fire extinguisher and swung it at the victim's head, unprovoked," said Sullivan. "This is the definition of 'malicious.' 'Willful, deliberate and premeditated' means a specific intent to kill adopted before the killing, for any length of time."

PLAYING THE VIDEO AGAIN, Sullivan told the jury, "Seven times [Abdullahi] said, 'You are going to die.' That's intent – and he made that promise come true." The prosecutor also noted how, at one point, Abdullahi went into the store's office, saw himself on the computer monitor and smashed it, hoping to cover up his crime.

"Mr. Bajgain was 109 pounds, and Abdullahi tossed him around like a ragdoll," said Sullivan. "[He] did nothing to provoke a reasonable person to act this way."

Public defender Robert Frank contended Abdullahi was under the influence of drugs or alcohol and, therefore, couldn't form intent. "He wasn't there to kill anyone," said Frank. "His emotions took over [and] he lost control. He saw Mr. Bajgain's inability to make the phone call as an affront."

But, countered Sullivan, "Is it reasonable to kill someone because they can't make a phone work fast enough for you – while getting beat?" For an intoxication defense, he said the perpetrator must be a "fall-down drunk, with no idea what's going on – and no one testified to that, at all. And in the jail call, [Abdullahi] told his friend, 'I wasn't even turnt' – meaning high or intoxicated – 'when I did it. I was just mad.'"

Furthermore, said Sullivan, "After he finds the fire extinguisher, he adjusts his grip so he can swing it at the victim's head as fast as he can – that's premeditation. [Abdullahi] wanted to kill him. Afterward, he didn't want to use the phone, anymore. I ask you to find him guilty of first-degree murder."

And after some three hours of deliberation, the jury did just that.

Jury Recommends 60-year Sentence

FROM PAGE 2

you'd provided him with a loving home?" asked Bredemeier. "Yes," she replied.

Judge Brett Kassabian told the jurors they could sentence Abdullahi to anywhere from 20 years to life in prison, plus a fine, too, if they desired. Then the attorneys spoke to them, one last time.

"You are the voice of the community, and you speak for them through your sentence," said Bredemeier. "[You decide] what the sentence should be for someone who heartlessly and senselessly beats a man to death over 15 minutes and then hits him with a fire extinguisher to the head."

Requesting life in prison, he said, "I'm aware of [Abdullahi's] young age and what the doctor said today. But with this defendant's history of attacking and harming someone, the question isn't if he'll hurt someone again, but when. He's now been convicted of eight offenses – and six were for crimes of violence."

Bredemeier also noted that, for four of those offenses, Abdullahi either received just 5-30 days in jail or a suspended juvenile-detention sentence.

"He gets breaks," said Bredemeier. "Then he stabs another teen; and on July 1, 2016, he's committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice. He comes out and gets a chance to get his GED and stop hurting people, but he can't."

On Jan. 4, 2018, Abdullahi was convicted of assault by mob and sent to adult jail for three months. "That was six months to the day before he brutally and viciously takes Mr. Bajgain's life," said Bredemeier. "Collectively, this tells us who he is and what he does, and his crimes ramp up until he kills. He chose not to stop; consequences mean nothing to him. He does what he wants and doesn't let anything stand in his way. When the victim is on the floor, gasping for breath, he stomps on his head. How much crueler could he be?"

Bredemeier said the four purposes of sentencing are punishment, rehabilitation, deterrence and incapacitation. He said Abdullahi deserves to be punished for terrorizing and killing Bajgain.

As for rehabilitation, he said teens make dumb mistakes, but this wasn't poor impulse control. "He beats and kills the victim be-

cause he wants to," said Bredemeier. "This is not how adolescents act – it's how this defendant acts. He can't be rehabilitated. He enjoys being cruel and is proud of what he did; he has zero remorse."

Furthermore, he said, "No amount of time you give him will deter him. It's already been tried, but it hasn't worked. His crimes escalated. Incapacitation is the only option to keep the community safe. He won't be stopped until somebody stops him."

