Investigative stories were the highlight of this year’s Silurian Excellence in Journalism contest. The New York Times, Newsday and The Record/NorthJersey.com were the big winners in the awards sponsored annually by the Society of Silurians.

Newsday also won the President’s Choice Medallion for its extraordinary investigation that exposed a complex web of corrupt ties between politicians and the business, law enforcement and legal communities of Long Island. Over four years a battalion of Newsday reporters and researchers conducted hundreds of interviews, pored over thousands of government documents and developed inside sources. The result was “Pathway To Power,” a 48-page, 30,000-word special Sunday supplement published last March.

The vehicle for the probe was Gary Melius, a onetime street hoodlum who came to own Long Island’s unofficial political clubhouse, a grand, Gatsby-era estate called Oheka Castle. Along with hosting celebrity weddings and music videos by Taylor Swift and others, Oheka became the place where high-ranking public officials, political leaders and law enforcement brass wined and dined, played poker, anointed and cross-endorsed candidates and otherwise sliced up the public pie.

Other winning entries also featured outstanding investigative work and several of them targeted the Trump business empire:

• The New York Times investigative team of David Barstow, Susanne Craig and Russ Buettner won the Medallion for Investigative Reporting by telling the complex story of the legally dubious financial history of the Trump family business. It demonstrated that Trump received today’s equivalent of at least $413 million from his father’s real estate empire and that much of it came from questionable tax schemes during the 1990s, including outright fraud.

• On their way to winning the Medallion for Radio News Reporting, WNYC Radio and ProPublica combined their staffs to produce “Trump Inc.,” a year-long series of podcasts that uncovered wrongdoing and conflicts of interest in the Trump business empire.

• The Associated Press Trump Business Team dug deep into the business activities of Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner. Their investigations exposed glaring conflicts of interest as the pair continue to serve as White House advisors without divesting their extensive financial holdings. For their reporting, the AP team won a Merit Award for Business and Financial Reporting.

• The exhaustive research work of James O’Neill, Scott Fallon and photojournalist Chris Padota of The Record/NorthJersey.com resulted in “Toxic Secrets: Pollution, Evasion and Fear in New Jersey,” which won the Medallion for Environmental Reporting. The four-part series uncovered how DuPont downplayed the dire health risks posed by cancer-causing ground-water contamination at their now closed munitions manufacturing plant in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey.

• Newsday reporter Will Van Sant’s “Hands to the Neck” exposé won for Public Service Reporting. It took Van Sant a year to conduct deep research, collecting documents, developing sources and using old fashioned shoe leather to get the story. It revealed scores of non-fatal strangulation attacks in state-run or state-supervised hospital and other medical facilities. Van Sant’s reporting detailed how Patricia Gunning, the former special prosecutor and inspector general at the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs, was stymied in her attempt to study and combat the phenomenon, which often involved employees acting against vulnerable individuals under state care. Van Sant’s piece spurred calls for Congressional action.

• Kevin Armstrong won for Sports Reporting for taking a close look at an FBI probe into the way businessmen and coaches schemed to funnel six-figure payments from sneaker companies to the families of star high school basketball players. When he wrote it he was working in the sports department of the New York Daily News. When the Daily News let half of their editorial staff go during 2018, Armstrong was among the casualties. But he bounced back and now covers sports for Newsday.

BY JACk DEACY

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Dennis Duggan Award Winner: Rachel Rippetoe is Dedicated to Local Reporting

BY ALLAN DOdds FRANK

The first story by Rachel Rippetoe, this year’s Dennis Duggan Award winner, appeared in the “Knighly News,” her high school newspaper at Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet High School in Nashville, Tenn., home of the Blue Knights.

In those days, Rippetoe was working part time at a farmer’s market so her journalism focused on agriculture and the food chain. She wanted to get out of the South and had relatives in Oregon so she enrolled at the University of Portland, where she became the editor-in-chief of The Beacon, the student newspaper.

While still at school, Rippetoe got an internship at the Eugene, Oregon Register-Guard. It was “the most fun ever reporting in a small town,” she says. “I got into journalism there and knew I...

