

FREE NEWSPAPER

# The Observer

THE OFFICIAL STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF BRISTOL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

February 2017, Issue 36

## THE RESILIENCE ISSUE

Stories of Perseverance by BCC students, past and present



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## The Holocaust Center Remembers the Life of Abraham W. Landau



Photo by Denisse Pumagualle

by Denisse Pumagualle  
[dpumagualle11@bristolcc.edu](mailto:dpumagualle11@bristolcc.edu)  
Editor-in-Chief

On a rainy Tuesday morning this past November, BCC students, faculty and staff—and some locals—congregated at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, to discover the story of the late Abraham W. Landau as told in *Branded on My Arm and in My Soul: A Holocaust Memoir*, published by Spinner Publications ([www.spinner-pub.com](http://www.spinner-pub.com)).

BCC's Holocaust Center and Spinner Publications co-sponsored the lecture and shared information about

the book, the author, and the importance of learning and remembering the Holocaust, so that history does not repeat itself.

"It is a great story of human survival, but it is also a great historical lesson and documentation of the events that were the Holocaust," said Joseph Thomas, the book's publisher and co-editor (with Marsha L. McCabe and Jay Avila).

Landau lived his last 50 years in New Bedford, after surviving 13 camps. Landau was born in Poland on 1922. By 1939, the German army invaded Poland. Landau was only 17-years-old when he started his un-

fortunate path through concentration camps.

"I thought Abe's story was unusually profound because of all the camps he survived [13 in total] and because his journey really confirms so many of the stories of the Death Marches, the camps, and the ghettos in Poland... He [Landau] talked about being on the train cars for days, standing up. People were dropping dead. The tall guys were first to collapse and then everyone started to rise because they were standing on top of the dead bodies," Thomas recounted.

To survive the Holocaust, Landau pretended to be a much younger boy,

which everyone believed him due to his small frame. He used his knowledge of the German language to befriend some of the soldiers. His father was a tailor and Landau, an orphan while in the camps, had learned the basics of that trade, and put it to good use in order to stay alive.

Landau had done a series of interviews before going to Thomas in 1993 for assistance editing his transcripts. "He spoke broken English and he wanted to share his story. He wanted help to make it as clear as possible," said Thomas. The project wasn't started until the early 2000s. The book was published almost 12 years later.

Landau recounted his return home in his Holocaust memoir: "*We walked around Warsaw for a couple of days and went to see the ruin of the Warsaw Ghetto. In the cemetery, the ground was still fresh from the blood of the thousands who had lost their lives. Nothing had healed; everything was still new and raw. People were crying and looking for relatives.*"

For more information about The Holocaust Center's upcoming events contact Ron Weisberger at [ron.weisberger@bristolcc.edu](mailto:ron.weisberger@bristolcc.edu) or at 508-678-2811 ext. 2444.



## The Observer

### Editors

Editor-in-Chief..... Denisse Pumagualle  
 Managing Editor ..... Brian Casey

### Staff Writers

Brian Casey, Denisse Pumagualle

### Student Contributors

Juan Llerena-Arias, Jesse Boncek, Lucy Matias

### Alumna Contributor

Crystal Hughes

### Copyediting

Denisse Pumagualle

### Layout & Design

Brian Casey, Denisse Pumagualle

### Photography & Editing

Brian Casey, Luce Cabral, Kris Motta,  
 Denisse Pumagualle, Katelyn Silvia

### Faculty Adviser..... Tracy Furtado-Chagas

Printing ..... TCI Press

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## Letter from the Editor



Photo by Denisse Pumagualle

by Denisse Pumagualle  
 Editor-in-Chief  
 dpumagualle11@bristolcc.edu

Welcome to another issue of *The Observer*.

The Spring semester has started, and the year 2017 has begun. Classes, internships, research papers, presentations and essays are about to fill up your calendars. Nevertheless, I suggest you take a moment from all the hectic distractions of working, student life and regular life, and take some time to reflect on what last year brought for each and every one of you. Hopefully, you got to reach all of your goals. If you haven't, don't worry at all. Just keep on working on a better you at your own pace, and don't forget to utilize the college resources that are available to you.

