# South End News

April 17, 2025 [Vol. 43, No. 15]

## for and about Boston's

best neighborhood

**LOCAL NEWS** 

#### **EDITORIAL**

## **FKR & BLM Have Much In Common**

Justice Concerns Could Unite Unlikely Allies

> BY SUE OCONNELL Co-Publisher

They emerge from different communities, with different backgrounds and political leanings.

Yet these two American movements share striking similarities in their core grievances.

Both distrust official narratives from law enforcement. Both point to evidence they believe has been tampered with or mishandled. Both suspect investigations have been designed to protect insiders rather than uncover truth. Both question whether institutions can legitimately investigate themselves. Both have built grassroots communities through social media,



Photos via Unsplash

circumventing traditional information gatekeepers.

And both have faced dismissal from authorities who seem more interested in discrediting their

concerns than addressing them One might reasonably assume these parallel movements would

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## 'Her Portmanteau' Unpacks **Family Tensions in Powerful Ufot Cycle Installment**



Lorraine Victoria Kanyike, Patrice Jean-Baptiste, and Jade A. Guerra in the Central Square Theater and Front Porch Arts Collective staging of Her Portmanteau. Photo by Maggie Hall Photography.

By Jules Becker Contributing Writer

Mfoniso Udofia is a playwright whose intriguing Ufot Cycle is proving as challenging to Boston area theaters as the family on which it

focuses. Raised in Massachusetts and educated at Wellesley College and the American Theatre Conservatory, the Nigerian-American dra-

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## **Ellis Early LearningNames Rosa Turco Its First Director of Evaluation, Educational Excellence**

SUBMITTED BY ELLIS EARLY LEARNING

Ellis Early Learning has announced the appointment of Rosa Guzman Turco as its first Director of Evaluation and Educational Excellence, a role created to further the organization's mission of advancingteacher quality and child

"An education researcher with a doctorate in human development and teaching from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Rosa brings a valuable skillset to our team," said Ellis Early Learning CEO Lauren Cook, "Rosa hasa track record of developing programs and tools that foster inclusive environ-

Continued on page 3



Rosa Guzman Turco, Ellis Early Learning Director of Evaluation and Educational Excellence. Photo courtesy of Ellis Early Learning.

## Mike's City Diner Turns 30

MIKE'S CITY DINER

Mike's City Diner, the legendary South End breakfast and lunch hotspot is turning 30. Jay Hajj opened Mike's City Diner in the South End neighborhood in 1995 and it has since become a beloved Boston institution, famous for its American diner classics, huge portions, great prices, friendly service and signature fresh-roasted turkeys.

To celebrate, from Monday May

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lay Hajj . Photo courtesy of Mike's

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#### Mike's City Diner

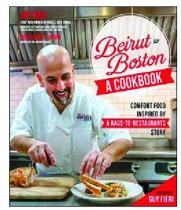
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19th through Friday May 23rd, 7 a.m.-11:30 a.m., owner Jay Hajj will turn back the price of Mike's popular "Weekday Special" to \$6.99. That's 3 eggs any style, 3 pieces bacon or sausage, grits or home fries, toast

In 1995, Bill Clinton was President, Thomas Menino was Mayor of Boston, OJ Simpson went on trial, the Internet became ubiquitous, and Jay Hajj opened Mike's City Diner. Since opening, every Boston mayor from Menino to Marty Walsh, and now Michelle Wu, has frequented the diner for breakfast meetings with the city's top officials - imagine if the walls could talk!

From the beginning, Mike's City Diner was a community gathering space and neighborhood mainstay, a favorite for police, firefighters, and doctors at nearby Boston Medical Center. Whoever you wereblack, white, rich, poor, gay, straight-you were welcome. Since then, Mike's City Diner has ingrained itself in the community and given back to the people he credits for the diner's decades of success.

Hajj represents the American dreammoving to Boston from war torn Lebanon as a child and becoming a force in the city's vibrant restaurant and real estate communities. He helped spearhead the renovation of legendary Locke-Ober into trendy Yvonne's (Mariel, Mr. H), and also rents the space for Toro tapas bar (located right next door to



'Beirut to Boston: A Cookbook: Comfort Food Inspired by a Rags-to-Restaurants Story." Photo courtesy of Mike's City Diner.

Mike's) to his now good friend Ken Oringer.

Jay is author of "From Beirutto Boston: Comfort Food Inspired by a Rags-to-Restaurants Story," an autobiographical cookbook. He is a  $frequent guest on the Food \, Network, where \, you$ can see him alongside Guy Fieri on "Guy's Big Bite," "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives" and "Guy's Grocery Games." In 2014, The Food Network named Mike's Famous Pilgrim Sandwich as one of the Five Best Thanksgiving meals in America.