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PROFILE: MERVIN BLOCK

BY BILL DIEHL

Mervin Block is watching the TV news and grumbling. “Too many crawls,” he says. “It gives me the creeps. Breaking news. Happening now. Those headlines are usually phony. Where are the editors? Supervisors? Management?”

Longtime Silurian Block, at 93, is still speaking his mind even though he retired from the day-to-day news business decades ago.

Merv had a distinguished career as a news writer at all three of the traditional U.S. networks—ABC, NBC and CBS. He wrote for some broadcast greats, including Walter Cronkite, Harry Reasoner, Frank Reynolds, Marlene Sanders, Edwin Newman, Dan Rather, Diane Sawyer, Dan Rather, Diane Sawyer, and Jake Tapper. In his books, Block doesn’t come down hard on news anchors, realizing they haven’t written everything they read, but he does quote some of their scripts verbatim, which is bad enough.

Does he watch the Sunday shows—“Face the Nation,” “This Week,” Meet the Press” No, but he does like CNN’s Fareed Zakaria (“He knows his stuff”) and Jake Tapper.

Any thoughts about President Trump? “Can’t we say something new and not [just] call Trump a liar? Or why even mention him, unless we can say something one has ever said?” How about President Trump calling the truth? But no one would believe it.

As for Fox News, Block.thinks Chris Wallace (son of Mike Wallace) seems to be a straight shooter. Mostly he thinks Fox News is partisan to a fault. “I watch Fox briefly now and then but what I see and hear leaves me shaking my head in disbelief. Likewise, Fox’s Sean Hannity, who is laughable in the way he’s in the Trump camp.”

Any advice if Block were running a network newsroom now? “Hire some folks who covered city hall for a small town daily and police and fire. And hire folks with backgrounds in print reporting.” Before he was a news writer at CBS, Block was a newspaper copy boy, reporter and editor at the Chicago American, covering courts, crime and city hall (and crime in city hall). In New York City, he wrote and broadcast editorials for WNBC-TV.

During my career at ABC News Radio I have interviewed some big names, but it’s hard to top Merv. He once had a private lunch with Alexandra Tolstoy, daughter of Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. He had dinner with Jimmy Stewart.

His list of interviews is long: Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley, Judy Garland. (Garland was 45 minutes late for her interview. “Why were you late, I asked. She said she was taking a shower. She wasn’t pleased when I said, ‘How long does it take you to take a shower?’”)

He once had breakfast with Senator Joe McCarthy, not in Washington but at the home of ABC Radio’s Paul Harvey. It happened accidentally, he said. “I was following the senator’s motorcade and it wound up at Harvey’s house in River Forest, a suburb of Chicago. After the senator went in, I went up to the house, knocked on the door, and identified myself as a reporter. To my surprise, Harvey welcomed me in to join them for breakfast. So I did.”

Other political interviews included Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and Eleanor Roosevelt. And he had tea with the poet T.S. Eliot and interviews with Carl Sandburg and W.H. Auden. No doubt about it, a great and fascinating career would be the envy of most anyone.

How would Mervin Block like to be remembered? “That’s easy,” he said. “Just say, ‘Someone who tried.’”

Bill Diehl is a correspondent at ABC News Radio and a member of the Silurian Board of Governors.
April 17 on the air. I was on the air for about a half and a 59 year-old Pope John Paul, in very good shape, he visits New York City. He was but I was assigned to stand behind a blue NYFD sawhorse at the top of the front steps of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. It was what it was for security. The Holy Father is walking on the 51st Street side of the cathedral. He stops, looks up at the people, and turns his head back and forth for two-handed gesture of appreciation. The people are roaring. I am on the air live and I say. Here is the Pope about 30 yards away I could barely hear him. When I got back to the studio and played the tape at the time that my mother was in the early stages of dementia; she had let the insurance lapse two months earlier. I called Dad to tell him about the CD to see if he could help. What happened next overwhelmed my mother, sister Wendy and I. Dad, who was held a fundraiser at the Times and we started getting personal checks in various amounts from ‘Bud’ and Edie Kihss, down to young reporters who only knew of my father by reputation. With this money and the money that people came in with from their retirement plan, we were able to save the house and get re-insured. My mother lived another three years, with a series of different illnesses, in her own bed. I am forever grateful to all the great people at the Times for their generosity in this time of need.