I hope you enjoy our February issue. We all have stories to share. In this, *The Resilience Issue*, we share stories from three BCC students and an alumna.

One is a story on childhood recollections of a writing journey. There's a story about never giving up on your dreams of seeking higher education. A student also shares his expectations as a new student. An alumna shares a breathtaking story of survival from domestic violence and finding heal-

ing. Also, we cover an event about a Holocaust survivor, who lived his last years in New Bedford. All of these stories capture the spirit of resilience, and I hope you connect with them as much as I did.

We apologize to our readers that we were absent last semester in print, but we hope you got to read some of our content on Facebook. We've been trying to overcome technology and staffing issues, while trying to gain a better working space at the Fall River main campus that allows us to work more closely with other BCC peers.

I just want you to know that we are still around. Yes, we are present! We are observing, preparing and learning how to make this the best student-run media outlet for our readers and crew. So, be ready for a new wave of changes and opportunities at our media outlet. If you, or any BCC student, or alumni, are interested in contributing with us or grow with our team, our doors are always open.

We are here to learn, teach and grow professionally with you. We are seeking writers, copyeditors, designers, photographers, videographers, journalists, social media wizards, bloggers, vloggers, business majors and more. We are also looking to begin training a new editor-in-chief for next semester when I transfer to Bridgewater State College.

You don't have to think like us. You only have to bring your best positive attitude, be willing to work hard and be open to keeping on learning as you go, just like anything else in life.

As always, we are thankful for your readership and continuous support.

Sincerely,  
 Denisse Pumagualle  
 Editor-in-Chief

## Letters to the Editors\*

### Opinion: 2016 Recount. A Year of Lessons and Acceptance.

by Denisse Pumagualle  
 dpumagualle11@bristolcc.edu

Regardless of the challenges we have faced as a society, the BCC community always comes together. It is now most important, especially after an unpredictable presidential campaign and a disappointing court case loss, due to a charge of sexual harassment by BCC staff towards another staff member.

The last three months have been tense around our campuses. First of all, we had a national presidential election, which left so many wondering what the future might bring. So much negativity had been spewed during the presidential campaign. No! This is not a game of "my team is better than yours." This is the reality of a country that has elected a man with little to zero knowledge of what it really means to be a responsible presidential role model. If you want to see an example of this irresponsibility, just take a look at the President's Twitter account rants. Yes, we all make mistakes. We are only human. But, when someone in his position of power has gone too far, we, the citizens, should hold our President --and just anyone-- accountable for his/her mistakes.

At the time of this publication, Donald J. Trump has been sworn in as the forty-fifth President of the United States. At this time, all we can do is accept a President who is not presidential, and wish this country the best of luck to keep on moving forward together as the amazing nation it claims to be, a nation that stands together for the betterment of all its inhabitants, not just for the ones with the biggest pockets, nor only for the ones in power.

This is the time for people to remain vigilant and become active in the democratic process and become involved in their communities. We must support democracy; nevertheless, we must not stay on the sidelines in the face of wrong-doing.

While our country faces this challenge, our own college faces one of its own. On Oct 31st, according to *The Standard-Times*, our college lost a \$2.45 million court case that had

begun in 2003 for "sexual harassment by university police and administration officials." In addition, according to *The Herald News*, the two existing unions, the Massachusetts Community College Council and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (MCCC and AFSCME) have given a vote of "no confidence in leadership on handling of [the] sex discrimination case." The article states that "MCCC members do not feel confident bringing complaints of harassment to the college human resources department."

As I think about both of these situations, it becomes more clear that we must come together to seek the best attainable version of the truth and hold people accountable for their actions, but most importantly, we must continue to move forward as a nation and a college by keeping the dialogue open, by owning one's mistakes and rectifying any wrongdoing, if possible, and by respecting the realities of others.