"Mr. Bajgain came here for a better life, and his family was finally reunited for 10 months before this defendant violently and senselessly ripped him from his wife and daughter. [Abdullahi] killed him without a second thought and didn't care that he did it."

"Resham's little girl will grow up without her father. But in the jail call, [Abdullahi] tells his friend, 'I was on six news channels. Did you see me? I killed someone.' He's excited about it. The only way to keep this defendant from harming or killing another person is by sentencing him to life in prison."

SEE JURY, PAGE 7

Jury

FROM PAGE 6

THE DEFENSE asked for 30 years, but Bredemeier said the court system previously gave Abdullahi chances. “Is he going to defy all logic and do a complete turn-around?” asked Bredemeier. “No.”

After some four hours’ deliberation, the jury returned and recommended 60 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine. Sentencing is scheduled for Nov. 22. Afterward, outside the courtroom, Dhakal called the jury’s first-degree murder verdict “the most serious and appropriate choice. And the sentence makes us feel a little safer, knowing he’ll be in jail for the next 60 years.”

Pleased with the outcome, Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney Mark Sullivan said the jury “deliberated with thought and gave a sentence that both respected the victim and kept the community safe. This couldn’t have been done without the fast response of the police officers, who acted heroically – including Officers McPherson, Ciarrochi, Updike and Clarke – and Det. Needels, who brought this case together in a manner enabling us to effectively prosecute it.”

ROUNDUPS

Update Driver’s License to REAL ID

On Saturday, Sept. 7, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m., people may update their driver’s licenses with a REAL ID card at a DMV 2 Go event outside the Sully District Governmental Center, 4900 Stonecroft Blvd. in Chantilly. It’s a great way to skip the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) lines and get a REAL ID before they’re required in airports.

Beginning Oct. 1, 2020, Virginians will need a REAL ID compliant driver’s license or ID card, or another federally approved form of identification (such as a U.S. passport or some military IDs) to board domestic flights or enter secure, federal facilities. All applicants for a REAL ID compliant credential must apply in person and pay a \$10 surcharge, in addition to the standard renewal or replacement fees.

WFCM to Hold Fellowship Tea

Western Fairfax Christian Ministries will hold a Fellowship Tea on Saturday, Sept. 7, from 2-4 p.m., in Centreville Baptist Church’s Fellowship Hall, 15100 Lee Hwy. in Centreville. The registration fee includes a three-course, gourmet spread and a program called “Why Girlfriends are Important.” Raffle tickets for prizes will be sold.

Women of all ages are encouraged to attend. Register at <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/wfcmtea>. Cost is \$15/person or \$25 for two. (A full table of eight people is \$100). Proceeds from the tea support WFCM’s work preventing hunger and homelessness in western Fairfax County. To volunteer as a table host, or for more information, contact Jennie Bush at jbush@wfcmva.org.

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Something or Nothing



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As you can imagine – or read every week in this space, my health, especially considering that my stage IV non-small lung cancer is incurable/terminal, is top of mind. (If truth be told, it's middle of mind, bottom of mind and every other mind in between and all around.)

That being said – repeatedly, I am prone to exaggerate the significance of seemingly unrelated peculiarities and draw them into my cancer “centricity” without any facts to support them. Though I feel fine-ish, mostly, (the previous weeks’ columns “Barbasoul” and “Side Splitting But Not Very Funny” notwithstanding), there are a number of things in my life which aren’t doing as fine and have given me pause for this column.

First and foremost is Chino, one of our two diabetic cats (“The Diabetic Duo” as I call him and his brother, Biscuit) is now up to 14 units of insulin per day and is a shell of his former self, literally. His appetite remains good but he’s confined in the kitchen because he doesn’t seem particularly interested or aware of his litter box. His co-diagnosee Biscuit, has had the complete opposite reaction to his medicine. He’s down to two units a day and appears quite himself. He’s free to roam around and seems quite clear about the reason for the multiple litter boxes located throughout the house.