I am so glad that the Peter Kihss Award is given out each year by the Society of the Silurians so that my father’s legacy endures.

Erik Kihss, who has a masters degree in music from Columbia University, is a retired music teacher and jazz pianist. He was the house pianist at Gage & Tolner restaurant for six years, and entertained many celebrities, including Wallace Cunliffe and the old Brooklyn Dodgers.
The Silurians Celebrate Journalism At Its Best

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The Mets for The New York Times. Strong investigative and research skills were also at work at the Norwood News, a community weekly paper that covers the Northwest Bronx. The paper’s Housing Matters series, written by editor David Cruz, won a Merit Award when it found that the city’s plans for creating affordable housing may be beyond the means of many Bronx residents.

In “The Reporting on Minority Issues category, Christine Veiga and Samuel Park of Chalkbeat, a non-profit editorial website covering education, won the New York Times with photographs by Todd Heisler. This is a brilliant investigative news feature, tracing in depth the operation of a sex trafficking ring in Queens. It was done with crisp writing and deep background reporting, all conveyed in colorful, novelistic style.

Merit Award: “A Bright Light, Dimmed in the Shadows of Homeless- ness” by Ben Weiser for The New York Times with photographs by George Etheredge. A fine example of how to bring to vivid life the story of a person who too often fades into the background of the urban scene, reduced to an abstraction rather than flesh and blood. Weiser wears out shoe leather and all the other tools of a seasoned reporter to produce a story that is understated, thorough and ultimately heartbreaking.

Merit Award: “Housing Crisis In New York City” by David Cruz for the Norwood News. With City Hall committed to expanding the stock of affordable housing, Norwood News, covering the north-west Bronx, asked a basic question: affordable for whom? The newspaper’s well-researched Housing Matters series, written by editor David Cruz, found that planned housing may be beyond the means of many Bronx residents struggling for the very soul of their neighborhoods.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING: Newspapers, news service, magazines and online.
Medallion: “The Case Of Jane Doe Ponytail” by Dan Barry and Jeffrey Singer for The New York Times with photographs by Todd Heisler. This well-documented and meticu- lously reported story uncovered a dan- gerous new form of predatory lending that relies on the legal system to drain billions of dollars from those who are often easily, if failing to pay their debts.

Merit Award: “Blue Lies” by Joseph Goldstein for The New York Times. This series uncovered the disturbingly widespread practice of “testifying” by New York City police, even under oath in court, to falsely claim that a crime was being committed by another person and perjuring themselves.

BUSINESS & FINANCIAL REPORTING: Newspapers, news service, magazines and online.
Medallion: “Kepp Quiet,” by Ann Marsh for Financial Planning. In this outstanding demonstration of determined reporting, Ms. Marsh dug deeply into how Wells Fargo rebuffed, tried to quiet and eventually fired an executive who tried to expose systemic fraud and disregard of federal regulations in its wealth management division. She outlined how the bank’s actions contradicted its professions of protecting whistleblowers and dismissed the threat that its efforts to clean up a reputation already damaged by the creation of thousands of fake accounts for unwitting customers.

Merit Award: “Ivanka Trump’s Troubled Xerox Profits: How They Pushed” by AP’s Trump Business Team for the Associated Press. The AP’s Trump Business Conflict Team dug into how Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump’s activities in 2018, with hard-hitting investigations that broke news and got action. The reporting shined a light on glaring conflicts of interest and disturb- ing business practices that continue to this day as Ivanka Trump and Kushner act as White House advisers without divesting their extensive financial holdings.

Merit Award: “Paper Jam” by Shawn Tully for Fortune. Tully detailed how Danandre Thomas chose to merge with one of its biggest stakeholders, Fujifilm of Japan. Shareholder and corporate raider Carl Icahn teamed up with Texas billionaire Danandre Thomas to buy out Dentsu, a deal in one of the nastiest takeover battles of the year.

