



FAITH

ASKING THE CLERGY

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Life's to-do list



Like the characters in 'The Bucket List,' older Long Islanders are realizing dreams

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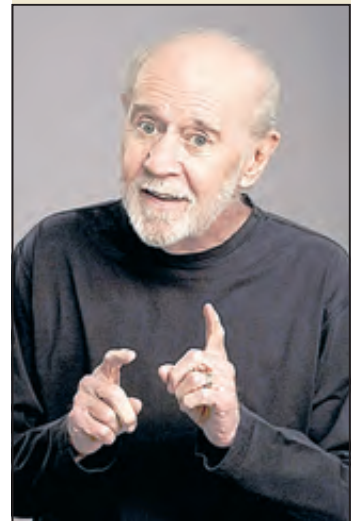


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Central Islip complex earmarks 67 units for buyers over 55

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On HBO tonight, George Carlin finds advantages of aging

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CLASSIFIED PULLOUT

Like Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, inset, in "The Bucket List," Kathleen Casserly of Huntington took to the road to fulfill a dream. Her pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago took her hiking through France and Spain.

Actually doing it

Long Islanders focus on realizing the dreams on their bucket list



BY CARYN EVE MURRAY
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Kathleen Casserly's pilgrimage had been quietly waiting for its turn at No. 1 on her list.

After working as an addictions counselor, she had finally achieved her childhood aspiration to the clergy in 2003, when she was ordained as an interfaith minister.

But the Huntington resident also always possessed a wandering spirit. "I used to notice I always had used words like 'path' and 'way' and 'journey,'" said Casserly, 57.

Preoccupied for more than two decades with the Camino de Santiago, she was drawn even more toward this religious pilgrimage through France, ending in the Spanish town of Santiago de Compostela after a divorce in 1998, the loss of her mother and three siblings and a false alarm in 2006 following a mammogram.

"I knew what I had to do," she said recently.

On a one-month leave of absence from work, she covered 300 of the Camino's 500 miles on foot, and the rest by bus, until she arrived in Santiago in late 2006. She returned with newfound peace and a new list.

"I want to walk from one end of England to another," she said recently. "I want to go to India and visit the

mountains outside Chennai."

To many, it's the ultimate inventory, a list that brings peace, mends relationship fences or hones a skill while life still has time. The current film "The Bucket List" brought wider attention to the idea, as Jack Nicholson's and Morgan Freeman's terminally ill characters globe-trot their way to the finish line before the cancer ravaging their bodies transports them there first.

Hearing movie's message

In defiance of the critical trouncing the film took for being too simplistic or overly reliant on its veteran stars' screen charisma, it surged to the top of the box office. It has taken in more than \$85 million in the United States so far on its strength as a "buddy movie" and because its theme had clearly struck a chord. Last weekend it was still the 11th-most-popular movie in the country.



"Nothing concentrates the mind more than a deadline, and the final deadline is death," said Jonathan Jackson, director of the Center for Psychological Services and director of clinical training at Adelphi University's Derner Institute. "You think about how much time you have left

in your life, and it provokes these kinds of thoughts."

But the view of life's lists as a peripatetic pursuit is flawed, he said.

In reality, he said, such list-making can just as easily be inspired by health. "These are thoughts and reflections people have all the time, when

Lori Connors and Annette Wanderer, above, ply the waters of Alaska, where they spent a week last May kayaking around Eagle Island. Left, Kathleen Casserly at a church in Navarra, Spain, during her pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago.

they are in midlife, and even when they are young."

In fact, that's how Joe Cambria's list began. Now 44, the Verizon manager from Massapequa Park was cycling cross-country in his 20s when he started taking mental notes.

"I realized there is so much in life to experience. I promised myself that when I got home I'd start doing the things that I dreamed about," he said.

Thus began his sky-diving, rock climbing, motorcycle riding and scuba diving — for starters. Now married and the father of three, Cambria may parachute from planes at 13,500 feet or scale craggy rocks a little less often, but each time he does, he reminds himself how much fun life can be.

Turning to a kayak

Annette Wanderer took her plunge into kayaking in her late 40s, during a vacation in the Florida Keys, after a series of what she called "turning points," including the death of a friend's husband from melanoma at the age of 56.



