

# Remembering Dr. King

If you just make the effort to open them, doors are a portal to compassion and understanding

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Morgantown's Community Coalition for Social Justice (CCSJ) is celebrating this Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday, Jan. 20, 2025, at 2 p.m. Read more about the event and how to attend in Joan Browning's essay on **Page C-1**.

BY JIM BISSETT

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Thursday made for an even busier morning than usual for Joan C. Browning, the author, activist and former Freedom Rider.

There were Zoom meetings, deadline projects and time spent on telephone interviews with this newspaper and other media outlets in Atlanta.

She had missed Jimmy Carter's funeral on TV, but she was hoping to carve out time to at least stream a replay later.

During this professional tumult, something else was also happening on the other side of her door.

The beckoning of good neighbors. Good neighbors who shoveled out stretches of the road leading to her home that Winter Storm Blair had layered with ice and snow. Good neighbors who offered to go on grocery runs in the chilling cold (anything you need, Miss Joan, just give us a list).

Good neighbors who keep watch, because that's what good neighbors do.

"That's one advantage of being an old lady living in a double-wide trailer on a hillside in Greenbrier County," she said, with her signature, droll sense of humor.

"Nice people want to do nice things for you."

In 1960, she was a young woman living and going to college in Milledgeville, Ga., who knew that she needed to do something.

Well, check that. Robert E. Lee Jr. – the president of Georgia State College for Women and not the Confederate general – made the decision for her.

### Hard work – and heart work

Browning grew up in economic straits in the Peach State. She and



Submitted photos

Clockwise from bottom left: Young Joan Browning during her time participating in the Freedom Riders, Browning speaks with friend and fellow Freedom Rider Charles Person, a very young Browning is photographed at her home in Georgia.

her family worked hard as sharecroppers.

By the time she was 16, the age she graduated high school early because of her good grades, she could pick 200 pounds of cotton a day.

Her knees, wrists and back ached, and the relentless Dixie sun couldn't be more unforgiving at Georgia State College for Women, a sharecropper's kid previously tagged with a Poor White Trash label (though she didn't necessarily know that at the time) was warming to life there.

She was busily transforming herself into a proper young lady of the South.

Which meant dresses, white gloves and, as she noted with more drollery, "what some might

call an aspiration to be June Cleaver."

That was a wry reference to how females of the day were depicted on television shows.

Women on those airings always did their chores in pearls and heels, and they always had a fresh-from-the oven meal waiting on the table, without fail, as their bread-winning husbands arrived home from work.

Meanwhile, her state was also broadcasting and stoking hate and racism against the Black community. She also had to admit that she didn't fully realize that either, at the time.

She toiled alongside Black people in the cotton fields, and, truth be told, she enjoyed their

SEE COMPASSION, B-2

## MCHD

# Do you live in a 'radon zone'?



MARY WADE BURNSIDE

### ARE YOU LIVING IN A REALM WITH POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS, ODORLESS, COLORLESS GAS THAT FORMS FROM THE BREAKDOWN OF URANIUM IN THE SOIL?

A radioactive gas that is undetectable to the human senses that may be seeping up from the earth and into the crevices of your floors and walls?

If so, you may have just crossed over into ... The Radon Zone.

OK, it sounds a little melodramatic, but that's what happens when you tailor information about radon in the style of Rod Serling, creator and narrator of the classic fantasy science fiction horror series "The Twilight Zone."

And because Monongalia County is in what we call the "red zone," with potentially three times the instance of radon than the national American average, it's a pun that's easy to make.

Nationally, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, 1 in 15 homes have high levels of radon.

But in Monongalia County, that figure is 1 in 5.

Radon moves up through the bedrock, then into the soil, then up from the soil into the atmosphere. When radon comes up into the air outside, it is perfectly harmless. When radon comes up into your basement and into your house, it can become a problem.

Because radon is radioactive, exposure to high levels of radon can lead to lung cancer. The EPA estimates that radon is the No. 1 cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers — more than 20,000 deaths per year.

There is good news. Monongalia County Health Department offers radon testing. A sanitarian will visit your home and set up a continuous radon monitor in the lowest living area. January, which is National Radon Action Month, is a good time to get a radon test because your home is likely going to have windows closed and be more airtight, so the test will be more accurate.

The machine will generate a report, and if the figures are high, mitigation work can be performed on your home that can vent radon outside. The average cost, according to the EPA, is \$1,500, with systems ranging from \$800 to \$2,500.

The cost for a test by MCHD Environmental Health is \$125 in Monongalia County and \$150 in surrounding areas

SEE RADON, B-2

## THEATER REVIEW

# 'Babygirl' getting buzz, but doesn't push boundaries enough



ALISE CHAFFINS

NICOLE KIDMAN HAS BEEN WELCOMING US TO THE MOVIES IN ADS FOR FIVE YEARS, BUT SHE NEGLECTS TO DO THAT AHEAD OF HER NEWEST PROJECT, "BABY-GIRL," FROM WRITER AND DIRECTOR HALINA REIJN.

Perhaps people didn't want the magic of cinema to be muddled with the eroticism of the film, but after seeing the movie, I don't think that this movie pushed enough boundaries for that to be a real concern.

Despite having two beautiful daughters, running a successful business, and having a handsome and attentive husband in

Jacob (Antonio Banderas), Romy (Kidman) is unsatisfied with her life. As such, when a dog nearly attacks her on her way to work, she is intrigued by the young man who can control the animal. He turns out to be Samuel (Harris Dickinson), a new intern at her company who is immediately drawn to her. When the two begin a torrid affair, Romy is opened up to questions about control, power dynamics and what is worth protecting.

Age-gap movies are always a bit of a hard sell, but "Babygirl" has some interesting ideas. We assume that the power rests in the hands of the older person or the person who has seniority in a job, but if the younger person can destroy what the other has built, who really has the power? How does one's religious upbringing affect their enjoyment in the bedroom? This film touches on several genuinely fascinating topics but seems unwilling to

engage with them.

This isn't to say that there isn't anything to like about "Babygirl." The performances are truly impressive. There are a number of people who weren't on board with Dickinson, but I found his manner precisely right for this character. His mildly off-putting manner compared to Banderas shows that this isn't about attraction for Romy but is something more primal. Kidman shines in her role, vacillating between a woman exhibiting power and a woman shy and embarrassed by her desires. Unfortunately, there isn't quite enough character built up to hang these performances on.

The movie is beautifully shot, but again, there were times when it felt timid in its approach to the subject matter. Rather than pushing in and allowing us to feel the discomfort that exists or even having wide shots that could convey a sense of isola-

tion, most of the movie is filmed at a comfortable mid-length shot that allows the audience to be observers but never challenges the subject matter that the film seems to want to engage with.

There was a moment near the end of the movie that made me think that this movie was trying to say something other than what it appeared to be doing throughout, and I got excited because it would be a truly unique twist on this genre. Once again, I was let down by the timidity of the script. "Babygirl" had multiple opportunities to be a challenging film, but in the end, it settled for being a titillating one.

Alise Chaffins is a Morgantown film critic and author. She is a member of several critics organizations, including GALECA, OFTA, and IFSCA. You can connect with her on social media at @AliseChaffins and on her Substack at MacGuffin or Meaning.

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