

Newsday

Llife

Jackie Sanchez tends her mother's 'beloved garden' in Roosevelt.

Living legacies

10 LONG ISLANDERS SHARE THE MEMORIES BEHIND INHERITED PLANTS **E2**

act**2** | The Great Throwdini's got a knack for knives **E15**

NEWSDAY / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.

Where memories



These **10 Liers** are nurturing the legacy of planters who came before

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The botanical beauties in these pages are no garden-variety plants — they are the living legacies of gardeners gone by. Here, 10 Long Islanders describe the unique emotional journey of tending to these growing links to the past.

Catherine Hoang of Huntington

When teacher Catherine Hoang, 39, moves, she likes to say, "pack the dishes, pack the peonies":

Our peony plants are from the old family house in Pennsylvania. They are over 100 years

CATHERINE HOANG



CATHERINE HOANG

Catherine Hoang's great-grandparents Anna and Michael Kertis with peonies at their Pennsylvania home in a photo believed to be from the 1920s. The plants were brought to Long Island about 1950, eventually making their way to Hoang's Huntington home.

In this issue

"I talk to my dad when I am in his garden," Julene Wright says in today's cover story, sharing a sentiment that resonates with so many Long Islanders who tend inherited gardens and plants.

In Act 2, prepare to be amazed by the story of Long Island's own "Throwdini." Then watch the video at newsday.com/LiLife.

And check out today's Faith and Seniors calendars, which list virtual and in-person events.

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grow

old and have been moved from Pennsylvania and then house to house on Long Island. They are from my great-grandmother and came to Long Island around 1950, when my great aunt bought a house in Huntington Station. My parents moved to Greenlawn in 1969. My aunt gave them some of the peonies. In 2001, we moved to Huntington. I was in college at the time, and we dug up all the peonies and took them with us. When I got married in 2010, I dug up some and moved them to Melville. My mom died, and my dad could not live by himself anymore. So, my husband and I, and our newborn son, moved in with him back in Huntington. I dug them up in Melville and brought them "home." When I was in elementary school, my mom would cut hundreds of them and bring them to the staff and to my pediatricians. I remember humongous buckets of peonies. I have so many memories of them. That's why it's worth it for me to bring them wherever I go.

Catherine Meinhold of Brookhaven

For Catherine Meinhold, 56, a library assistant, tending the 2-acre gardens her parents, Charlie and Anne Meinhold, cultivated at their historic farmhouse has helped her deal with the grief of losing them:

My mom created a beautiful shade garden, pond and stream here in Brookhaven hamlet. I am living in the house with my family now and trying my best to keep it up. Last spring, I shed a lot of tears trying to get it back in shape. This year, it definitely feels more like "our" garden. I didn't realize how much energy and work she put into it. It's an oasis. You do what you do during the day and you come home to green. It was so much a part of who she was, both my parents really. They lived here for over 50 years. They built something

See COVER STORY on E4



Catherine Meinhold in her late parents' Brookhaven garden, which includes a stream, with her granddaughter, Charlotte Anne Castoro.

They're tending to the past



COVER STORY from E2

really special here. We didn't realize it growing up. It's a magical place. I feel my parents' presence here.

Peter Corbett of East Hampton

Peter Corbett, 41, an investor and end-of-life care volunteer, and his wife last year bought the East Hampton estate owned by handbag designer Judith Leiber and her husband, artist Gerson Leiber. The 2.16-acre property backs The Leiber Collection, a museum:

My mother is an interior designer, and my father is an architect. When my wife and I saw the property, we thought we were crazy to consider buying it. We sent the link to my parents, and they said, "you would be dumb to not buy this. You can't make this. This has been made over decades. You should reinvigorate what once was a premiere estate out there." I could see the dead wood and all the overgrowth. I was excited to get my hands dirty. I did for nine months. The property had been intricately landscaped for 60 years prior to the Leibers' passing. My wife and I have inherited such a natural bounty. It's hard to describe. Some of the plants we now care for are a 300-square-foot rose garden, a quarter-acre vegetable garden, three Japanese maples, roughly 100 rhododendrons, thousands of feet of boxwoods, privet and yews, and several climbing hydrangeas that have to be 40 years old. What a great gift.