NEWSDAY PHOTOS / ANA P. GUTIERREZ

Above, Yellesphur Dathatri and his wife, Geetha, of Farmingdale, hold a photo the holy mountain of Kailash in Tibet, which the family visited. Left, John Stevens was inspired to write a book on Dutch-American architecture after working at Old Bethpage Village.



"Do whatever you want to do," Wanderer, 52, of Babylon, said she told herself at the time. "You are getting older." The Farmingdale State College business professor went last summer with her friend Lori Connors of Islip to Alaska,

where they rode kayaks around Eagle Island. In October, Wanderer kayaked in the Virgin Islands. Mostly she rides in Great South Bay, feeling a little bit more of an adventurer these days.

From all this, she said, she

has learned: "I am not going to be on the sidelines. I am going to be at the head of the dance lines at the senior citizens' center."

Vinny Franco already is. The 80-year-old Huntington resident, who goes to the

Town of Huntington Senior Center, dusted off his long-idle tap shoes recently and resumed lessons because he remembered what fun it was. The payoff now, he said, is he gets exercise and he can perform to make people smile.

Dance isn't the only thing Franco delights in sharing. The former graphic designer renewed his youthful love of painting. Now, he said, he savors a satisfaction his much-loved longtime career, designing automobile logos, postage stamps and commercial packaging, never could: "With painting, you're not

confined or limited in what you can do."

John Stevens' list was topped by a book that took 40 years to hit print. When it did, it was the third one authored by the Greenlawn man, 78, a retired architectural historian. With 2005 publication of "Dutch Vernacular Architecture in North America 1640-1830," he became a proud author again at 76, inspired by the Minne Schenck House, a Dutch-American building at Old Bethpage Village Restoration, where he'd worked.

"I had to finish that book. I just had to do it," said Stevens.

Back to the martial arts

Rich Vience also had unfinished business high on his list. College, the Army Reserve, then family life and volunteer firefighting displaced his commitment to the martial arts. In February 2007, the Massapequa father of four returned to the discipline 40 years later, just weeks before he turned 60.

"I'd always remembered how good it felt to be able to move my feet as easily as I move my hands, it is a very comfortable feeling that stuck with me," said Vience, 61, who runs his own information technology service business.

Sometimes fulfillment also brings lifelong closure — as Yellesphur Dathatri of Farmingdale and Maria Jimenez Tonkiss of Middle Island both discovered.

With his wife, Geetha, older brother, Jayaram, and son, Deepak, by his side, Dathatri, 59, achieved the spiritual homecoming desired by many devoted Hindus: In 2005, the family journeyed to Lake Manasarovar, and Mount Kailash in Tibet, at more than 21,000 feet, battling altitude sickness as they followed their sherpa guides to the holy site. It was an arduous and expensive expedition — at least \$3,000 per person, including airfare.

"I have all along been religious but these days it is a little more," said Dathatri, director of the Solar Energy Center at Farmingdale State College. "The moment you see the lake and the mountain, you feel that you are alone with nature. It is a lifetime experience. . . . My outlook has changed and I see everything in a different, calmer light."

Tonkiss, 74, restored wholeness to her life, too, reuniting in 2006 with her brother, Ramon, after a 17-year estrangement over a family financial matter. Fulfillment

Post-movie homework: Create a bucket list

One of the more challenging homework assignments doled out inside Wood Park Primary School in Commack in early January wasn't one for the kids.

Teachers and other staffers were asked to compile a "bucket list" of their own after seeing the film of the same name as a group, along with principal Michelle Collison.

The adults had seen how students had responded to a recent "bucket-filling" exercise they were instructed to do in class and thought they would try something like that themselves.

Like any good homework, it provoked thought. Neither Susan Brandel of East Northport nor Shelly Atlas of Jericho had really given much thought to such a list before the outing, but now, it seems, few of the 20 who went on the outing

has since held an empty bucket.

"I'd like to spend even more time with family and friends," said Brandel, 53, a school secretary. "And volunteer, maybe at a soup kitchen or a hospice."

"There are so many places in the world I'd like to visit," said Atlas, 51, a second-grade teacher. "I'm also looking at life now, not wanting to rush through things."

A trip to Australia appealed to another school secretary, Linda Rotoli, 61, of Hauppauge. She also promised herself she'd finally learn to swim this summer.

