

The Arlington Connection

Arlington native David M. Brown, a Navy Captain and flight surgeon, served as a mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia. Feb. 1, 2023, marks the 20th anniversary of the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster.

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PHOTO COURTESY NASA

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FEBRUARY 1-7, 2023

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FOOD INSECURITY

Eggstremely Bad News for Food Pantries

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

FILE PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE

It used to be that eggs were cheap protein. Not anymore according to Charles Meng, CEO of Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC), and Sally Diaz Wells, Social Justice and Outreach Minister of Our Lady Queen of Peace Church (OLQP). Meng says, “I have a challenge.”

In an interview for a local TV station a few days ago Meng pointed out that inflation is crippling families. “I am feeding 22 percent more families than at the same time last year.”

In AFAC’s monthly newsletter Meng said for the last six months the number of families coming to AFAC has increased by about 100 to 2,776 families the week of Jan. 9. This translates into 6,900 individuals which he says is higher than the pandemic. And everything costs more.

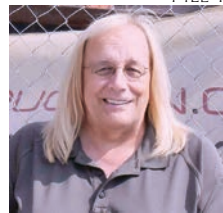
Part of the problem is the price of eggs which he has seen skyrocket due to inflation and to a bird flu outbreak. “The amount of money it takes to keep these shelves stocked with eggs ...” Meng says at the beginning of 2022 they were purchasing eggs at \$16.95 for a case of 15 dozen. “Last week we spent \$66.70 a case for the 180 cases needed each week for our families. At this rate what was an annual cost for eggs of \$125,000 will grow to over \$465,000 a year.”

Sally Diaz, Social Justice and Outreach Minister, Our Lady Queen of Peace says the OLQP weekly church pantry which serves about 600 families a week has seen egg prices double. “It has really become so difficult. It has become a strain for our small pantry.” She says OLQP runs a small pantry on Wednesdays that gives food to anyone who presents themselves with a need.

Egg prices are already on the rise according to the USDA Egg Market Report from a low of about \$1.40 per dozen in March 2022 to a national average of \$3.26 in January 2023. This is due not just to the normal inflation but compounded by avian flu spreading among many birds in the United States. In particular commercial layer chickens in Iowa, Maryland, South Dakota and Wisconsin have been affected. Iowa has 12 million endangered layer chickens, producing the most in the country. According to the Center for Disease Control, more than 57 million birds have been affected by the illness so far.

Meng points out that they have served 68,000 to date in the six months between July 1-December 31. “And we have a half year to go. So that means there might be 125,000 visits to us by July 2023.” He adds that it’s not just eggs; a half gallon of milk used to be \$1.36, and now it’s \$1.96—a 44 percent increase in six months. Chicken was 59 cents a pound; now it’s 95 cents a pound. “We need 2,700 half gallons of milk a week for our 2,700 families. It sounds like a small increase but when you multiply it, all of a sudden it becomes real dollars.”

In addition to costs going up, some benefits are going down. SNAP benefits will be



Charles Meng, CEO
Arlington Food
Assistance Center



Sally Diaz, Social
Justice and
Outreach Minister,
Our Lady Queen
of Peace



Cost for each case of eggs for AFAC up from \$16.95 to \$66.70 last week for 180 cases needed each week.

reduced when the supplemental emergency SNAP benefits put in place during Covid expire. During the Covid public health emergency many individuals receiving SNAP food assistance received temporary increased food benefits. These benefits expire in February which will result in 5,480 households or 9,285 individuals in Arlington losing the supplemental SNAP benefits.

