

The Sentry

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LOCAL NEWS...

Pedestrian dies following Lauderdale Lakes crash

Detectives with the Broward Sheriff's Office Traffic Homicide Unit are investigating a crash that killed a pedestrian in Lauderdale Lakes on Monday.

Just after 4 p.m., Broward County Regional Communications received a report of a traffic crash involving a vehicle and a pedestrian in the 4100 block of North State Road 7 in Lauderdale Lakes.

The preliminary investigation revealed that a 2015 Honda Accord was traveling northbound in the center thru lane approaching Northwest 41st Street. An adult female, Silmene Louizaire, was walking eastbound just north of the designated crosswalk. She entered the northbound travel lanes and walked into the path of the Honda. The front passenger side of the vehicle struck Louizaire.

Broward Sheriff Fire Rescue responded and pronounced Louizaire deceased. The driver of the Honda, Joshua Nordelus, remained on scene and cooperated with investigators.

According to investigators, neither impairment nor excessive speed on the part of the driver are believed to be contributing factors to the crash.

Missing Pompano Beach man located



Update: Detectives with the Broward Sheriff's Office Missing Persons Unit have located 76-year-old Gary Ready, missing from Pompano Beach.

According to investigators, Ready was located safe and unharmed in Wisconsin. His family has been notified.

A missing persons alert was issued on Saturday, June 14, after he was last seen around 6 p.m. on Friday, June 6, near the 4500 block of Northeast 15th Terrace.

He was last seen driving a white 2014 Mitsubishi Outlander bearing Florida tag AJ15VV.

Teen killed in Pompano Beach crash

A 16-year-old was killed in a multi-vehicle crash, and detectives with the Broward Sheriff's Office Traffic Homicide Unit are investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Just before 8 p.m., Friday, June 20, Broward County Regional Communications received a report of a traffic crash involving multiple vehicles and a car fire in the 200 block of East Copans Road in Pompano Beach.

According to investigators, the preliminary investigation revealed that a 2019 Mercedes Benz CLA 250, driven by a 16-year-old male, was traveling southbound on Leisure Boulevard toward East Copans Road. Detectives say that at some point, the Toyota turned left where it collided with the Mercedes.

The collision caused the 16-year-old to lose control of the Mercedes. The Mercedes rolled onto its roof as it slid southwest across the roadway and into the path of eastbound traffic. That is when the Mercedes collided with a

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Shaky cease fire between Israel and Iran

"Bring your pilots home" Trump told Israel President Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday as he continued to try to end the war in the middle east.

The head of the Israel Defense Forces said Tuesday that "the campaign against Iran is not over" as a ceasefire between the two countries went into effect. President Trump also vowed that Israel will not attack Iran as he told Israel to bring its pilots home.

Trump lashed out at both countries for launching attacks after his cease-fire announcement. Comments by Israel's military and Iran's president suggested the deal remained intact.

"Both Israel and Iran wanted to stop the war, equally," Trump wrote on social media as he flew to a NATO summit in the Netherlands. Referring to U.S. airstrikes over the weekend, he added, "It was my great honor to destroy all nuclear facilities & capability, and then, STOP THE WAR!"



On Air Force One Trump said he had spoken with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday morning and was "firm and direct" about what needed to happen to sustain the cease-fire.

Several top Senate Democrats are pushing for a vote to require congressional approval for any further military action against Iran.

Desantis promises to ax \$500 million from budget

"The reality is the House leadership (dragged) this out for 45 days for really no reason at all," DeSantis said. "The budget that was enacted is not any type of sea change. There were no major policy victories in it. It was something that could've been done 45 days ago."

After the recent session which lasted 45 days longer than sched-

uled, lawmakers passed a \$115 billion budget.

A 1.3 billion tax cut eliminated tax on commercial leases and other items including hurricane preparedness.

Florida has a lean budget, DeSantis argued, compared to other states

and has the fewest state workers per capita in the country. Speaker of the House Danny Perez has noted the budget is about \$500 million less than what DeSantis suggested in his budget proposal, so DeSantis said to keep up the fiscal discipline, he'll wield a hefty veto.

"If some of the House leadership is saying that we're spending too much and whatever, (then) don't I have to take at least \$500 million off to get under what I recommended?" DeSantis said.