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING: Newspapers, news service, magazines and online.
Medallion: “Toxic Secrets: Pollu- tion, Evasion and Fear in New Jer- sey,” By Jim O’Neill, Scott Fallon and photojournalist Chris Padota for The Record/NorthJersey.com. This exhaustively researched four-part report brought to light for the first time the lengths to which DuPont, over a peri- od of a decade and more, downplayed to regulators and inhabitants of the nearby...
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residential community the dire health risks posed by cancer-causing ground water contamination at its now-shuttered Pompton Lakes munitions-manufacturing site. At the time the series ran, the problem remained largely unaddressed, despite reports of elevated levels of illness. Following its publication, Gov. Phil Murphy ordered his attorney general to probe DuPont’s management of the matter and his environmental commissioner to monitor cleanup operations.

**SCIENCE & HEALTH REPORTING:**

Newspapers, news services, magazines and online.

Medallion: “Surgical Tragedies, Tragic Results” by Lindy Washburn for The Record / North Jersey.com.

Invited by the USA Today Network to participate in a investigation of the safe record of the nation’s fastest-filling same-day surgery centers, the Record had its readers sign up for a forum to discuss questions about the facilities. In a number of instances, these lapses led to infections; in others, to death. Washburn’s reporting prompted lawmakers to begin tightening state regulations governing these facilities.

**Merit Award:** “It keeps us safe”: A New York City Bathroom Set Up To Stop Overdoses” by Jennifer Peltz of the Associated Press.

When New York became the biggest U.S. city to embrace safe haven sites for injecting drugs, the Associated Press set out to find a story about the debate over whether such facilities should be established. Through patient and sensitive reporting, Peltz and her teammates gathered the facts about an under-the-radar facility that already exists in the overdose crisis: monitored bathrooms where staffers are prepared to come to the aid of overdose victims after their lapse to the light.

**Merit Award:** “The Change Agent” by Amanda Fortini for Vanity Fair.

This is an illuminating portrait of the actress Michelle Williams, known for guarding her off-screen privacy just as fiercely as she bares the feelings of her on-screen characters. Williams opens up to writer Amanda Fortini with an unflinching account of how she learned she was being paid less than $1,000 for some reshoots while her male co-star was getting $1.5 million for the same job. Williams also reveals the grief she felt following the death of her partner Heath Ledger in 2008 and the new love she found with her marriage to Philip Elverum last year.

**Merit Award:** “A Broadway Mogul Redefines Closet in His Own Fashion” by Michael Paulson for The New York Times.

Jordan Roth — pony-tailed, red-carpet ready, flamboyant and gay — is the highly successful, 42-year-old head of Jujamcyn, a group of five Broadway theaters, who managed to lure Bruce Springsteen to perform in one of them and who has had major hits in the Others, is by any measure, a big-time showman. He is also an outspoken Democrat, activist and fund-raiser who is behind a series of satirical videos that poke fun at Donald Trump and the coarsening of the culture. Roth’s father, meanwhile, is a billionaire real estate investor who is a close friend and supporter of Trump, which makes for an interesting family dynamic.

**ARTS & CULTURE REPORTING:**

Newspapers, news services, magazines and online.

Medallion: “Welcome to Brighton Beach, Brooklyn” by Yelena Akhtiorskaya with photographs by Alexey Yurenev for The New York Times - Brighton Beach, a seaside enclave of Soviet emigrés not far from Coney Island, is one of New York’s liveliest and most culturally insular neighborhoods. Here, novelist Yelena Akhtiorskaya and photographer Alexey Yurenev have teamed up to capture with exuberance, energy, warmth and wit a portrait of a bit of New York where “the sea turns to vodka and the newspapers turn Cyrillic.”

**COMMENTARY:**

Newspapers, news services, magazines and online.


For millions of his devoted readers, Jim Dwyer brings the texture and the atmosphere, but above all, the real people of this great city to life. New York is a richer place for his unique gift of storytelling.

**Merit Award:** “Up and Down Wall Street” columns by Randall Forsyth for Barron’s.

Forsyth explains in exquisite detail and deep understanding the arcana of Wall Street functions and the critical role it plays in the American and global economy.