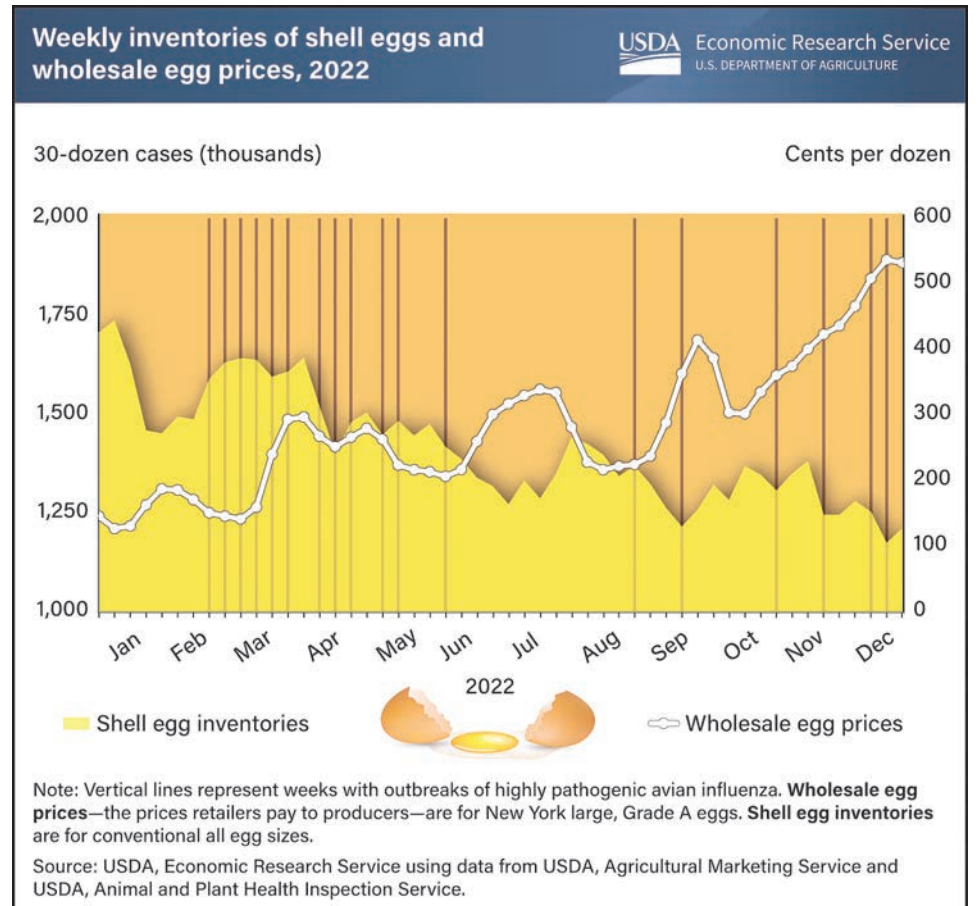
Stephanie Hopkins, Food Assistance Coordinator at the Department of Human Services, says senior citizens will suffer the greatest burden from this loss of supplemental benefits. “The minimum SNAP benefit, the amount a lot of older citizens receive, is \$23. The emergency SNAP benefits took them up to \$281 a month.” The loss of the supplemental benefit will return them to \$23 a month.

Hopkins says there is a bill in the Virginia legislature which would make \$20.4 million available from the general fund for persons aged 60 and older in the amount of \$25 per month using the Federal SNAP criteria.

In addition, she says they are working on a flyer in eight languages to be sent out to households through the mail with information about the SNAP benefits and available food pantries. Also there will be a letter coming straight from Richmond. For general questions about food assistance call 703-228-1300 or for questions if enrolled in SNAP call 703-228-1350.



AFAC clients line up at the AFAC central location on S. Nelson Street for supplemental food assistance.



Plan for Hunger in Arlington

In May 2022 Arlington released a new report “Improving Food Security and Access in Arlington Virginia.” The report researched food security efforts, barriers to accessing services, best practices from other communities, data collection and reporting and outreach opportunities. It indicated that 7.1 percent or 16,670 individuals in Arlington experience food insecurity. The disparity in rates was significant ranging from 14.6 percent along the west end of Columbia Pike to zero in other areas of Arlington.