Cindy Smith of Stony Brook

Cindy Smith, 59, who works in marketing and advertising, is in the process of moving some of her parents' Guardian Angel hosta outside her window so it feels like her late mother and father are watching over her:

I come from a family of gardeners, but that doesn't mean when you buy your house, you run to the garden center and start buying plant material. We used to say my parents' plants all had wheels on them because they would change up what was

Peter and Nicole Corbett at home, the former East Hampton estate of Judith and Gerson Leiber. ■ Video: newsday.com/LILife

“Some of the plants we now care for are a 300-square-foot rose garden, a quarter-acre vegetable garden, three Japanese maples . . . and several climbing hydrangeas that have to be 40 years old . . . What a great gift.”

— Peter Corbett



WARREN STRUGATCH

Cindy Smith was happy to landscape her new home with “castoffs” from her parents’ garden that included a Frances Williams hosta, pictured, and Guardian Angel hosta.

in the gardens all the time. When I purchased my home, I was broke but more than happy to take my parents’ garden castoffs — Alberta spruces, Hinoki cypress, hostas, crepe myrtle. I even took the landscaping rocks. I felt like the Grinch. Today, I’m so glad I did take all the plants. My dad is gone, and my mom passed in January. It’s so great to see their plants, especially the Guardian Angel hosta — the leaves look like angel wings — and a very special Exbury azalea. It was my grandmother’s, then my mom’s; then I took it, planted it and a borer got it. In an attempt to save it, I cut it way back, and it bloomed in the spring. In a way, it’s comforting to know the “family” is here making themselves known with their plant legacies.

Maureen Andersen of West Islip

Nurse Maureen Andersen, 56, says she is happy that she spotted a listing several years ago for free plants:

We answered a Craigslist ad for free plants placed by Doug, an amazing gardener. He alluded to the fact that he wanted to give the plants to people who wanted to take care of them. It turns out that he had been diagnosed with cancer and only wanted his plants to live on. We planted our whole yard with his plants and call it “Doug’s Garden.” Doug was a wonderful man, and we felt so bad when we never heard back from him after his last round of chemotherapy. His flowers and plants

bring me such joy. He gave me a tree that was literally a stick and it’s almost 4 feet. I have his daisies and coneflowers that are in bloom. The yard is lined with all his sea grass, and the gardens have his Stella D’oro day lilies. He has no idea how much those plants give me joy to go out there and see them.