**PUBLIC SERVICE:**

Newspapers, news services, magazines and online.


For a year Van Sant cultivated sources when education officials proposed a tented website, chronicled in a series of reports how state officials charged with overseeing the city’s half dozen specialized high schools, which educate 1 million children. Recent political attention has been focused on the city’s half dozen specialized high schools, which educate a tiny minority. Those elite high schools get most of their students through entrance examinations and a small number of them on the Upper West Side.

**Merit Award:** “MS-13” by Victor Manuel Ramos for Newsday.

Newsday reporter Ramos tapped into contacts developed during years of covering Long Island’s most affluent communities to earn the trust of Edwin, formerly a homeboy in one of the most violent cliques of MS-13, the Salvadoran school gang responsible for terrorized high schools and neighborhoods in eastern Long Island and cities from Washington D.C. to Los Angeles. Ramos worked to establish trust and himself from the gang to tell the larger story of how police and communities are battling to contain its depredations.

**SPORTS REPORTING AND COMMENTARY:**

Newspapers, news services, magazines and online.


A sweeping look at an FBI probe into the way businessmen and coaches schemed to create a climate of corruption in which star basketball players from sneaker companies were funneled to the families of elite high school basketball players via college coaches who themselves pocketed piles of kickback money. Reporter Kevin Armstrong spent six months pursuing the story, moving from Long Island’s top high school arenas, to Vegas hotel rooms to federal courthouses. He talked to teenagers “next big things,” former NCAA stars, scouts and coaches; and top to top NCAA coaches who released diary entries when education officials proposed a tented website, chronicled in a series of reports how state officials charged with overseeing the city’s half dozen specialized high schools, which educate 1 million children. Recent political attention has been focused on the city’s half dozen specialized high schools, which educate a tiny minority. Those elite high schools get most of their students through entrance examinations and a small number of them on the Upper West Side.

**Merit Award:** “Hard Knocks: Lacrosse and Brain Trauma” by Jim Baumbach for Newsday.

Researchers at the New York Institute of Technology in Old Westbury, Long Island, tracked the brains of one of the school’s 18-game lacrosse season last spring to monitor how their brain function may have changed because of repeated hits to the head, raising questions about the impact of such blows even if a
The Silurians Celebrate Journalism At Its Best

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player isn’t diagnosed with a concussion. The school agreed to share the results of the study with Newsway, and the paper’s investigation appeared in an enterprise reporting for sports, Jim Baumbach, deftly wrote about the subtle declines in memory and slower cognitive reactions of the players.

BREAKING NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY:
Newspapers, newspapers, services, magazines and online.
Medallion: “Class Trips Turns Deadly” by staff photographer Bob Karp, for The Record/ NorthJersey.com. Bob Karp was the first photographer on the scene on May 17, 2018, when a much-anticipated class adventure to a historic park became a nightmarish, deadly ride for Paramus, Nashieville fifth graders. Their school bus, one of three heading to Waterloo Village, and a dump truck collided on Route 80 in western Morris County. The crash killed 10-year-old Miranda Vargas and beloved teacher Jennifer Williamson-Kennedy and injured 43 others. Karp’s photos and videos from the scene – taken while balancing on the railing of an overpass while a reporter held him steady – were as incredible as they were heartbreaking.

Merit Award: “Blizzard Blaze” by Thomas A. Ferrara for Newsday. Newsday’s Thomas A. Ferrara provides us with imaginative glimpses behind the scenes and under the waters of our February 2017 blizzard. His dramatic photo caught members of a veteran Newsday photographer Thomas and videos from the scene – taken while he was a reporter held him steady – were as incredible as they were heartbreaking. In the photo, a car is on fire on the Long Island Expressway. The photo captures the essence of the stories that come from the newsroom and the people who report them.

FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY:
Newspapers, newspapers, services, magazines and online.
Medallion: “The Shrinking Middle Class of New York City” by Andre Wagner for Fortune. Fortune magazine may be a surprising choice to be the winner in the feature photography category, but Andre Wagner’s poignant black-and-white portraits of New Yorkers who earn inadequate wages for their work and despite the Long Island Expressway provide us with a much-needed perspective. The magazine is commended for its outside its usual realm of coverage to focus on the plight of an often-overlooked segment of the American workforce.