The report was the product of a task force that identified a number of issues and set out goals for the future. Meng pointed out at the time that a number of recommendations were directed at the County “and my question to them is do they have the funds or the desire to make changes.” He said eight months later he still has the same question.

Meng said that unlike the funding mechanisms used in most counties to support programs addressing food insecurity, in Arlington the County provides only \$555,000 out of the AFAC yearly budget of \$8 million. In addition, he is concerned about a new process the County is proposing to require all non-profits to undergo a competitive grant

process to receive funding.

Hopkins, coordinator of the study, kicked off the Arlington County Food Security Strategic Plan, which resulted from the study, with a presentation at the Central Library on Jan. 23. The study establishes a Food Security Coalition and sets up Arlington’s first strategic food insecurity plan. “There is a lot of work to be done. We have an open door policy. No one department can do it all. Anyone who wants to help can.” Hopkins says the Coalition will look at specific strategies and how to connect the dots.”

Hopkins says they have three working groups who will address food access, outreach and systemic change. “For instance we want to share information in useful ways. Everyone doesn’t access information in the same way. Different populations have said “send a flyer to my door,” while others want a message on What’s App, and others say, “it’s on my phone I won’t look at it.”

Systemic change will look at long-term issues with advocacy at the state or local level. “For instance, we can’t control changes in SNAP benefits, WIC and school meals. Hopkins says this plan will probably take 3-5 years to implement. “We’re not going to solve all of this tomorrow.”

REMEMBERING



PHOTO COURTESY NASA

The crew of the Space Shuttle Columbia included Yorktown High School graduate David Brown (left). Pictured with him are Commander Rick Husband, Laurel Clark, Kalpana Chawla, Michael Anderson, Pilot William McCool and Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

The Arlington County Planetarium was renamed in 2008 in honor of Space Shuttle Columbia astronaut and Arlington native David M. Brown.



PHOTO COURTESY NASA

The seven-member crew of the Space Shuttle Columbia included Yorktown High School graduate David Brown (top left). Pictured with him are (clockwise): Pilot William McCool, Michael Anderson, Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon, Laurel Clark, Commander Rick Husband and Kalpana Chawla.

The Final Countdown

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
THE CONNECTION

David Brown was just 16 minutes from home. As a mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia, the Arlington native was going through final landing preparations aboard STS-107 to conclude what for more than two weeks had been a routine mission.

But at 9 a.m. on Feb. 1, 2003, that changed when Columbia began its reentry into the Earth's atmosphere, disintegrating over the skies of Texas just minutes from its planned Florida touchdown.

"I'll never forget the tears in my father's voice when he called to tell me to turn on the TV," said local resident Col. Nathan "Chili" Lindsay Jr. (ret), whose father, the late Gen. Nathan Lindsay, was the 45th Air Force wing commander during the Challenger tragedy. "Dad rarely cried but I knew he was reliving the Challenger incident."

Feb. 1, 2023, marks the 20th anniversary of the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster, the third date in less than a week of three tragedies that claimed the lives of 17 astronauts: On Jan. 27, 1967, three astronauts were lost in the Apollo 1 launch pad fire and on Jan. 28, 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded on take-off, killing all seven astronauts on board. In all three accidents, investigators found human error played a role.

Because of the clustering of these three dates, NASA sets aside the last Thursday of



PHOTO COURTESY NASA

Arlington native David M. Brown, a Navy Captain and flight surgeon, served as a mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia.

"Dave knew that the chance of not coming back was significant."

— Douglas Brown, brother of Columbia astronaut David Brown



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Arlington native David M. Brown perished in the Space Shuttle Columbia tragedy and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

every January as a Day of Remembrance to commemorate its fallen astronauts.

Brown was born and raised in Arlington, attending McKinley Elementary and Swanson Middle schools before graduating from



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

The Space Shuttle Columbia Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery.

Yorktown High School in 1974. He received a BA degree in biology from the College of William and Mary in 1978 and a doctorate in medicine from Eastern Virginia Medical School in 1982.

