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In My Own Shoes: Raise your hand up and be a tourist

By Rona Mann Special to The Sun Apr 9, 2022 0



If you live in Westerly and have never been to the Babcock-Smith House, the Granite Theatre, or toured the Westerly Armory, raise your hand.

If you live in Stonington, and you've never been to the Lighthouse Museum, the Stonington Historical Society, or taken in a performance at La Grua, raise your hand.

And if you live in Hopkinton, and never discovered the Tomaquag Museum, hiked through the Arcadia Management Area to Stepstone Falls, or visited Camp Yawgoog, raise your hand.

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Okay, put your hands down and stop muttering, "But I always meant to." Truth is, most of us are guilty, even if we were born here, even if we packed school lunches for kids who did take these field trips.

About two weeks ago I had an event to attend at 5 p.m. Prior to that, I needed to deliver something to the Southern Rhode Island Volunteers office located in the senior center at Ninigret Park in Charlestown. Now, I've been to Ninigret on many an occasion in the 35-plus years I've lived in these parts. I've come to the park numerous times to attend the Big Apple Circus, for years I've eaten myself silly at the Charlestown Seafood Festival; stomped my feet and clapped my hands at Rhythm and Roots and other extravaganzas, but that was it. There's a whole other side to this park! Just keep driving past the Frosty Drew Observatory (stop in, if you've never been, and touch the sky) and keep following the signs for the senior center around and around; and just when you think you might have gone the wrong way, you'll see a large and well-constructed dog park on your right. If Fido isn't accompanying you on this jaunt, keep going just a little further, and shortly you will be in the parking lot for the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge. What a wondrous place! A place of salt marshes, kettle ponds, wetlands, 250 species of birds, and a choice of a number of walking trails. I chose two of them, marveled at the views, stopped and read the signposts along the way detailing a history I never knew, and so appreciated the peacefulness of the place.

Originally used for farming way back even before the Revolution, during World War II it became a Naval Auxiliary Air Station (called the Atlantic Airport), a satellite to Quonset. One of the signposts even tells you that if you're reading this, you're standing on what was the runway. The 900 acres are maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and if you're looking for new roads to travel near home that don't guzzle every drop of gas in your tank, here's a perfect place.



Our area is a whole lot more than just the beaches. It is a fantastic place to poke around in and be thoroughly amazed at finding folks whose families go back many generations. You can learn about the slave trade, the underground railroad, and so much more simply by stopping at one of our greatest treasures, the Westerly Library, where there are people completely schooled in history who would just love to transfer some of their knowledge and passion to you. And it's FREE!

About 10 or 12 years ago, my husband and I decided to take a day trip to Boston as "tourists." Even though Boston was his birthplace, he had no idea of all that rich history because his school didn't take field trips and his family didn't have the money to do so. It may be the best money you'll ever spend. Take a train so you don't have to drive and worry about parking, then invest in a one-day ticket on the Old Town Trolley where you can get on and off as many times as you wish to spend time at any one of 18 stops wherever your interest is piqued. Everything from the USS Constitution to Faneuil Hall, the Old State House, Back Bay, the Prudential Center, the Bull and Finch Pub (the model for TV's "Cheers") ... it's all there.

If you're more of a homebody and prefer to stay local, do so, but take a good look around at all we have in our area free for the exploring. Then open your eyes, raise your hand way up, and be proud to be a tourist in a place so rich in history and resources. Love where you live.

Come on, now ... raise your hand!

Rona Mann has been a freelance writer for The Sun for 20 years, including her "In Their Shoes" features. She can be reached at six07co@att.net or 401-539-7762.