"When I think of Boston I think of the tea party, I think of the sox of course, and now I think of a place called Mike's City Diner!" Says Guy Fieri.





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#### **Ellis Early Learning**

Continued from page 1

ments and drive measurable growth in children's learning, making her a perfect fit for Ellis. We are thrilled to welcome Rosa into this new role during a period of growth at Ellis."

Turco will drive the creation of a measurement, evaluation and learning system to measure the impact of Ellis's new Center of Excellence, ensuring continuous improvement and data-driven decision-making. She will develop systems and processes that assess teacher quality, child outcomes

and the broader classroom environment, recognizing that early learning is shaped by multiple, interconnected factors.

By integrating diverse data sources - ranging from child assessments to observations of instructional practices, family engagement and social-emotional supports -Turco will create a sustainable framework that not only

measures growth but also helps educators. families and policymakers understand the everyday impact of early childhood education. This work will be deeply aligned with Ellis's mission of helping all children develop the social, emotional and academic skills they need to thrive in school and in life.

Turco brings over a decade of experience as an education researcher, specializing in early

childhood education and literacy. Before joining Ellis, she was the Director of Research at National University and Director of Research and Evaluation at a software development organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for underserved communities. Turco was also a teaching fellow at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education for nearly five years. In her most recent roles, she spearheaded the development of a bilingual e-reading platform and designed and evaluated language and social-emotional learning programs.

Turco's research spans executive function

and theory of mind in bilingual preschoolers, infants' early numerical intuitions and the impact of digital media on early language and literacy development. Across these areas, her work seeks to identify the optimal ways to support young children and to capture the key features of learning environments that best foster growth for children from diverse backgrounds

and needs.

**Turco brings** 

over a decade

of experience

specializing in

early childhood

Turco also holds a master's degree in education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Wellesley College.

A Medway resident, Rosa is immersed in early childhood at Ellis and at home, which she shares with her husband and two young children, ages 1 and 3



## In remembrance of Barbara Francis Agbay Cherubini, May 14, 1939 - March 1, 2025

Barbara Francis Cherubini, a beloved mother, vife, sister, friend, entrepeneur, and philanwile, sister, litelio, entrepreneur, and philai-thropist, passed away peacefully and sur-rounded by an adoring family at her home in Florida on March 1, 2025, after a remarkable demonstration of endurance and strength in her fight against Parkinson's Disease, Barbara was the embodiment of style and grace, and

will be forever missed. Barbara was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, to Albert and Nancy Agbay, and grew up in a home filled with warmth, love, and the comforting smells of Italian and Lebanese cooking. She was the cherished sister to Judy and Albert. Their home was always full of family, friends, afternoon coffees, and beautiful dresses, all made by her mother Barbara's beloved grandmother, Giulia, was a guiding in-fluence for Barbara, instilling in her a deep sense of family values, a trieless work ethic, and a passion for feding and caring for others; all of which Barbara adopted and carried throughout her life.

Barbara's path to success began when she attended ballola's paint to success vegal when she attended catholic school followed by Regis College, where she ob-lained her degree in Home Economics and forged lasting friendships. With her strong nose and taste and entrepre-neurial spirit, Barbara worked together with perfumist Arthur

D. Little to create Wink, the original version of Fresca. On an evening out with her girlfriends at Pete's Pub in Boston, Barbara met her husband and the love of her life busion, ballotial met the Industrial to the lower in emis-julian. They were a perfect match in every sense, marrying six months after meeting. Together they created a lasting legacy and loving family. After moving to the South End, they made lifelong friends and developed an interest in real sestate, which became a lifelong passion for the two of them. Julian and Barbara were ever the complement to one an-other, particularly in their joint work in founding AliMed, a company born from their shared vision to 'help people help people' in 1970. While Julian leveraged his multiple degrees to rethink ways in which to address the needs of caregivto retnink ways in which to accress the needs or calegiv-ers and patients, Barbara implemented a family-business mindset and spent many late nights stuffing envelopes with mailers and stitching tabs onto knee braces. After growth in their business moved the company out of their living room and into a downstairs office in the South End, AliMed con-tinued to grow with the ongoing dedication and devotion from Julian and Barbara, and ultimately moved to Dedham,

on Julian and ababara, and unimately moved to be the mploying over 200 individuals.