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WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Remembering Arlington Native

FROM PAGE 4

"Gemini is what I remember growing up with, then certainly Apollo," Brown said in one of his final interviews prior to the mission. "I thought that was the coolest job you could ever have but I couldn't see the path there as a normal kid."

A U.S. Navy Captain, Brown was a first-time astronaut aboard the Columbia. He was also an aspiring filmmaker who recorded hundreds of hours of the training process for the fated crew, which included Commander Rick Husband, pilot William C. McCool, Payload Commander Michael P. Anderson, Mission Specialists Kalpana Chawla and Laurel Clark, and Payload Specialist Ilan Ramon.

"Dave knew that the chance of not coming back was significant," said Brown's older brother Douglas Brown in the 2009 documentary "Astronaut Diaries," which was made featuring his brother's film work. "Hence when he did his last email, he wrote it with the thought that it

could be a distinct possibility."

Brown, son of the late Arlington County Circuit Court Judge Paul D. Brown, was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery alongside Columbia crewmates Laurel Clark and Michael Anderson. He was posthumously awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor. Additionally, the Arlington County Planetarium was renamed in Brown's honor on Feb. 1, 2008, five years after his death.

"It's hard to believe that it is coming up on 16 days and we land tomorrow," Brown wrote in what would be his final email to his family. "The views are really beautiful. My crewmates are like family. It will be hard to leave them after being so close for two-and-a-half years."

I will make one more observation. If I'd been born in space I know I would have a desire to visit the beautiful earth more than I ever yearn to visit space. It is a wonderful planet."

"FLOURISHING AFTER 55"

Office of 55+ Programs
Department of Parks
and Recreation
300 N. Park Dr.,
Arlington, VA 22203
703-228-4747

703-228-4747.

55+ Travel group will tour the new National Museum of the U.S. Army at Ft. Belvoir, Monday, Feb. 6. Cost \$10, Arlington resident, \$13, non-resident. Registration # 902302-02.

Jeopardy, America's favorite quiz game, Monday, Feb. 6, 2 p.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 912600-16.

Reading buddies, participants pair up

with children from Lubber Run's Creative Preschoolers Program and read stories out loud, Monday, Feb. 6, 10 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Books provided by preschool teacher. Registration # 912301-11.

Learn to cook sweet and nutritious desserts for Valentine's Day, Tuesday, Feb. 7, 11:30 a.m., virtual. Presented by Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Food Volunteer. Registration # 912890-11.

SEE FLOURISHING, PAGE 7

55+ Programs are in person at 55+ Centers, unless otherwise noted. A 55+ Pass is required to participate (starting at a \$20 annual fee). To join or register, go to registration.arlingtonva.us or call

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Legals

PUBLIC NOTICE

AT&T proposes to modify an existing facility (new tip heights 64.5' & 68') on the building at 4241 Columbia Pike, Arlington, VA (20230013). Interested parties may contact Scott Horn (856-809-1202) (1012 Industrial Dr., West Berlin, NJ 08091) with comments regarding potential effects on historic properties.

The
Arlington
Connection

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CALENDAR

JAN. 30 TO FEB. 24

"Claim to Fame." At Gallery Underground, 2100 Crystal Drive, Crystal City Shops, Arlington. First Friday Opening Reception: Friday, February 3, 2023, 5-7 p.m. The Focus Gallery of Gallery Underground will present Claim to Fame, a National juried show. Juried by Felecia B McFail, an Arts Commissioner for Arlington County, Virginia and founder of From One Hand To Another -- a calligraphy business that turns the spoken word into visual art. This exhibit asked artists to submit the work they are most proud of, their personal Claim to Fame. With 50 pieces from artists across the United States, Claim to Fame showcases a variety of mediums and styles. For more information about the gallery: <https://www.arlingtonartistsalliance.org/gallery-underground>