Our college sure has tons of talented, hard-working, respectful and kind workers and students. And, our college sure has the latest technologically advanced and eco-friendly building and car ports; yet, all the shiny stuff can't make us overlook the wrongdoing of a few. We must learn to stand together for what is right, even if that means going against the policies in place. We must stand for what is right, not just for what is convenient. We must do this always in a civil manner, through open dialogue, and with integrity.

Hopefully through this complex process, we find truth and healing. I hope that our country, and college, continues to come together in order to find positive solutions.


\*Disclaimer: Letters and opinions published in *The Observer* express solely the opinions of the respective author(s). To be included in our next *Observer*, email your letter to dpumagualle11@bristolcc.edu.




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Contact **The Observer** at:

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 **508.678.2811 x2677**

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# Bristol Community College: John J. Sbrega Health & Science Building

## BCC Opens Zero Net Energy Building



Side view of John J. Sbrega Health & Science Building.



Front view of John J. Sbrega Health & Science Building.



Back view of John J. Sbrega Health & Science Building.



Solar canopy over lots 6-10.

# Sbrega Health & Science Building

## Photo Essay by Brian Casey



Students using the new micro lab.

by Brian Casey  
Managing Editor  
bcasey13@bristolcc.edu

On July 2016 Bristol Community College opened the John J. Sbrega Health & Science Building. The Sbrega building is a zero net energy building which provides savings for the college, and will allow for clean energy.

The building is 100 percent powered by the solar canopy built over parking lots 6 to 10. The solar canopy generates 3.2 megawatts of power and covers 800 parking spots.

The building houses the dental hygiene program, nursing program and science micro labs. Throughout the building there are multiple study areas and lounge areas for students to study or mingle with other students. The state of the art labs allow students to learn in today's work standards.

The building is named after the current president of the college John J. Sbrega, who will be retiring later this summer.



Student lounge in the John J. Sbrega Health & Science Building.



## Memories of A Student Writing Journey



Photo by Denise Pamagualle

by Juan Llerena-Arias  
Student Contributor  
jlllerena12@bristolcc.edu

(Editor's note: Essay reprinted from Professor Amy Allen's English 101 class. Essay has not been edited by editorial staff, other than minor copyedits.)

Brooklyn in the early 90s, the crime rate was high, the cost of living was low, and my quest for words began. I remember being a kid walking home from school, looking at different signs unable to comprehend the meaning of them. I saw familiar letters that I've been learning in the recent months. When I learned to read, it was a very long time ago. I don't remember the exact moment when I started reading fluently. I just remember that I knew how to read. I wanted to learn how to read different things, like the street signs or the advertisements in front of the comic book store. I always wondered who would write those things and how did they do it. I do recall certain events that happened, very few of

them, but there enough to give me an idea of what I know today.

Looking deep into my memory, I see a blurry image and hear voices from far away. It's myself as a child saying "I don't know," and an adult voice insisting saying, "Go ahead and try it again. Just sound out the letters. You're able to do it. Just keep trying." This was after a long day of school and after-school, when I would be sitting at the kitchen table doing homework. I remember wearing my school uniform white shirt, blue pants and a red tie. Together with a cool bookmark, I recall learning to read was very frustrating. It seemed repetitive, sounding out the same things over and over again. I would attempt to recreate the reading material to an episode of the Reading Rainbow TV show. It was around that time when I discovered that writing was an easier task for me.

The trace-the-dots and connect-the-lines days were no longer there. It was time for me to exercise the pencil movements I had been practicing, drawing shapes and lines to create letters, a test to make my drawn symbols, I called letters, into words. Carefully spacing, but putting these words together to create sentences, and focused on keeping the letters between the margins. The crayon drawing complemented the short sentences in the stories I composed. I arrived home with an exuberant attitude showing my mother the stories I wrote. It was my motivation to keep me writing and unconsciously acquiring new knowledge of words. With my determination in writing, my reading improved.