DeSantis hasn't formally received the budget (SB 2500) from the Legislature yet, but is expected to sign it into law with his vetoes before July 1, the start of the next fiscal year.

On Tuesday morning Governor Desantis signed a bill that will aid in preserving Florida's beaches. Senate Bill 1622 will repeal a provision related to establishing recreation customary use of beaches.

The bill, DeSantis said will repeal the burden of some state mandates and return decision making power to local governments regarding customary use of beaches.

The prior law, enacted by Governor Rick Scott prohibited local governments from affirming public recreational use of the dry sand areas of private beaches without first going through complex and costly judicial processes.

DeSantis said the legislation will make it easier to restore eroded beaches in Gulf Coast communities with smaller populations and allow the State to restore areas already declared critically eroded without input from private Gulf-run landowners.

Pompano Beach's 4th of July Fireworks Spectacular

Fisher Family Pier | 222 N. Pompano Beach Boulevard
Friday, July 4th - 5:00 pm - 9:30 pm

Get ready for a star-spangled evening of fun, music, and fireworks as the City of Pompano Beach lights up the sky for its 4th of July Fireworks Spectacular! Join us Friday, July 4th

on the main beach by the iconic Fisher Family Pier at 222 N. Pompano Beach Boulevard for a celebration you won't want to miss.

The party kicks off at 5:00 p.m., so grab your crew, your beach blankets, and your lawn chairs and settle in for an epic night of entertainment!

5:30 p.m.: Jam out with the sounds of Shadow Creek.

7:00 p.m.: Dance into the evening with the high-energy Stereo FM Band

9:00 p.m. (approx.): Look to the sky as we wrap things up with a breathtaking fireworks finale over the ocean!

Please note: For everyone's safety, personal fireworks, glass

containers, alcohol, drones, and pets are not allowed. The Fisher Family Pier will be closed on July 4th and will reopen during regular hours on July 5th.

Parking is available at the end of Atlantic Blvd and A1A, including nearby street parking and the pier garage. Be aware that eastbound traffic onto the barrier island will be temporarily closed starting at 8:45 p.m. for the fireworks show. Don't worry — pedestrian access across the bridge will remain open all day and night!

Whether you're a local or just visiting, come make memories with us under the stars on one of the biggest and brightest nights of the year.

Happy 4th, Pompano Beach — Let's make it a blast!

For more information, please visit www.parks.pompanobeachfl.gov.

The 1928 HURRICANE - THE STORY OF MY FAMILY

The 1928 hurricane on Lake Okechobee, Ritta Island and Fort Lauderdale

By C. A. MUTT THOMAS
EDITED BY BUD GARNER

WE MOVE TO RITTA ISLAND

My father's family lived on a farm seven miles northwest of Madison in Madison County Florida. The farm lay close to Hickstown Swamp, which was named after a renegade Indian who was killed nearby.

My mother, whose maiden name was Susan Indiana Loper was born in the same community on March 20, 1894. My father, Charles Edward Thomas, was born in the old farm house, which my grandfather had built on February 18, 1892. I was born April 27, 1915 a brother and two sisters were also born in North Florida and another sister was born after we came to South Florida.

My grandfather had nine children, two died young six boys and one girl grew up. When my grandfather was older, he was struck by lightning while and my uncle were working out in the fields when a sudden storm came up and they took shelter in an abandoned house on the place.

They were standing near a window and my Grandfather was struck. He seemed to recover but died soon after.

Grandmother had to sell a lot of the land. My aunt, Edna Thomas Drury moved in to Madison after she married and still lives there.

My father was farming land that belonged to my mother's people. He was farming cotton and peanuts and raising cattle and has until we left there in the fall of 1921 to come to Ritta Island.

This was after the first World War and times were hard, as farmers in north Florida were not making anything on their cotton.

My Uncle, Richard Mays Thomas, had gone to Fort Lauderdale long before the war and had worked for a wealthy man, Hugh Taylor Biss, as caretaker and manager of his estate off the mainland at Fort Lauderdale.

Mr. Birch thought highly of Uncle Mays and kept him on as long as uncle Mays would stay. Uncle Mays had a chance, however, to earn \$300 a day working on a dredge on the North New River Canal.