FRIDAY/FEB. 3

Sustainable Landscape Design Part II: Landscape Problem Solving. 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. Online. Sustainable landscape design builds on the unique conditions of your yard to create a healthier and more ecologically friendly outdoor space. In Part II of this two-part series, Kirsten Conrad, Extension Agent for Arlington County and City of Alexandria, will focus on solving landscape problems to help you create more harmonious, functional, and pleasing outdoor spaces. Attendees are invited to submit photos, some of which may be selected to discuss particular design challenges. Photos may be sent by email to vcceprogramresponses@gmail.com by Monday, January 23 and must include name, contact info, photo of a problem area, and information about the problem along with your question. Those sending photos must also register separately for the class. Participants signing up for Part II are encouraged but not required to attend Part I. Free. RSVP at <https://mgmv.org/events/> to receive a link to participate.

FEB. 2-11

"Boston Marriage." 8 p.m. At Theatre on the Run, 3700 S. Four Mile Run Dr., Arlington. This wickedly sharp drawing room comedy, set in the early 1900's, brings us into the lives of Anna and Claire, two fashionable, upper-class women involved in a "Boston marriage," a Victorian euphemism for a long-term, intimate relationship between two unmarried, financially independent women. Tickets may be purchased on the Dominion Stage website



"Boston Marriage" will be presented from Feb. 2-11, 2023 at Theatre on the Run in Arlington.

at www.dominionstage.org. There will also be some tickets available at the door.

FRIDAY/FEB. 10

Introduction to Vegetable Gardening - Part 1. 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. Online. Join Extension Master Gardener Interns Faatimah Muhammad and Krystyn Moon for a beginners' class on the many aspects of vegetable gardening. In Part 1, you'll learn how to select a site, improve your soil, plan your garden, and obtain seeds, plants, and equipment. This is a two-part course on learning how to grow a vegetable garden. Part 2 will be held on Friday, February 17. Free. RSVP at <https://mgmv.org/events/> to receive a link to participate.

SATURDAY/FEB. 11

The Comedy Karaoke Trivia Funtime Show. 7:30 p.m. at Highline RxR, 2010 Crystal Drive, Arlington. Bring a team or fly solo and win prizes by dropping knowledge in a trivia competition, then duking it out in a karaoke battle. Hosted by Christian Hunt, this experience features stand-up comedy from the D.C. area's finest comics. The headliner for February's show is the hilarious Damo Hicks. To purchase tickets, go to funtimeshowdmv.eventbrite.com

SATURDAY/FEB. 11

"Broadway, Spirituals and More." 7:30 p.m. At Gunston Arts Center - Theatre 1, Arlington. What can you say about a program that pairs Broadway show tunes with Spirituals and Moore? How much more is there? Featuring Aundi Marie Moore of the Metropolitan Opera of New York. She will perform selections by African American composers, songs from Broadway musicals and more. The concert will also feature violinist/Artistic Director Leo Sushansky and piano virtuoso Carlos Cesar Rodriguez.

"FLOURISHING AFTER 55"

FROM PAGE 5

55+ Book Club members to discuss "For Whom the Bell Tolls" by Ernest Hemingway, Tuesday, Feb. 7, 1:30 p.m., Langston-Brown 55+ Center. Drop-in. Pair up with one of Lubber Run's preschoolers to create Valentine cards, Tuesday, Feb. 7, 10 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912310-04 and Wednesday, Feb. 8, 10 a.m., registration # 912310-05. Supplies provided. Exploring "New School" Chat Rooms, discover online forums and how to use them and ways to keep safety in mind, Tuesday, Feb. 7, 6:30 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Registration # 912403-07. The study of words and history of English discussion, Wednesday, Feb. 8, 10:30 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912402-30 or virtual, registration # 912402-31. Tips for aging in place from minor changes to home renovations, Wednesday, Feb. 8, 1 p.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 912500-03.