TELEVISION BREAKING NEWS:
Medallion: “November Snow Storm” by the Eyewitness News team for WABC News. The 11 pm coverage by WABC News of last year’s November snowstorm showed the power of authoritative local news at its best. The news team’s whip-around reporting from New Jersey, New York and Connecticut combined with solid weather and government stories gave viewers a complete picture of what was happening and what was coming next.

TELEVISION FEATURE NEWS:
Medallion: “Concession Coverage” by Nate Kane at WABC 11 New Jersey. Until Walt Kane’s reports appeared, few people knew that roller coaster rides can cause concussions and even fewer people would have guessed that once the coverage began the state would try to help amusement park operators disengage the risk of riding.

Dennis Duggan Award Winner: Rachel Rippetoe

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wanted to do it fulltime, but I wanted to go to a bigger city.” She returned to Tennessee in March 2018, veteran Newsway photographer Thomas A. Ferrara reported to a researcher on fire on the Long Island Expressway. His dramatic photo caught the moment of the crash, and videos from the scene – taken while he was balancing on the railing of an overpass while a reporter held him steady – were as incredible as they were heartbreaking.

Merit Award: “Get in the Know” by Thomas A. Ferrara for Newsday. Newsday’s Thomas A. Ferrara provides us with imaginative glimpses behind the scenes and under the waters of our February 2017 blizzard. His dramatic photo caught members of a veteran Newsday photographer Thomas and videos from the scene – taken while he was balancing on the railing of an overpass while a reporter held him steady – were as incredible as they were heartbreaking. In the photo, a car is on fire on the Long Island Expressway. The photo captures the essence of the stories that come from the newsroom and the people who report them.

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Dennis Duggan Award Winner: Rachel Rippetoe

Excerpt from “Through the Looking Glass,” Kevin Armstrong’s six-month tour of basketball’s underbelly for the Daily News, a deep dive into an FBI investigation of chickery involving elite high school prospects, sneaker companies and college coaches, the Medallion winner in the Sports Reporting and Commentary category.

One night in October, Lamar Odom stood up, straightened his 6-foot-10 frame and stared into the podium inside Bryant Park Grill on W. 40th St. Dressed in a black suit and tie with white polka dots, Odom is sober, two years removed from a cocaine binge at a Nevada brothel that left him in a coma, breathing through a ventilator. Odom, 38, looks around the room. This is the occasion: the New York City Basketball Hall of Fame Dinner, and he is about to be inducted. To his right is Tom “Satch” Sanders, a retired Celtic in a bow tie. To his left is “Jumpin’” Jackie Jackson, an old Boys High Kangaroo who used to hand out business cards with four words on them: “Have Converse, Will Jump.” Snarker laces remain the ties that bind many in the family. In the back sits Gary Charles, a 5-foot-5 businessman who wears a black three-piece suit and matching fedora. Charles coached Odom with the Long Island Panthers, an AAU program sponsored by Adidas. When Odom signs the National’s top prospect with Christ the King High in 1996, Odom leans in to the microphone.

“I never thought I would be re-

Frank is a past Silurian president and a member of the Board of Governors.
Welcome to Брайтон Бич, Brooklyn

The winner in the Arts and Culture category of the Silurians Excellence in Journalism awards is a photo essay done for The New York Times in December by photographer Alexey Yurenev and writer Yelena Akhtiorskaya. Here is an excerpt from Akhtiorskaya’s charming essay—she is a native of Odessa—and a couple of Yurenev’s delightful photos.

“...The current state of Brighton Beach,” writes Akhtiorskaya, “can be traced directly to the year 1979, when the first spate of Russian Jews came sputtering out of a hole in the Iron Curtain. The leak was patched up—after devouring the warm ototicism is the best they can hope for. Russians came. But no one’s coming to Brighton Beach.”

