

What are the editorial pages all about?
Who writes editorials?
How do letters and guest columns get published?
This week's pages offer some answers to our readers.
We thank The Riverdale Press for the idea.

Opinion pages

Finding higher meaning in Sept. 11

I remember driving west on Park Avenue in Long Beach with my then 1 1/2-year-old daughter tucked in her car seat behind me. It was midday, and the sun shone so brightly. There was a break between the buildings, and through it I could peer toward the destruction.

A plume of white smoke billowed out of lower Manhattan in the distance. It was like a giant ribbon stretching to the heavens. "My God!" I said to myself. I realized nothing would ever be the same.

It was Sept. 11, 2001. Earlier, 19 hijackers had flown two airliners into the World Trade Center, and the twin towers had crashed to the ground, killing 3,000 people. I will never forget the moment that I first encountered that smoke line, marring an otherwise perfect azure sky.

My wife, at work as a middle school teacher, was released from her duties, and we met up on a side street in Lawrence. I could see the fear and horror in her eyes. We exchanged cars. We realized we had no cell service. I told her that everything would be OK. I wondered whether that was true.

My wife drove our daughter back to our Long Beach apartment, and I went to work. Soon afterward, I arrived at the Herald's Lawrence office (which burned down in a freak accident three years later). From there I took dictation from reporters who had been dispatched to train stations along the Babylon and Far Rockaway branches of the Long Island Rail Road. They were speaking with survivors who had hurried out of Manhattan, white ash and sweat coating their dark business suits. They poured out of the trains like frightened war victims.

I worked until 3 a.m. the next day to produce a paper. I



SCOTT BRINTON

remember stepping out of the office onto the empty sidewalk on Central Avenue around midnight and staring into the black sky. I heard F-16 fighter jets streaking overhead. They flew so low, but I couldn't see them.

I felt drained and hollow. I was unprepared for the sense of sorrow that I — and the nation — would feel in the coming years.

I reported on 13 funerals and memorial services in the months after Sept. 11, training my camera's telephoto lens on the grieving family members and friends of victims. I hated shooting photos of those in such deep mourning. Now, though, my sense is that those pictures are an important part of the history of that terrible time. They are documents that tell us about the price of terrorism. They show us, in no uncertain terms, why we must, as a nation, work toward world peace.

As so often has been said, we must "never forget."

That's why I'm ambivalent about President Obama's new National Day of Service and Remembrance, to be marked annually on Sept. 11. Part of me would like Sept. 11 to remain simply a day to remember the dead, those we lost in a horrible act of inhumanity. On the other hand, part of me would like to rewind history, to return to Sept. 10, 2001, when all seemed right with the world, before mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, friends and acquaintances were killed in as far-fetched a plan as any-

one could ever concoct.

Critics have said that to make Sept. 11 a day of service will take away from remembering those we lost. We will forget the meaning of the day, and Sept. 11 will blend into all the other days of the year. We will rewind history by erasing the devastation — both physical and psychic — from our memories.

Proponents of the service day say it will pay homage to the dead by remembering — and reviving — the kindness, the human spirit, that Sept. 11 evoked in the nation at that brief moment in time. Our local fire departments had more volunteers lining up to battle the blazes that raged at ground zero that day than were actually needed. Emergency workers of all stripes stayed long past their shifts to restore order. Random acts of kindness abounded. We wore American flags on our lapels and flew them in front of our homes. It was a moment when partisan rancor dissolved before our eyes. We were united as a nation, under God.

I see both sides of the service-day argument, and agree with both.

My sincerest hope is that we Americans can understand to one another, not just on Sept. 11, but on all days, and that someday, somehow, we can make friends with the rest of the world once and for all.

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Opinion columns

Each week, we publish two pages of opinion in addition to the editorial page. Most of these pages are devoted to the columns of our three weekly contributors, Randi Kreiss, the former editor of the Nassau Herald, Scott Brinton, the senior editor of the Bellmore and Merrick Heralds, and our newest addition, former United States Senator Alfonse D'Amato. Our writers come from diverse backgrounds and from different points of the political spectrum. Their columns reflect their own opinions on topical issues. The newspaper does not select the topics on which columnists opine, and their publication is not an endorsement of the positions they espouse.

Special features

Other items will also appear on our editorial and op-ed pages, including the "Framework" feature that showcases creative work by the Herald's photo staff, which, we hope, brightens the page and your week.

We also make mistakes, despite our best efforts. We strive to correct them as soon as possible with a correction or clarification notice on these pages, the most prominent in the paper after page 1.

Letters to the editor

Because community opinions are so important to us, we publish virtually all letters we receive.

This policy, of course, can bring problems with it. Some letters may seem silly, dull or poorly written, but we believe you should have the chance to read them anyway; they are voices from our shared community. Letters may also be tasteless, racist or sexist, but we believe they should be published too. We cannot pretend that such attitudes do not exist; if we are to fight them, we must meet them head-on. We believe deeply that the remedy to "bad" speech is more speech, not censorship.

Vituperative attacks on local people or institutions pose a more complicated problem. The laws governing libel apply to letters to the editor with the same force as anything else we publish. Both the letter writer and this newspaper can be held accountable for heedlessly damaging a reputation. Public figures like politicians have less protection from outraged opinion than do private citizens. Robust public debate must take precedence over our feelings and the sensitivities of those who have entered the public arena.

We do not publish anonymous letters. Letters must be signed and include a daytime phone number and an address, so we can verify that a letter is genuine. Phone numbers and full addresses will not be published.

We are reluctant to publish letters from people who are unwilling to stand openly behind what they have written. We are willing to withhold the name of a letter writer on request only when the letter states a valid reason for doing so.

Within those limits, we will publish as much as we can each week, though letters will sometimes have to wait until there is enough room.

We usually refrain from commenting on letters, but in certain cases an "editor's note" may attempt to correct misinformation or misunderstanding.

LETTERS

dren get the shots. Now Obama is bringing the 9/11 terrorists to New York for a criminal trial that could threaten our security.

What could our president possibly do next? He'll probably give the terrorists citizenship and free health insurance.

STEVE GROGAN
Lynbrook

Why do cops hide?

To the Editor:

When I was a youngster in the 1940s and 1950s, I noticed that when my father drove on highways, he often spotted cops on motorcycles hiding behind billboards to trap speeders and ticket them. To this day, I notice that cops are still doing the same thing.

I drive 26 miles each way on the Belt Parkway from Nassau County to work in Brooklyn, and nowadays cops park their cars on the grass at right angles to traffic, aim their radar at cars to catch them and ticket them. They also park just after overpasses so you can't see them when you drive unless you look in the rearview mirror.

I've always driven at least at the highway speed and often up to 9 mph over, since it seems you're not bothered if you don't do more than that. But I've gotten

pretty good at spotting the cops when I do speed more than that. However, when I see a police car driving along with traffic, I and everyone else around slows down to the speed limit until the police car goes off an exit, and then we all resume speeding.

My question is, why do the police not stay out in the open instead of hiding and trying to entrap and ticket us? There has always been the alleged theory that com-

manding officers demand quotas of a certain number of tickets for each tour. This would seem to be true, judging by how they hide. Hiding doesn't slow traffic, but a cruising police car does.

So I ask, are cops more interested in having fewer traffic accidents by keeping drivers to the posted speed limits, or are they more interested in impressing their commanding officers, getting promoted,

getting paid more and raising money? I would hope the former, but I tend to believe in the latter. I see them hiding and giving out tickets and rarely just cruising for their shift.

STEPHEN J. SAFRAN
Woodmere

FRAMEWORK by Chevon McIntyre



Honoring veterans — Baldwin

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