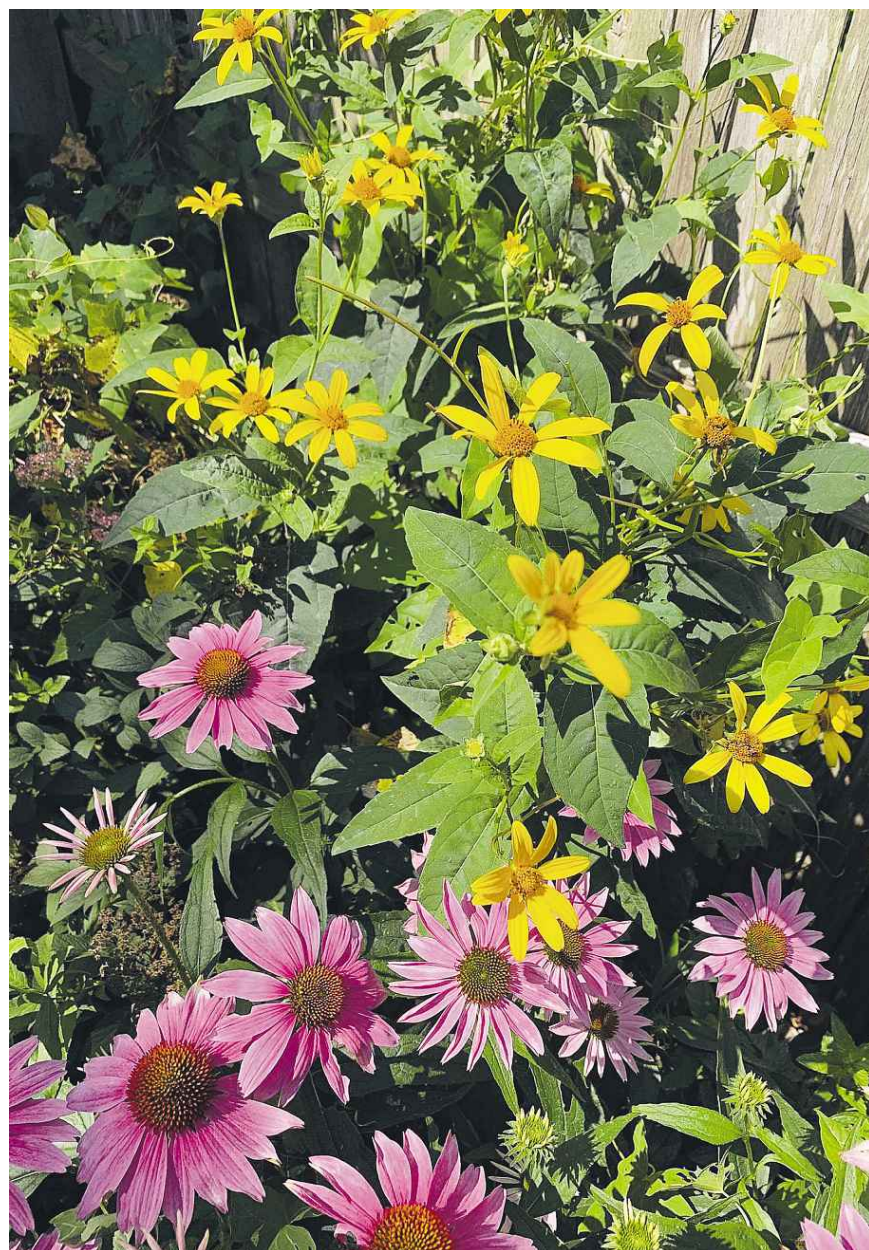
Jackie Sanchez of Roosevelt

Makeup artist Jackie Sanchez, 56, still lives in her childhood home. Her mother planted most of the garden, but one plant came from a legendary novelist:

My mother did a lot of the landscaping herself. I remember her being up on the ladder shaping bushes with her elec-

tric hedge trimmer every summer. She added topiary bushes in front that complement the structure of the house. In a neighborhood of look-alike split-level homes, having a garden with shaped topiaries, including tall ball and pom-pom styles, really makes the landscape stand out. I love maintaining my mom’s beloved garden. She was very creative and had an incredible sense of style, and these bushes clearly reflect that. It makes me feel connected to her to care for the yard she loved so much. I also have a lovely sedum plant that I got from my longtime client and friend Toni Morrison. She let me clip them from the path along her driveway.

See COVER STORY on E6



MAUREN ANDERSEN

Maureen Andersen nurtures “Doug’s Garden,” so named for the plant benefactor she found on Craigslist. “His flowers and plants bring me such joy,” she says.



J.R. SWANLICK / NEWSDAY

Jackie Sanchez has keepsake sedum, which she clipped from the driveway path of longtime client and friend Toni Morrison.

ON THE COVER. Jackie Sanchez lives in her childhood home in Roosevelt where she is surrounded by and cares for the gardens once planted and maintained by her mother.