As I continue my daily tasks as an adult, now, I frequently read my emails and text messages from family and acquaintances. Occasionally, I reminisce on those days when that didn't exist. I time-travel to the second or third grade, where I shared a similar task, staring at a blank paper thinking of the message I needed to compose. To develop our writing skills, we were assigned a pen pal. I needed to exchange thoughts with another person I hadn't met. With the fear of complete embarrassment, I read and revised thoroughly, dotted the *Is*, crossed the *Ts* and used capital letters at the beginning of sentences. But most importantly, I envisioned myself as the recipient reader. I imagined the scenario in the mystery person's classroom, reading the letter and clearly observing their facial expressions with a smile. Days later I would receive a response confirming my accurate assumption of my imagination. The letter ended with a message that has been carved in my memory. It ended saying, "You are a nice person." I think back to those great times and realize some things don't change.

Other influences in my development of writing skills included vocabulary words. As an aficionado for words, I realized lots of English words are similar to my second language Spanish. This gave me an advantage in learning new words. Every week we would learn new vocabulary words in class. I pictured it like playing a video

game, achieving a new level and saving the game for another day. As I made progress, the levels were much more difficult, but with dedication, practice and patience, I was able to overcome those obstacles.

The sound of my teacher's voice asking me to find the definition echoes in my head when I listen to music. As a teen, I remember sitting in front of the house steps with a radio, nodding my head equipped with a dictionary in hand, my foot tapping to the tempo of the beat focused on the lyrics. I enjoyed listening to rap music. In the 1990s rap artists wrote meaningful verses and explored an impressive vocabulary. It was a combination of slang, metaphors, and similes that kept me intrigued. It was a competition with peers to listen and understand the artist's verse. I used to wonder how they would come up with that material.

At times, it seemed like a supernatural ability to compose a story and end a phrase with a rhyming word. In later years, my childhood best friend was inspired by rap lyrics, and he went to become a high school English teacher. We read the lyrics of many songs and discovered some words were improperly used. Even though, I still enjoy their music, I learned artists would read the dictionary to fill in the blanks when they had trouble thinking of their next line. Imitating the supernatural artist as a teenager, I explored the dictionary seeking words for ideas to finish an essay. The influence of music kept me motivated in my quest for words.

So, whether it is reading storefront signs, e-mails or listening to music, the desire to acquire knowledge continues to expand for me. I revise my past and find answers to questions I'll have. Unconscious of how I learned, at times, and continuing on a never-ending learning path, the new vocabulary words that were introduced to me were added to my collection and stored in my memory. When composing an essay, writing a letter or any kind of writing material, I'm reminded of past experiences.

## The Non-Traditional Student Experience



Submitted by Lucy Matias

by Lucy Matias  
Student Contributor  
lmatias11@bristolcc.edu

I came from Portugal at six and a half years old, and am the middle child in a family of seven. My father was illiterate, but was a very smart, hard worker. I happen to be the only one out of all my siblings to graduate from high school. I dropped out of high school in 1984 when I turned 16. Ever since then, I was in and out of night school until my mid-20s.

At that point, I changed my mind to go for my GED instead. I only had one or two classes left out of five. I didn't feel it was right for me to get a GED. I knew I would feel more accomplished getting my adult diploma. The classes for my adult diploma were Mondays through Fridays 9 AM - 2 PM at the old New Bedford High School. I had to quit my full-time job, and I had just bought my first home when I made this hard decision. I received my adult diploma on June 3, 1997, at the age of 29.

That same year of 1997, I signed up at Bristol Community College

to be an elementary school teacher. I always had enjoyed playing teacher as I was growing up.

I had to drop out of college in the winter of 1997-1998 because I had gotten into an automobile accident. I was walking on crutches and couldn't get from building to building with a heavy backpack. I was devastated. I didn't get to finish my degree.

Eighteen years later, in the winter of 2015, I signed up to come back to Bristol Community College for human services. I remember in the winter of 2015, classes would get canceled a lot because of the snow. I would get so upset with Mother Nature. I wound up getting really sick at the end of my third semester, but I wasn't going to let my illness stop me this time around. I forced myself to continue.