Together, Julian and Barbara raised their beloved daug rs, Nicole and Alexandra. As a mother, Barbara was constant source of love, support, and guidance. While continuing to work with Julian in their real estate endeavors and in growing AliMed, she created a home where family came first, just as her mother and grandmother had done before her. Through the unconditional love and support Barbara provided antonintinian over and support partial provided to Alexandra and Nicole, she passed on her work ethic, entrepreneurial spirit, fashion sense, sew-ing lessons, and food infused with love and joy. She taught them both to truly savor their lives of

fered, seeking pleasure in all they chose to do.

Barbara lived life to the fullest. She loved to host partites, spend meaningful time with family and friends, and took many memorable trips. Travel was one of her greatest joys, and of all the places she visited, Morocco, its incredible history of craft and its exceptional cuisine held a special

tole instory of craft and its exceptional clusten ened a special place in her heart. She deeply enjoyed the arts, a passion she passed on to her grandchildren, Malachi and Roma, who have both pursued and excelled in this arena.

Her love of fashion was constantly on display, and she forever looked fabulous curating elegant and timeless ensembles. Barbara loved boxing and ballroom dancing, taksemines, Bartoara lovee doxing and barroom darring, rak-ing lessons well-into the late stages of her life. After receiv-ing her Parkinson's diagnosis in the early 2000s, Barbara continued on with her inflectious joy for life, never letting the disease define her. Instead, she became a dedicated sup-porter of the Michael J. Fox Foundation and their remarkable efforts to find a cure for Parkinson's. In addition Barbara founded the Barbara and Julian Cherubini Foundation which among other causes has focused on neurological research and advancement through the Fox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital. Barbara's resil-ience, kindness, and generosity of spirit remained unwavering. She was forever a beacon of love and strength. always ready to offer help to those in need.

Barbara is survived by her daughters, Alexandra and Ni-cole Agbay Cherubini, her grandchildren, Malachi Bosch and Roma Josephine Cherubini Purcell, and her son-in-law, Ca-nillo Alvarez. Her legacy of love, joy, and determination will live on in all who were fortunate enough to have had their lives enriched by knowing her. She will forever be remembered as a woman of style, grace, brilliance, determination, and extraordinary strength, and she will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of sharing in her remarkable life. A party in celebration of Barbara's life will be held in Boston on Sunday, June 8th, 2025. For more information,

please contact cherubinimemorial@gmail.com.
In lieu of flowers, gifts may be made to The Michael J. Fox Foundation in memory of Barbara Cherubini Donations can be sent to The Michael J. Fox Foundation in Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research at 111 West 33rd Street, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10001, or via michaelifox.org/donate.

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Teresa Polhemus, Executive Director/Secretary

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recognize their common ground. Yet supporters of Karen Read and Black Lives Matter activists often view each other as occupying oppositeends of America's divided landscape.

At first glance, these groups might seem

worlds apart. But dig deeper, and you'll find their core concerns spring from the same well: distrust of law enforcement and fears about systemic iustice failures.

The Karen Read case has captivated Massachusetts and beyond since Boston police officer John O'Keefe was found dead in 2022. His girlfriend, Karen Read, is charged with second-degree murder,

leaving the scene of a deadly accident, and manslaughter after allegedly striking O'Keefe with her vehicle. She has pleaded not guilty, claiming she is the victim of a law enforcement conspiracy. Her previous trial ended with a hung jury and her re-trial is underway.

Read's supporters argue she's been railroaded by a corrupt system protecting its own. They allege that there is missing evidence, inconsistent testimonies, and investigation irregularities that suggest a cover-up.

Sound familiar? These are precisely the concerns that galvanized the Black Lives Matter movement: allegations of evidence tampering, officers protecting each other, and investigations that seem designed to reach

predetermined conclusions rather than uncover truth.

Both movements fundamentally question whether our justice system can fairly investigate itself. When police investigate potential misconduct by fellow officers whether in a suspicious death case like Read's or in police violence cases central to BLM -the same troubling question emerges: Who watches the

watchers?

Both

question

whether our

justice system

can fairly

Critics may dismiss Read supporters as conspiracy theorists or BLM activists as antipolice, but this misses their shared, legitimate concern: justice systems work only when accountability applies equally to everyone, including those within the system.

The parallels don't stop at critiques. Both

movements have leveraged social media to circumvent traditional information gatekeepers, building grassroots communities united by skepticism toward official narratives. Both have faced dismissal from authorities who seem more interested in discrediting their concerns than addressing them.

Of course, significant differences exist between these movements in scale, demographics, and historical context. But their common thread - demanding transparency when power investigates itself - transcends political divides.

Perhaps there's an opportunity here.

If Americans from different political backgrounds can recognize their shared interest in accountable institutions, we might find common ground in reforming systems to restore trust.