Flowers powering emotion



COVER STORY from E4

Charlie Kulins of North Bellmore

Charlie Kulins, 57, who works in IT at a university, cherishes the flowers — and the paintings of them — that came from a North Shore estate he helped his father garden as a kid:

I have an Oriental poppy that lived on an estate in Laurel Cove once owned by a person who loved to paint still lifes. My father was the gardener on that estate, and the owner gave him the poppy when they were repurposing part of the land. My father took it to our family home in Hempstead, where he replanted it, and then to our new garden when we moved North Bellmore. When I was younger, I would help my father on the weekends. I would cut flowers from the garden and bring them to the owner to paint. She would say, "OK, today we're painting," and we would have to gather those flowers and she would paint them. I have two paintings of the poppies. They were given to me by the painter's husband after she died. I cherish the plant and the paintings with fond memories of the people, too.

Julene Wright of Amityville

Julene Wright, 66, a retired state employee, has named her garden to honor her late father, a carpenter who built homes on Long Island:

I named the garden "King Arthur's Garden" because my dad referred to himself as King Arthur. He would always say, "I am the king of my castle, and my name is King Arthur." My father's name was Hugh Arthur. I started the garden in the spring of 2013. My father passed away in November 2012. He lived a street away. I took all kinds of plants from his garden — hibiscus, canna lilies, elephant ears, cockscomb, Spanish bluebells, yellow gladiators, Scarlet Bugler and more. After he retired, he would spend a lot of time in his garden. He would call me to see it to get my approval. We would spend hours talking about his garden and the different plants that he should buy. We also traded plants. I feel very warm inside because it is some-

Charlie Kulins cherishes the still lifes of poppies given to him by the painter's husband after she died. The paintings and the flowers, below — transplanted from the painter's Cove Neck estate — now live at Kulins' home in North Bellmore after a stint in Hempstead.



I would cut flowers from the garden and bring them to the owner to paint."

— Charlie Kulins



thing that we both love. I talk to my dad when I am in his garden. I think of all the good times that we had together over the years. He was amazing.

Diane Gutierrez of Northport

For Diane Gutierrez, 63, a school secretary, mowing her lawn has become a new joy:

My husband, Joe, and I were married for 42 years before he passed away in November 2019. I took care of the inside housekeeping while he took care of all our yard work. When springtime of 2020 rolled around, we were deep in COVID quarantine, making me hesitant to have anyone come in to take care of what had become my yard. So, I pulled out our old clicky-clack scissor mower to see if I could manage the lawn myself. Much to my surprise, outdoor work is something I enjoy tremendously. I think this is due, in large part, to how much he loved our property — remembering when Joe planted the bulbs that bloom in springtime, how he replaced a tree with our new little maple, when he created my backyard “bird-watching garden” and so much more. It keeps me connected with him in a very special way as I walk in his footsteps and tend to the yard he loved.



Julene Wright in “King Arthur’s Garden,” which is named in honor of her father, whose transplants — including hibiscus — thrive there.

BARRY SLOAN

Puneeta Mittal of Glen Cove

Puneeta Mittal, 54, an artist, built her garden with plants from her mentor, the late ceramist Betty Busby, a native of Oyster Bay:

She not only taught me and others love of clay and making functional ceramics for the table, but shared her love of life, family, joy of cooking, baking and gardening. From the time she got up till she went to bed, she tended to her garden, home and studio with a steadfastness and loving firm hand while being involved in community programs. Before she moved to Connecticut in 2005, Betty offered to share her beautiful plants with her “claygirls” — a few of us took the plants and transplanted them in our gardens. Betty’s plants continue to thrive not only in our garden, but with family and friends in Oyster Bay, Huntington, Cornwall Bridge, Connecticut, and elsewhere. I remember and cherish my friendship with Betty every day in the things I do and the plants I watch blooming and growing in our garden. We hope to give them the same tender loving care in our garden and will divide them further as they grow.



Diane Gutierrez has discovered tremendous enjoyment and connection to her late husband by caring for the yard he loved.



Puneeta Mittal brings “tender loving care” to the plants given to her by an artist-mentor whose lessons went beyond clay-making.

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NEWSDAY, SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2021

BARRY SLOAN