“New Yorkers tend to discover Brighton Beach by accident. They set off for Coney Island, they might stroll down the boardwalk, marveling at the decked-out diaspora, unable to resist the allure of the sea, so reminiscent of our beloved Black Sea home.”

“A slip of the tongue, perhaps, but it means something. And what it means is that Brighton Beach is a universe unto itself, with its own time, its own language, its own customs, for which it makes no apologies. If you don’t get it, it’s your loss.”

Edwin recalled the afternoon in 2005 when he decided to join the MS-13 gang as a personal low point. He was 14, recently arrived on Long Island, and hating his life. A group of boys who belonged to the Mara Salvatrucha gang, better known as MS-13, won a Merit Award for Reporting on Minority Issues. The young man, Edwin, admitted to committing crimes against the gang’s enemies. The story had a rare happy ending when Edwin found religion and was permitted to leave MS-13. Following are the lede paragraphs of Ramos’s story:

Victor Manuel Ramos’s gripping story for Newsday about a Salvadoran immigrant boy on Long Island who joined the Mara Salvatrucha gang, better known as MS-13, went to the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C., and reported that an inauguration official expressed concern about being overcharged and worried about what would happen “when this is audited.” They also uncovered how Trump and his children misled investors and profited as real estate projects failed, learned that some of the money raised for Trump’s inauguration going series of podcasts that has uncovered wrongdoing and conflicts of interests in the Trump business empire. They de-

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Celebrating the Best

The American Association of Invalids and Veterans of World War II from the Former U.S.S.R. honors Anastasia Guildina, third from right, a veteran and Holocaust survivor, on her 93rd birthday.

INSIDE MS-13

Victor Manuel Ramos’ s gripping story for Newsday about a Salvadoran immigrant boy on Long Island who joined the Mara Salvatrucha gang, better known as MS-13, won a Merit Award for Reporting on Minority Issues. The young man, Edwin, admitted to committing crimes against the gang’s enemies. The story had a rare happy ending when Edwin found religion and was permitted to leave MS-13. Following are the lede paragraphs of Ramos’s story:

Edwin recalled the afternoon in 2005 when he decided to join the MS-13 gang as a personal low point. He was 14, recently arrived on Long Island, and hating his life. A group of boys who belonged to the SWP gang had been harassing him in the hallways, cafeteria and locker rooms at Turtle Hook Middle School in Uniondale.

They called him names, pushed him and pined him against walls and, when no adults were around, punched him. Even though they were immigrants too, they used expletives to berate him as an immigrant, mocked his inability to speak English, commented on his unfashionable clothes and dubbed him “primo”—literally “cousin,” which he said was a demeaning term for a “hick.” Edwin, who asked to not be identified by his full or street names, had been leaving school in a rush to avoid his assailants, but that day about 10 of them waited on his path. One called him out to fight. He continued on Page 8

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Radio feature news: Medallion: “Trump Inc.” by the WNYC/ProPublica investigative team

In the age of Trump, WNYC and ProPublica have created a new template for collaborative journalism in an age when authorities are broadly arrayed against fact-finding and truth-telling.


Semyon Krasilshikov, who served in the Great Patriotic War, celebrating his 100th birthday in Brighton Beach.
BY ROBERTA HERSHENSON

I n 1992 I was a freelance reporter covering the arts for The New York Times. My territory was Westches-
ter County, where I lived, and where a good number of well-known performing artists lived their private lives amid the tall hedges and spacious gardens of the suburbs.

I was knowledgeable about classical music and was carving out a space for myself interviewing conductors like Andre Previn and Kurt Masur, composers like David Diamond and David Amram, and opera singers like Roberta Peters and Renata Scotto. As long as they lived in Westchester they were fair game.

There was plenty to cover north of the city, and I pursued this beat for several decades, writing also for other sections of the Times as well as for magazines like Opera News and Classical Singer. As an English major who did not study journalism, I learned on the job, and I am still wondering if a journalism degree would have averted the snafu caused by my second Previn feature in the Times. Previn’s recent death has brought the inci-
dent to mind in all its red-faced clarity.