Moved by the friendship between the film's dying protagonists, second-grade teacher Mary Fazio, 60, said appreciation of her own relationships has deepened, particularly with grown children living out of town.

"I am not one for travel," she said, "but I want to be with my family as much as I can."

Another second-grade teacher, Mona DeMarco of Commack, rolled those two list items into one: "I want to take a cruise with my family and extended family while we are all still young enough," said DeMarco, 49. "And that will happen."

Content at being well traveled, reading teacher Leslie Davis seeks no major journeys. In fact, Davis, 62, of Commack, said her list has been with her for years. It was penned by Ralph Waldo Emerson and includes these simple wishes: "To laugh often, to win the respect and affection of children . . . to know even one life has breathed easier because of having lived."

— CARYN EVE MURRAY

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NEWSDAY PHOTO / KEN SPENCER

The clubhouse at Islip Landing is nearing completion. There are 67 market-rate condos earmarked for buyers 55 and over in the complex.

HABITATS / Islip Landing

Where: Maya Circle, off Eastview Drive, in Central Islip, 631-297-8008 (on-site sales office)

What: A new, market-rate, condominium development that has earmarked 67 of its 223 units for buyers 55 years and older. The complex encompasses more than 22½ acres, with the age-restricted housing located on nearly 7 acres across the street from the development's non-age-restricted units. The complex opened in January 2007, but is still under construction.

How much: Prices for age-restricted units range from \$305,000 for a second-floor, 1,100-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath unit with a study and a laundry room to \$379,000 for an 1,800-square-foot town house with two bedrooms, each with its own full bathroom, a powder room, laundry room and one-car garage, according to Russell Mohr, vice president of sales and marketing at Benjamin Development Co. Inc., the developer. Combined monthly homeowners' association and common charges range from \$175 to \$293.

What you get: Services include grounds upkeep, landscaping, snow removal and roving security personnel. In-unit amenities include central air-conditioning, vaulted ceilings, skylights, full-size washing machine and dryer (or stacked laundry appliances) and dishwasher. Heating and cooking facilities use gas. Unsold units also have upgrades, including hardwood floors on the first floor,

granite countertops, stainless-steel appliances, recessed lighting, wood molding and upgraded plumbing fixtures and maple cabinets. Communal facilities for all residents consist of a two-story, 8,000-square-foot clubhouse featuring an elevator, lounge, multipurpose room with billiard and card tables, a fitness room with exercise machines, a stoveless kitchen and men's and women's showers. Outdoors, there's a heated pool, a patio area and four gazebos.

Getting around: A car is necessary; the development is about a quarter-mile from a shopping center that includes Target and Home Depot. The Central Islip railroad station is slightly less than a mile from the housing complex. **Getting in:** Thirty-eight age-restricted condos already have been sold; 19 more are available for immediate occupancy, and the remaining 10 age-restricted units are slated for completion in April.

Pros: Conveniently located and upscale, with many recreational amenities. Pets are allowed.

Cons: Because the development is brand new, the extent of social activities is unknown. The units do not have intercom systems, which means second-floor residents must go down steps to the front door to open it.

The inside line: The development is on a site that was part of the now-defunct Central Islip Psychiatric Center.

— CARA S. TRAGER

Fulfilling 'bucket list' dreams

DOING from B6

of that dream came unexpectedly after someone sent Ramon Jimenez a copy of the book "Adelante: Achieving the American Dream," which his sister, a retired Spanish teacher, had written about their mother's life. He phoned from his Florida home, and soon, the widow and her kid brother were as in sync with one another as they'd been as children in their troubled household in Island Park.

"He is my history, we grew up together and went through all of this together," she said.

Her Florida trip in July found her at the hospital where her brother was

having a coronary stent put in. The siblings made plans to travel together afterward. They would visit Tibet, which held spiritual meaning for both.

But Jimenez went into kidney failure during the procedure, she said, and on July 15 he died, barely a year after their reconciliation.

This month, when Tonkiss departs for Tibet, she will carry the hat her brother was rarely without.

"I am going to wear his fedora in Tibet, on the rooftop of the world. And then maybe the emptiness in my heart will be filled. Maybe then I will feel some peace."

And when she fulfills that last item on the list, it will be as much for her brother as for herself.

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