This project was taken over by the Clark-Furst Construction Co. In 1910 it picked up Steam after a dredge moved to the site of South Bay to start the Okechobee Lake end of the canal. It was finished in 1912.

Mr. Lawrence Will, Glades historian, reported meeting Uncle Mays at Ritta Shore during the winter of 1914-15. Ritta Shore, on the mainland, got its name from Ritta Island.

The Bolles Hotel had been built at Ritta Shore in 1911 to house prospective customers for Glades Land. Ritta Shore was later known as Miami Locks. It wasn't until July 16, 1931 with the coming of the post office that it became known as Lake Harbor.

Ritta Island is located a mile off shore from the Miami Canal; it had its first settlers about 1909 and others came.

The U. S. Government surveyed all the Okechobee islands in 1917 and soon after, largely through the work of Brockdock and Winne on Torry Island, declared that they were open for homesteading.

Johnny Windham had 55 acres on the east side and he got Uncle Mays interested. They went in together, built adjoining houses, started clearing the land and began farming.

Uncle Mays got my Daddy interested and when Johnny traded his rights to Uncle Mays and moved away, Uncle Mays persuaded us to come join him. My mother came down and visited with Uncle Mays in 1920 before he brought us down in 1921.

My father borrowed \$100.00 to make the move to Ritta Island. We made the trip from North Florida on the train.

We changed trains in Jacksonville and went to Haines City, a spur of the Atlantic Coast Line, which had started operation in 1917 or 1918, took us from Haines City to Moore Haven. We brought with us our furniture and other possessions as well as five barrels of smoked meat. Someone stole a barrel in Moore Haven, or, at least it never got on the boat.

We left the next day to go to Ritta Island on Captain Ed Forbes mail boat. The Fox. This cabin boat left from Everglades Locks near the big cypress tree at Moore Haven. Captain Little Ed Forbes, the skipper lived on Ritta Island near the hotel that

Captain Felix Forbes, his father, had built and the boat lay up overnight there before continuing on to Loxahatchee the next day.

Mail from the Lake communities was picked up on the way and incoming mail from West Palm Beach was picked up in Loxahatchee and brought back. Passengers and merchandise were carried on the boat for additional profit.

The Post Office on Ritta Island was built on the Northwest corner and was called Mabry. We moved into the house that Johnny Windham had left vacant on the southeast corner of the Island.

The house was made of Florida pine consisting of a large living room, bedroom, small kitchen, back and front porch.

The windows were screened with shutters and the porches were open. Most of the houses built then were unfinished inside with the ceiling rafters bare.

Uncle Mays and Daddy started farming together. They cleared land by hand, planted it and farmed with hand tools mostly.

Captain Felix Forbes had the only mule on the Island. It was necessary for all who could do so to work the land. The children worked as soon as they were big enough and when they were not in school. In those days the family with the most kids had the best farm.

My mother worked beside my father as she had done in North Florida.

The land was originally covered by custard apple trees, which were easy to clear. You cleared the land by hand and the more land you cleared the bigger your farm.

The more help a family had the more you could grow.

Green beans and onions were the crops we grew first season. They were shipped to Fort Lauderdale on Captain Shafkleofors freight boat and sold there.

We moved to Fort Lauderdale 1922.

In the late summer of 1922 the rains came and by September 30 the rainfall was 10 inches in excess of the annual average for the year.

The level of Lake Okechobee rose five feet from the lake to Kissimmee and could be made on a solid sheet of water. The

Pompano Pioneers by Bud Garner



lake level was 22 feet, or better. Later flooded. Ritta Island, which had an elevation of 21 feet as it had just been cleared and had not yet packed down. Bare Beach, Clewiston, Okechobee as well as the islands were under water. Some land on Ritta Island is now 17.5 feet.

The chickens hadn't been off the roost in thirty days. Captain Forbes' old mule would come up at night and pull them off by their tail feathers. They would squawk and Daddy would go out and put them back on the roost. He finally put up some wire and tin to keep the mule out.

Chicken snakes fell on the mosquito nets that hung from the rafters and covered our beds at night. My dad would get up and throw the snakes outside. Water moccasins were everywhere. Even before the heavy rains came they were plentiful. I have seen my mother go out with a rifle when she heard one of her hens squawk in a certain way. She would find a dead hen and nearby a moccasin. She would shoot and kill the snake every time.