Daintree Rainforest's Ecosystem, a far away ecosystem, discover if the plants, animals and fungus are more familiar than expected, Wednesday, Feb. 8, 11 a.m., virtual. Registration # 912400-21. History roundtable members to discuss the impact of maps in history, Wednesday, Feb. 8, 11:15 a.m., Virtual. Registration # 912402-12. 55+ Travel group will travel to Richmond to see "Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art" at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Thursday, Feb. 9. Cost \$37, Arlington resident, \$43, non-resident. Registration # 902302-03. Author of "My Halls Hill Family," Wilma Jones, to share stories and show how this once segregated community flourished, Thursday, Feb. 9, 11 a.m., Langston-Brown 55+ Center. Registration # 912899-06. Bunco Bunch, a fun dice game of luck, Friday, Feb. 10, 1:30 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. No experience necessary. Registration # 912600-08.

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Each local newspaper mission aspires to provide greater community service, and we do know that our communities are better off if we continue to publish. Last year's financial support from readers and supporters like you bridged the shortfall before Federal PPP funding arrived, and both made our survival possible. We now await a decision for a grant from Rebuild Virginia in early February that we hope will help us in 2022 and beyond. But we need help to survive the first quarter, always a brutal time for cash flow in weekly newspapers. Thank you.

Please, help save these historical papers.

All gifts will be used to fund our printed newspapers and websites and to meet obligations to our loyal and patient employees, writers, contractors and suppliers.

The ongoing pandemic continues to crush many newspapers across the country, and our newspapers continue to be at risk.

The Northern Virginia area's best read and most trusted source for community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Connection Newspapers in the metropolitan region.

The pandemic has hit small businesses hard, which in turn has reduced advertising revenue that keeps these local newspapers alive to provide hyper local news to residents. It feels like no small miracle to be looking forward into 2022.

The pandemic has been a bear, financially and otherwise. Revenue plummeted at the beginning in 2020. Some beloved advertisers have stayed the course supporting us throughout, and many more have done what they can. In the fall of 2021 we saw the return of some advertising for events and Grand Openings, but now on our horizon is the horizon in so many ways. Revenue still remains short of expenses despite our greatly curtailed costs.

Connection Newspapers has been offering these local newspapers to residents for over 200 years. Countless residents have grown up with these papers covering significant moments in the lives of family and children, news, community events, school activities, and even pictures of your dogs and cats. Internet news and large national newspapers cannot provide the local connection or historical connection that local papers like Connection Newspapers and the Alexandria Gazette Packet provide. If your child, dog, mother, father, neighborhood, school has been featured, you understand the value of local community newspapers.

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Been There Done That, Unfortunately



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Over the course of these many cancer years (diagnosed late Feb. 09), a recurring theme has been that various friends are regularly surprised that I'm still alive. These are friends who are either outside my local loop or who are geographically out of sight but not out of mind. Typically, what happens is I'll receive a random-type check-in call from these friends who, understanding the seriousness of my condition are often hesitant to even make this call for fear of the inevitable: yours truly not picking up when yours truly is no longer truly yours; and when I answer the phone, they are happily surprised and generally say so.

Then there's another group of friends, some of whom are out of town, who are regularly in touch. So much so that they're up to date on my health status and may even know my scan schedule. Understanding as they do, 'the seriousness of my condition,' two things happen: when they call and I don't pick up, they get nervous that I've more than fallen and can't get up (that I've slipped off my slope and have been admitted to a hospital)/are too sick to even pick up the phone, as happened when I called my brother during what turned out to be his final week, or if they receive a call from me at an uncharacteristic/atypical time, they also get nervous when they see my name on their phone.

A parallel occurrence is that when this same category of friends calls, and I don't pick up, they usually leave a message requesting an immediate call back – to confirm that I'm still alive or leave a message with normal urgency likewise requesting a call back, but in an unassuming-type tone anticipating that Kenny is still alive. Their tone is without too much fear that I've passed. What often happens with these callers, who aren't particularly anxious in their message, is that they become increasingly anxious in the minutes, hours and sometimes days during which I neglect to call them back. Nevertheless, with these callers I know I need to call them back, if even for just a second (almost literally) and assure them I'm perfectly fine, just busy with life. It's not exactly pressure on me, but I do appreciate and feel the weight of their concern/fear.