I earned a certificate in human services in the summer of 2016 at Bristol Community College. I was very proud of myself, but I wanted to continue further and obtain my As-

sociate's degree in human services.

I have chosen to go into the human services field because I'm the type of person that loves to help people who appreciate my help. I can't see myself leaving BCC at all, but I know I have to move to another college to get higher degrees.

BCC is my second home. I love coming to college. There are great people that work at BCC: from the enrollment center to the financial aid department, to the deans, advisors, the tutoring and writing center, counselors, librarians, great professors, and the new and exciting students at BCC who I remain in touch with to this day.

My professors, my advisor, and the tutoring and writing center have given me a lot of encouragement and confidence that I can do it.

I feel it's very important to keep an open communication with your professors if there are any difficulties in your non-traditional BCC student experience.

## Expectations of A First Year Student

by Jesse A. Boncek  
Student Contributor  
jboncek11@bristolcc.edu



Submitted by Jesse A. Boncek

As a first year student at Bristol Community College, BCC, I was not sure what to expect.

I was hopeful that the staff and community would help me reach my utmost potential.

In the past, I had gone to Cape Cod Community College and Massachusetts Community College. The atmosphere within those educational facilities can not compare to BCC.

I am amazed by the amount of support from both educators and students here at the Fall River campus. Financial aid provided me with one-on-one assistance. My professors fully interact with me, letting me know when I have done a great job,

and students who have traveled from all over the world to obtain an education opened my eyes to privileges us Americans overlook.

The close-knit community here at BCC allows for dreams to be made into reality, and for success to be within arms reach.

I am attending BCC for two years and transferring to a four-year university after graduation. My goal is to become an English teacher and professional writer. This dream of mine had never been acted on before going to BCC.

At 21 years old, I believed I would spend the rest of my years working a labor-oriented job. The idea of a college education was always fresh in my

mind, but I was afraid to act upon it.

During one epiphanic night, while over-viewing my current life status, I decided to fill out my third application to my third community college.

BCC administration made it easy for me to complete the application, and I attended financial aid and mathematics workshops the college provided.

Thank you Bristol Community College for continuing to hold my hand through this glorious journey.



# Life, Strength and Survival: A Domestic Violence True Story



Facebook.com

by Crystal Hughes  
Alumna Contributor  
hughescrystal331@yahoo.com

(Editor's note: This powerful story was submitted to us for October's Domestic Violence Awareness Month.)

I, like so many others, absolutely adore everything about October. I mean who doesn't love the crispy, spicy air or the gorgeousness of those autumn colors. And you can be sure I can never get enough of the overdone pumpkin everything. October, however, is not always just that simple. While her majesty Mother Nature is both eagerly and humbly glorifying death, I remind myself that October is a time of life, strength, and survival.

They say there are no coincidences. So I could go on to say that it was by random mishap that the month I chose to break free and survive just happened to be the same month that raises awareness for domestic violence. Domestic Violence! I cringe just to say it, to think it, to even type it. But as I get ready to welcome my 6-year anniversary as a survivor, I realize this perhaps even more now than ever, **THERE ARE NO COINCIDENCES**. It was my destiny, as it is for us all to take our terrible misfortunes and situations and turn them into the things we know deep down to our very bones... that we are strong, warriors, free...

I could very easily make this entire article about the pain and struggle I endured during my time with an abuser, that moment in life when I could feel my soul was so broken it literally split

into two jagged parts. I could easily claw away at your heart strings and make you taste the pain I felt of being suffocated and hit in the face with remote controls, and being held down and screamed at until my eardrum ruptured, and degraded and forced to greet everyday with the feelings that I was worthless.

I could fill your throats with lumps and force you to hold back tears with unspeakable acts, some of which are kept in the most secret compartments of my heart, that thankfully these days are pulled out only on rare...very rare, solo occasions. But this, this is so very far from my point. I write as a reminder that bad things happen to us, but we must fight to keep them from consuming us.