Unfortunately, Chino is slowly getting worse and despite following doctor’s orders and feeding him prescription food, nothing really seems to be stemming the tide.

The rest of the examples I’m about to give pale in comparison to Chino’s situation but in the aggregate, they represent a pattern that’s making me nervous.

My inherited model-year-2000 Honda Accord is most definitely showing its age and may very well be nearing the end of its useful life. I have given up trying to make the necessary repairs suggested by the multiple idiot lights illuminating my dashboard. As determined as I am to ignore them, the different sizes, shapes and colors of the various lights/symbols are drawing me ever closer to the wear and tear they represent. I fear the worst, as with Chino.

Now into a more mundane world, a world in which technology has ensnared us. What would we do without the various hand-held devices with which most of us are all too familiar? I’m getting regular messages that unless I act accordingly, I’m about to find out.

My museum-piece flip phone is dying. It won’t hold a battery charge for nearly as long as it used to. Either I’m speaking into it or I’m speaking at it because I only have one bar and I need to charge it. As a result, it’s become unreliable and a bit of a bother. If it had any legs, it would be on its last ones.

The battery-operated key fob for my car has recently advised me that it too is dying and, unless I make the necessary battery replacement, it will no longer start my car. Do I really need my key fob communicating with me? A metal key never bothered me with such trivialities and so long as I was inserting it into the car to which it was mated, I was usually able to reach my intended target – without any backtalk.

Finally, I’ve been receiving messages on my television that the remote control is unhappy and also needs a battery replacement and unless I respond, it too will fade into nothingness and I’ll be staring at a blank screen. I don’t mind a smart TV but I do object to one that persists in its demands.

All these elements, crucial in their own way, intersecting with my cancer life at the same time and all seemingly headed in the same direction: south.

I can ignore and compartmentalize some things, but I can’t ignore and compartmentalize all things. After all, as the old joke “punchlines:” I gave you lots of warnings.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

OPINION

Washington D.C. to Tokyo in Under Five Hours

BY EVA WILLIAMS-SIGUENZA

Not exactly, but this summer I felt as if I spent two weeks in Japan without even leaving the East coast.

This opportunity was High School Diplomats (HSD), which is a program hosted at Princeton University for 40 US and 40 Japanese students to exchange cultural knowledge and ideas. Using games, diplomatic discussions, activities, and even food, I gained a deeper understanding of not only another culture but also of myself and my place in the world. It's a chance to meet someone on the other side of the world that you would have never met otherwise.

My High School Diplomats experience began when my family and I hosted two Japanese students, Honatsu and Rina, for three days. We went shopping at Tysons Corner Mall, bought all the American snacks they could possibly fit in their luggage, and took a painting class. I immediately formed a tight bond with both of them and we learned about each other's cul-



Eva Williams-Siguenza and Honatsu Tanaka show off their star-spangled costumes.

tures along the way. I highly recommend anyone in Northern Virginia who applies to participate in Homestay Weekend, as it gave me a taste of what the rest of my summer would be like.

Two weeks later, we reunited at Princeton for the upcoming ten-day program. In those ten days, my mindset shifted to a more globally understanding one and I began to see both cultures in a new light. I am so grateful that I was

able to have an international experience without leaving the country. In this sense, High School Diplomats is truly unique. I met so many interesting people with whom I shared more similarities than differences. The High School Diplomats staff led us through several activities, such as a Bunka No Hi Culture and Earth Day festivals. I will never forget all the impromptu dance parties we had, the insightful diplomatic talks or the

Japanese language classes.

High School Diplomats is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. It's also one of the most challenging, which is why it's important to go in with an open mindset ready to absorb anything and everything. I can't thank HSD enough for helping me figure out who I am and for teaching me about true friendship even if it is 6000 miles away.