Because ultimately, a justice system that works fairly for everyone benefits us all - regardless of which specific case brought us to that realization.

Sue O'Connell is the editor of South End News and a commentator for NBC10 Boston. She appears regularly on "Canton Confidential: The Karen Read Murder Trial" nightly at 7 pm on NBC10 and Peacock. Follow O'Connell on social media: @suenbcboston



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### Portmanteau

Continued from page 1

matist has tapped into her own background as well as her family's in nine plays being staged locally through next year - beginning with "Sojourners" and "The Grove," already handsomely produced by Huntington Theatre. The fourth play in the cycle - "Her Portmanteau" (the third "runboyrun" has been heard on a podcast) - is receiving a strong co-production by Central Square Theater and the Front Porch Arts Collective.

Although each of the plays in the cycle can be regarded as individual efforts, "Her Portmanteau" absorbingly develops the stories of characters first introduced in "Sojourners" and "The Grove." As with Udofia's own family, the Ufots immigrate to Houston, Texas in the 1970's (1978 in the first play) and move to Worcester in the second (here in 2009). Centering on family reunion, confrontation and possible reconciliation, "Her Portmanteau" brings together conflicted mother Abasiama Ufot and her two very different daughters with different fathers -gay New York-based Adiaha (meaning eldest in the Nigerian language Ibibio) and Nigeria-raised Iniabasi Ekpeyong, Iniabasi proves the pivotal character as her visit at Adiaha's homey apartment (well detailed and colorfully set by designer Shelley Barish) becomes a war of words with seething resentments involving the halfsisters and their Worcester-based mother.

While "Her Portmanteau" may sometimes seem less vocally showy than its predecessors, Udofia's disarming drama ends up offering timely insights about family understanding and love as well as respect for cultural differences. The plays clever title can have as much to do with Abasiama's emotional baggage as with her mother's connection to the daughter's red suitcase and telling photos she brings on her visit. Abasiama speaks of



Lorraine Victoria Kanyike, Patrice Jean-Baptiste. Photo by Maggie Hall Photography

her own son Kufre - the subject of the fifth play in the cycle "Kufre n' Quay" - expected to be staged this coming July. As in the earlier plays, the characters speak a fair amount of Ibibio-especially in heated exchanges. Some theatergoers may wish that the companies staging Udofia's plays would provide translating surtitles or playbill explanations of the gist of these conversations. Even so-particularly as characters respond in English - audience members are likely to discern the nuances of such exchanges.

Under Tasia A. Jones' thoughtful direction, the play's journey from initial misunderstanding and emotional distance to potential common ground is vividly portrayed by the coproduction's talented cast. Jade A. Guerra finds all of Iniabasi's early contentiousness and puzzlement as well as her gradual softening towards her welcoming sister and her conflicted Adiaha's ongoing outreach to her sister while never losing sight of the character's complicated relationship with her mother. Patrice Jean-Baptiste catches Abasiama's tenacity as well as her vulnerability in searching for full understanding from her daughters. Costume designer Chloe Moore artfully reflects the degrees to which the characters' clothes demonstrate their respective attitudes about American and Nigerian cultural differences.

mother. Lorraine Victoria Kamvike captures

As with the title suitcase, "Her Portmanteau" could do with a careful examination by the playwright - especially to pack more detail about the sisters' respective challenges regarding work and life. Still, the plays staged thus far from the Ufot Cycle establish Udofia as a significant voice - one that is adding an important measure of excitement to the Boston theater scene.



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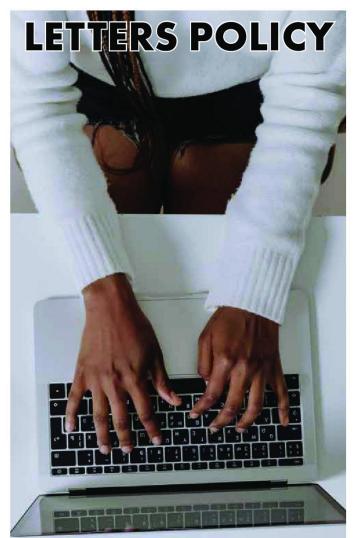


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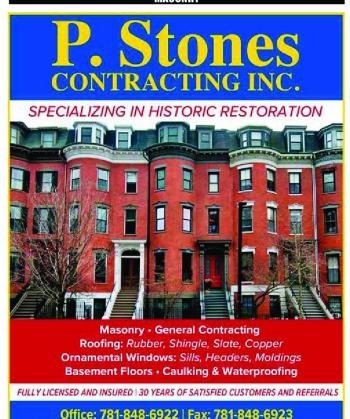
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