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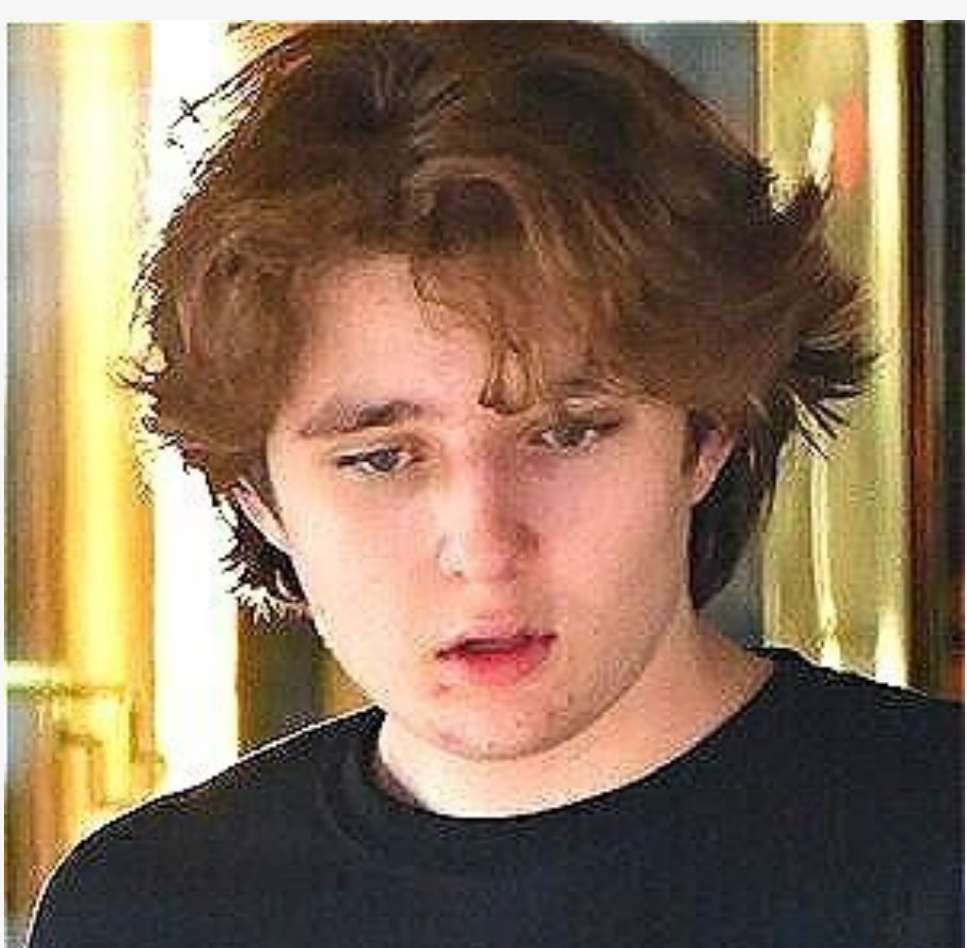
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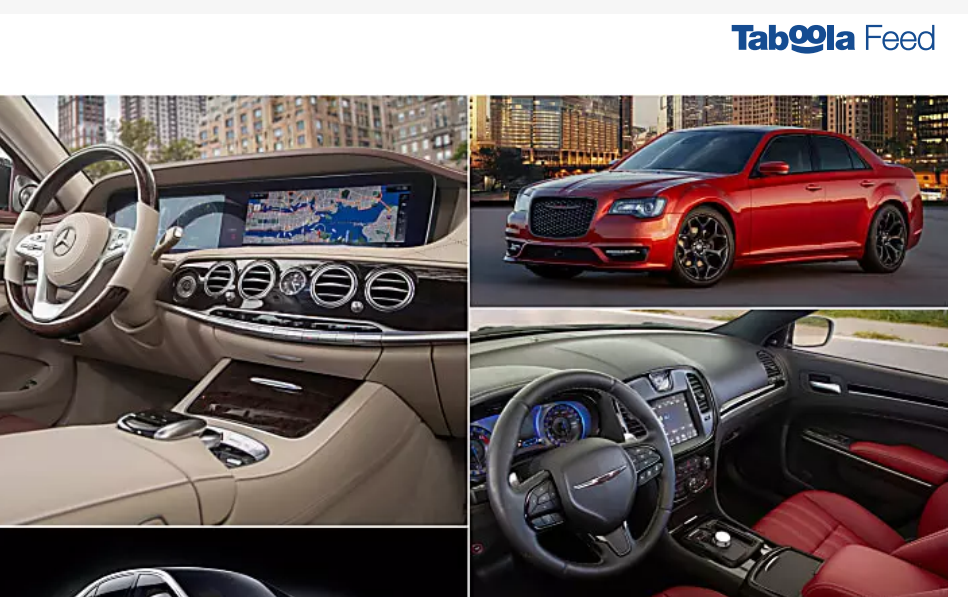
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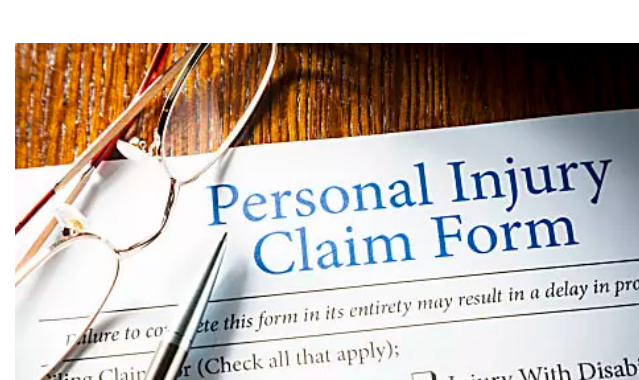