Back then we filed our stories orally with the Recording Room, noting every correction, which was enabling as though our lives depended on it. Errors were corrected in later editions—and in the case of the Sondheim section, where the Previn feature ran, corrections ran the following week. Though I focused on his musical career in the interview, his life in Westchester—specifically in Bedford Hills, where he had settled—was also relevant. Readers would feel they were getting an inside look at the famous, multi-faceted music-
cian who lived among them.

So I asked questions about how Previn and his fourth wife, Heather Sneddon (who somewhat resembled his third wife, Mia Farrow), lived in the commu-
nity. Previn, who had been a six-year stint as Artistic Advisor at Caramoor, in nearby Katonah, where he also coached young chamber musicians, said he often lent his name to local events. My lede referred to such gestures as neighborly, though “relatively effortless.”

When the article appeared, the word “effortless” appeared as “fruitless.” The “fruitless” fiasco was not really my fault. But I began to hold my breath whenever a new article appeared in print, lest someone discover a mistake. One time I confused Moss Hart with Lorenz Hart, and Kitty Carlisle Hart herself called to sweetly set me straight. By then we had entered the digital age, and the error was corrected right away. The incident stung, but not as much as when I esteemed Andre Previn yelled at me to “fix it!”

I had written, “They called your activities ‘fruitless’ rather than ‘effortless,’” I said, placing my head in the lion’s mouth. “I’m sorry.”

“WELL, FIX IT!” he bellowed into the phone.

A quick call to the editor, Silurian Wendy Schligt, and a correction was arranged for the following Sunday. (Un-
fortunately, the archived edition of the 5/2/92 article, “Previn Coaches Players in His First Love, Chamber Music,” still contains the word “fruitless.”)

It wasn’t like mistaking Mozart for Hadyn, or stating that Previn specialized in Early Music, one of the few musical genres not his bailiwick. And he didn’t hold a grudge; I spoke to him often after that for the weekly arts news column, Footlights, I wrote for the Westchester section.

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Welcome New Members

Karen Feld has been a freelance writer, editor and broadcast journalist since 1969. She was Washington editor of the Shuttle Sheet, a Delta Airlines in-
flight magazine, a syndicated gossip columnist with stints at the Washington Times and the Washington Examiner, and she has written on a variety of subjects for such publications as Parade, People, Time, Newsday, Money and Vogue.

Mike Kelly is an award-winning column-
nist at the Bergen Record, where he has been employed for more than 40 years. He has written about events for-
and domestic, was named “Jour-
nalist of the Year” in 2001 by the New Jersey Press Association and “best general interest columnist in America” in 2004 by the National Association of

My Snafu with Andre

ANDRE PREVIN

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said he couldn’t turn around without looking like a coward. They got down to it, and when Edwin landed punches, the other boys jumped him. They were punching and kicking him senseless and he thought he was going to die. Then, something of a miracle hap-
pened. He remembers seeing a souped-up Toyota 4Runner SUV pull up out of nowhere and stop. His attackers ran. A tough-looking guy in his 30s told him in Spanish “Súbete” — to hop in the car.

“To this day I don’t know who he was,” Edwin said. The man revealed that he was an MS-13 member in Hempstead. He delivered him to safety.

Thus began Edwin’s devotion to an organization that largely bypasses the sustaining criminal rackets of oth-
er gangs for a loyalty built on crude violence, with a lure so potent it has enabled it to regroup despite decades of crackdowns. Only a turn toward religion while he was in the depths of sadness and depression enabled him to escape this life and replace it with something better.

Simple protection...is what Edwin said drew him to the gang toward the end of his first school year. He said he wanted to emulate the mysterious figure who rescued him. He hadn’t been ex-
posed to gangs in El Salvador because he grew up more than two hours from the gritty neighborhoods in the capital of San Salvador that serve as their well-
springs. But after his encounters with the Uniondale boys he decided he couldn’t go it alone. “I thought this is the solution so I can be protected in school,” he said.

Edwin went home, logged into MySpace, and started searching. He found a profile for an MS-13 clique in nearby Westbury and chatted with the person running it. He soon knew all he needed to know. If he joined, the gang would have his back.

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MS-13 members frequently cover their bodies with tattoos.