Sophomore and Junior students from all over the United States can apply starting Sept. 15 until Jan. 8 at www.highschooldiplomats.com and clicking the Application Information button at the bottom of the article. After the application deadline, selected students will be contacted for an interview as the second portion of the process. Contact the program director, Celine Zapolski, with any questions about the program at celinezapolski@highschooldiplomats.com.

Start planning today your opportunity to expand your horizons, have the experience of a lifetime, and make long-lasting friends.

Eva Williams-Siguenza lives in Chantilly and attends St. Paul VI Catholic High School in Fairfax City.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Letter to Friends and Neighbors

To te Editor:

I've written to you before and I didn't think I could do it again. You see, after fighting so hard, my sister lost her battle with ovarian cancer last year. I feel her loss every day. As hard as it is to talk about, I keep remembering something she said to me after she was diagnosed. She was shocked that two educated women (she was a physician) were so unaware of the risk of ovarian cancer. As we shared her story with friends and colleagues, we discovered that we weren't the only ones unaware of this killer. She kept telling me that

we had to warn everyone. While we fought to keep her alive, we worked hard to raise awareness and to make people comfortable talking about reproductive health and ovaries.

To honor a beautiful warrior who wanted to spare anyone else's family from the pain we have endured, I would like to share our story again as September is ovarian cancer awareness month.

Denise was one of the 85 percent of women who are diagnosed after the cancer has metastasized because the symptoms are so vague. There is no accurate screen-

ing or early detection test for ovarian cancer. Nothing done during our annual trips to the gynecologist is checking us for ovarian cancer. By the time Denise was diagnosed, the cancer had spread well beyond her abdomen. My sister was an athletic, very active person until she was told she had stage IV ovarian cancer. Most people don't realize that ovarian cancer is only the 11th most common cancer among women, but is the fifth leading cause of cancer death among women.

I am calling on all of you to help me honor Denise. Pay attention to

your own bodies and be aware of changes. Don't do what most of us do and ignore them as we rush about our busy lives. If you feel any of the following: bloating that is persistent; eating less and feeling fuller; abdominal pain; urinary symptoms; please be proactive, see your gynecologist, ask for a transvaginal ultrasound; a pelvic/rectal exam; and a CA-125 blood test.

Help me spread the word during September by telling all the women in your lives about the risk of ovarian cancer.

Laura Forte
Great Falls

Preserving Area's Equestrian Culture

To the Editor:

The Northwest suburbs of Washington DC hugging the Potomac River have always been known for being horse friendly. For many years, horses, horse properties and equestrian events were commonplace. Over the past decade, this equestrian culture has come under pressure as the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors continues to increase property taxes and approve higher density real estate development.

As new homeowners join the community, they are increasingly

less informed of this equestrian heritage and may question the need to have horse friendly parks, trails and road crossings. By no means have horses left Great Falls and boarding opportunities are in high demand. All the more reason to protect Turner Farm as an equestrian park and be thankful for events such as the one that took place this past weekend – the Summer Horse Trials, Combined Test, and Dressage Show. Not only does it represent one of the many horse shows at Turner Farm over the course of any given year, it

brings the equestrian community together and raises needed money for park maintenance. It also provides a wonderful opportunity for beginner and novice riders to participate in an organized event in a friendly and supportive environment. Now in its fifth year, riders and spectators alike look forward to the event that draws hundreds to Turner Farm from surrounding communities. This all volunteer event runs smoothly, including wonderful support from Great Falls Volunteer Fire and Rescue who are present maintaining a

watchful eye on horse and rider safety. Thank you to Kristin Parisot and Wendy Masemer for your vision and leadership. The equestrian community needs more passionate leaders such as yourself to ensure that our community never forgets why Turner Farm is here, that the park is well utilized by the equestrian community and why this community invests so greatly to ensure it is maintained and preserved for future generations.

Craig Parisot
Great Falls

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