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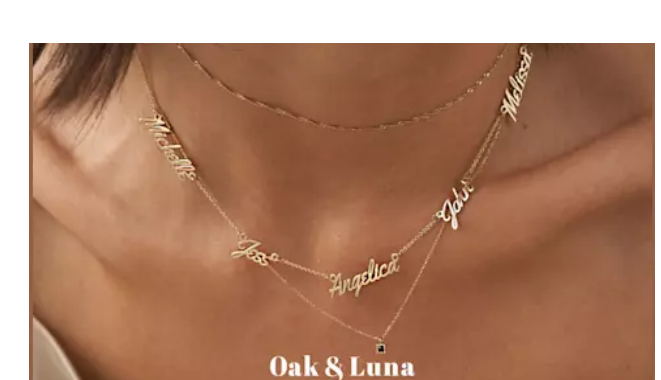
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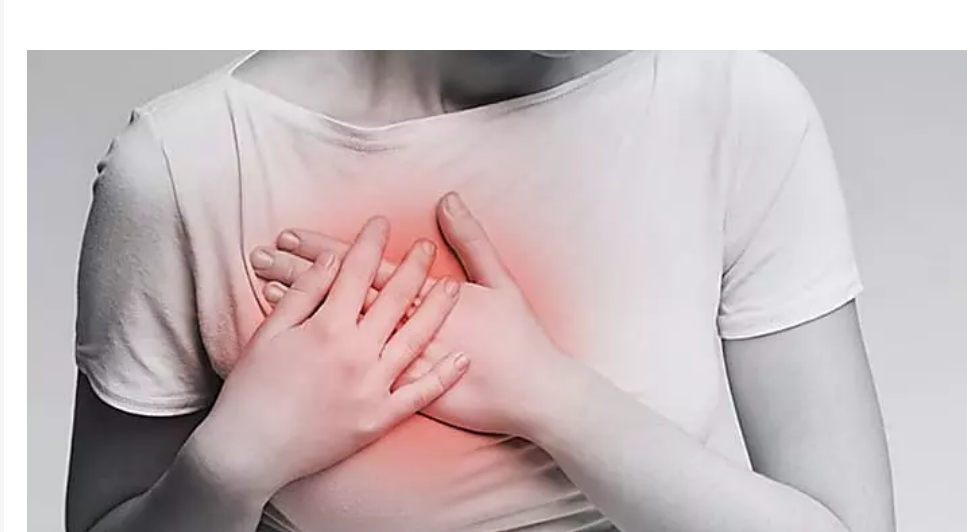
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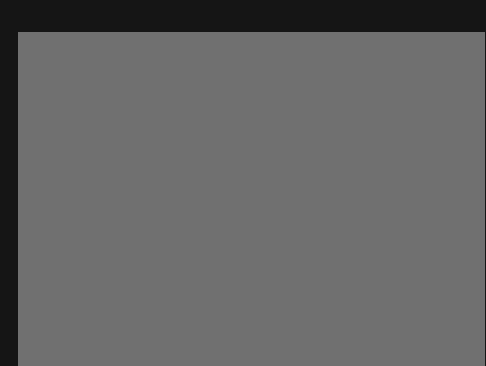
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