I know firsthand what these non-required are feeling since I've gone through the identical experience. A few years ago, I reconnected with a lifelong friend (dating back to elementary school) who googled me and stumbled upon some of my cancer columns. It quickly became apparent to her that she and I had both been diagnosed with similar sounding stage IV, non-small cell lung cancer. Soon thereafter, she tracked me down over the phone and we began to share our stories. Unfortunately for Suzanne, she was having far more difficulty that I was (and we had at times been on the identical chemotherapy). Since she lived in Barnstable (on "the Cape of Cod," to quote Radar O'Reilly from the television program M*A*S*H) our only method of communication was the phone (computers certainly were available but, given the seriousness of our respective situations, a computer exchange felt wholly inadequate). I would call at a time she had suggested would be convenient (she was in pain/major discomfort), she would pick up – until she didn't. I would leave a message asking for a call-back/status. This went on for a week or so and naturally, I grew increasingly anxious, and it was reflected in the content of my voice mail: hope you're okay, empathizing with her challenges, no need to call back/call anytime/just thinking of you, et cetera. After receiving no reply for 10 days or so (I didn't know her address or land line), I decided to google her. That's when I saw and read her obituary. Given her date of death as listed in the agit type, Suzanne had indeed died during the time when I had been calling. As they say: that left a mark.

Knowing full well then what my friends might be experiencing/thinking when they call and I don't answer, or I don't call back in a timely manner, or call at odd times, I am now the call-back king. Not that I can really prevent this situation from arising one day when I am unable to call them back – for all the predictable reasons. Therefore, I am committed as I can be to answer all calls from the Kenny-verse. Moreover, I hope to fulfill this commitment for many years yet to come.

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

SAIGON SISTERS

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



Reunion of the Saigon Sisters in 1989.



Kit Norland finally locates Saigon Sister Tuyen who was celebrating her 91st birthday.

Memories of Revolution Still Strong in Vietnam Reunion

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

It is a few days after Thanksgiving and Kit Norland is headed halfway around the world on a 24-hour trip back to Vietnam. She is hoping to visit the four remaining of the nine Saigon women she met there in 1989.

The story began when Norland met Oanh, a Vietnamese social worker, in 1988 when Norland was working for a small non-profit organization dedicated to improving relations between the two countries. Norland returned the next year spending six weeks interviewing Oanh and eight other women who had left their lives of privilege to fight the French occupation.

These women had left the prestigious Lycee Marie Curie, donned their black pajamas and headed for the bus stop. Each had a story and in her own way supported the revolution. Norland featured them in a book "The Saigon Sisters: Privileged Women of the Resistance," published in 2021.

Norland had kept in contact with the women through the years through visits from nearby posts when she was in the foreign service and keeping in touch with their daughters. Norland had her tickets that had been purchased before Covid. Now seemed like the time to return.

"One of the daughters explained the Saigon sisters are now very frail. They had all been born in the 30s and are now in their 90s." This turned out to be a good decision.

Norland was pretty confident she could find two of the women who were sisters living in a communal home in Ho Chi Minh City on August Revolution Street which their father had built over a century ago. A third sister, now deceased, had lived there as well and been active as a spy.

"My former landlady, Tien, was the key to pulling this off. She has been like a second mom to me since I stayed with her for six weeks in 1988."

Tien was the linchpin to staying in touch with the daughters and women, so the first two sisters were easy to locate. "Tien's son picked us up at the airport the first morning and off we went to the communal home to visit the two sisters Minh and Trang."