At the time when I decided to plan and attempt my great escape, my only reason for staying was my bank account. I lived every day in a shell of a human being, but my bank statements said, "Hey, what other option do you have?" But when that was no longer reason to stay, I knew it was time. That and a very life-altering anonymous phone call I had made to the Women's Center.

Starting anything is always the most difficult part of everything. Planning to leave, and keeping it hidden and knowing my life as I knew it, and even his life was all going to change, was the single most harrowing start to the journey. I became physically ill upon the mere thoughts of me packing. I actually "chickened out" on my first attempt to leave and gave in to the idea of us spending the upcoming holiday season together, and convinced myself that we could work it out and this was just meant to be. But no, **HELL NO**, this couldn't be my life. This was not the end of my story. Then October rolled around.

I barely slept the night before the day of the planned escape, and I'll always remember his last words to me before the door closed behind him on what he thought was just another day, "Get your ass in the kitchen and make me my lunch." So I did and handed it

to him with a meaningless smile. And in my head all I could do was chuckle and think this is the last time I'll ever be making you lunch.

I'll never forget that morning. That warm, sunny October morning. I'll never forget going to the store and buying packing tape for the hidden boxes in my car (that he thankfully never saw) and the monsoon of butterflies in my stomach. I'll never forget the heart-wrenching, heart-racing, crippling fear that he would leave work early and come home to me packing or his parents, who owned the apartment house we lived in, would come home and notice me moving box upon box out to my car.

Thankfully, and by the grace of God, those instances never happened. I left favorite things behind, left the keys on the kitchen table, took my cat with me, and promised to never look back. The hardest and worst part was over, and the most draining day was over. I was gone. I literally sat in a room of a tiny one-bedroom hole in the wall studio apartment and survived. I dealt with terrible voice messages and angry texts, but I survived. I dealt with phone calls from his mother pleading with me to check up on him every now and then because he "wasn't dealing with the break up very well." But, I survived.

Would you like to know how it feels to have your family have to pretend they don't know where you live for the sake of your own safety? I guarantee you don't. But, I survived. I went from shitty studio apartment to shitty apartment with shitty roommates. Survived. I worked countless hours to make ends meet and shoved down feelings and broke down and discussed feelings with therapists (some good, some not so good) and attempted to nurse my soul back to wholesome.

The road to a recovered me was long and painstaking, but that's not to say there were never laughs and smiles and learning experiences. But, it goes without saying that a road to recovery is not sugar-coated and

sweet. There were far more tears, disappointments, and uncertainties.

For a long time, I never gave myself enough credit for what I had gone through. I mean, there are people who were/are in far worse situations than I was. But, pain is relative, and when I allowed myself to step back and view my own situation, from the outside looking in, all I could say was "this girl needs a hug and a stiff drink."

Eventually feelings returned. I spent so long being numb and building up walls that feeling something other than nothing was a silent victory. And perhaps, as silly as it sounds, I never felt so strong as I did the year when I purchased a sofa, my own sofa, and broke down into tears on the drive home because that piece of furniture was **THE THING** that tied my apartment, my nice, safe apartment, into my home, the apartment that was my own, that I have worked so hard to call my own. It's this very life that I have worked so hard to ensure, is in fact, my very own.

Sometimes I stand back and allow myself to be swallowed up with deep feelings of satisfaction knowing that I have created this. I am forever thankful for my stubbornness and willpower. If I had to travel down the road again, or if you ask me if it was worth it, the answer will be hell yes.

So, the next time we get ready to enter another October and all its autumn festivities, remember what the month may mean to another. As breathtaking as the autumn view will be, and as fun pumpkin patches and hayrides are; and we get to celebrate all things creepy, the only monsters we will need are the ones on television and movie screens. And, the only haunted houses we need to enter are the ones we choose to by our own admittance. They are not the places we should call home. We deserve to take pleasure in the simple and festive things the month of October brings.