"We rang the bell on the expansive white



Minh on accordion during Kit Norland's visit in late 2022 to reconnect with four of the Saigon Sisters.

wall." The house hadn't changed since 1988 although Ho Chi Minh City's population has exploded to 11 million. "We had been told to go mid-morning which would be the best time for Trang who was sleeping much of the time."

Today Minh emerged from the house to greet Norland with enthusiasm. "At 92 she remains smiling and vibrant and speaking good French." Minh remembered attending the Opera House where patriotic songs and skits were performed "devant le monde" without the French understanding the implications. Norland explains Minh was happy to play the piano as she did 33 years ago. Then Minh pointed to a large mysterious black box in the corner which turned out to be an accordion "with all of those many buttons." Minh balanced the heavy accordion on her lap and launched into "Len Dang," the march of the students that she had played so many years ago.

They asked to see Trang and Minh led them to the second floor where Trang lay sleeping. Trang was gifted in languages and after an unfortunate arranged marriage, she later became a diplomat and translator for Nguyen Thi Binh, the foreign minister of the National Liberation Front. Norland explains, "We just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Paris Peace Talks yesterday. Trang was there at the table during the talks."



Reunion in November 2022 with Norland's landlady Tien and Saigon Sister Tuyen.

Now Trang was holding on to life. Norland says, "I leaned over and whispered in her ear how strong her courage was in caring about the fate of her people and how many people had heard her story. ... It was difficult to know if she heard me. We can't talk but I hope she can hear me somehow."

The third sister, now deceased, who had lived in their house, had taken a different route when she headed to the jungle to fight for the revolution and had a child. But she eventually headed to North Vietnam as a double spy leaving her daughter August for her older sibling Minh to raise. Minh had stayed back in their communal home to care for their parents but played her own pivotal role as a liaison for the resistance, opening secret messages from agents in the jungle and passing needed supplies along.

Norland was afraid the other two Saigon sisters, Tuyen and Xuan, would prove to be a challenge to find.

"Despite contact with their children in Canada and Vietnam I wasn't sure of finding these two women in the labyrinthine alleys of a megalopolis." As it turned out her fears were unfounded on finding Xuan due to her landlady's contacts. And on Tuyen her landlady again turned out to be unstoppable — day after day she checked old address books, chasing down dead ends, calling friends. At last the day before her departure Norland found herself in a tiny alley in front of one more wrong address.

But Tien was not one to give up and asked a local noodle vendor about the family. The lady pointed down the lane and gesticulated around the corner. A phone call later and Tuyen's son headed around the corner and led Norland and Tien to their house. It was a pleasant surprise that Tuyen's family was getting ready to celebrate her 91st birthday complete with decorations, a chocolate cake and her daughter who had just arrived from Australia.

They shared memories about Tuyen's brother's revolutionary songs that had inspired students to join the resistance. Tuyen had stayed in Saigon to be a pharmacist taking care of her family and providing health care for the poor. Now she was still vigorous and engaged with a passion to go everywhere and help people. She headed to the roof each day on the elevator installed for her for her 45 minutes of exercises.

When Norland found Xuan she found Xuan was even more slight and bedridden. This had been a woman who had studied at London's Royal College of Music where she met her husband and supported his double life. They moved in elite circles while working for the resistance. When her husband got imprisoned for criticizing Diem in his newspaper, she supported their four children by teaching piano and taught continuously for 50 years. She had directed the Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory.

Tuyen's daughter-in-law was one of Tuyen's students and she had planned to unite Xuan's students from around the world in an April concert paying tribute to her teacher. Unfortunately upon her return to Arlington, Norland received word that Xuan died several days before.

Norland says of seeing Xuan: "She doesn't express herself in words but does react with noises to words or music. Her eyes are open and they would flicker and move when I talked to her. Her toes would move, and my landlady felt this was a real response. I talked about her courage and compassion and told her that her story would not be forgotten. They had so many other choices but they wanted to help their people."

Norland most recently worked as a public diplomacy officer within the US Department of State.

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