The field corn had to be gathered in by boat and we shelled it in Gus McGhee's barn on the west side of the Island. The only part of the island out of water was the ridge on his farm.

My Uncle Mays and his wife moved to Ralph Bishops farm at Ritta where she kept house and cooked for Mr. Bishop. Uncle Mays worked for himself.

The outlook was not good with water covering the island. Uncle Mays persuaded my dad to move to Fort Lauderdale.

We went to Fort Lauderdale on Shafkleofors freight barge. We loaded on it our furniture, the shelled corn and all the chickens. We left at dark and entered the North New River canal. The first stop was at the old Everglades locks in South Bay. Mr. Willis had a store on the canal bank North of the old locks Daddy called

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NEWS...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

2015 Lexus RX 350. Additionally, a 2021 Toyota RAV4 was traveling eastbound on East Copans Road and was struck by debris as the Mercedes slid by it.

Deputies on scene immediately began life-saving measures until Pompano Beach Fire Rescue arrived and transported all the occupants of the Mercedes and the Lexus to an area hospital for treatment.

The 16-year-old driver of the Mercedes was pronounced deceased.

The drivers of the Toyota Sienna and Toyota RAV4 did not report injuries and remained on scene and cooperated with investigators.

Detectives said the preliminary investigation reveals that excessive speed may have been a contributing factor in the crash. The investigation into the circumstances of the crash is ongoing.

Garner

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to Mr. Willits to bring him a nickels worth of candy as the barge cruised slowly by the store, that took care of all the money we had when we left Ritta Island.

It was early the next morning, after daylight, that we arrived at the Sewell Locks on the North New River Canal opposite Davie. There we sold to the lock-tender the chickens and the corn that we had placed on top of the barge.

That gave us money to rent a house when we got to Fort Lauderdale.

We went five miles further on, passed under the Henry Flagler railroad bridge and tied up at the dock. The captain told us where we could rent a house. My dad got off the barge, walked east three blocks across to the Andrews Avenue bridge and rented a house. It was on 13th Street one half mile on the South side of the river.

Daddy was able to get a truck to move the furniture to the house. It was then or soon after that we had electric lights for the first time ever. We moved in and set up housekeeping that day and the next day my dad went out looking for a job.

He got a job working for a Mr. Gibbs who was in the cement block business two blocks away near the railroad tracks. He pushed a wheelbarrow for \$1.00 a day pouring concrete for hand molded blocks. He worked at this for a week and a half; then the big colored man running the mixer didn't show up.

Daddy cranked it up and ran it for two days. Mr. Gibbs paid him \$2.00 a day. The Negro showed up but now he rolled the wheelbarrow and Daddy ran the mixer. My dad wound up as a form setter and a plasterer at \$2.50 an hour.

Times began to get better. Mr. Gibbs got a good contract and my Dad's job was that of setting forms for sidewalks at the sub-division of Crossland Park.

Pay went up as the boom started. In 1924 he bought a model T-Ford. In 1924 the job pouring, sidewalks ended. He got another job mixing mortar at \$20.00 a day or better.

In 1923 the road to Belle Glade was rock surfaced and one-way steel bridges were installed at Twenty mile Bend, Six Mile Bend and at Belle Glade.

In 1925 my dad bought a truck and started hauling produce from the Glades. In the meantime he had been sending money to Uncle Mays. Later, it turned out, they had overspent their homestead and

Help! My travel insurance company is denying my claim for a canceled tour

Travel insurance is supposed to help you when things go wrong -- not get in the way. But for Lee Aubry, travel insurance became a major problem when it presented her with an insurmountable paperwork obstacle.

Aubry had booked a southern Africa tour through Smithsonian Journeys. But United Airlines canceled one of her outboard flights, and she couldn't catch up to the group.

She had to return home. When she filed a claim with her travel insurance company, a representative told her it would only cover a fraction of her expenses. The reason: United sent proof that her trip was interrupted, but not canceled, and this only covered for up to \$1,000.

"I would like my claim paid in full," she says.

Well, that makes two of us. One of the reasons you buy travel insurance is for peace of mind.

after the 1928 hurricane it reverted to the state. My dad bought it back from the state after that. Water had remained on the land after the rains of 1922 until February of 1923.

1923 was a dry year but the water rose again. In October of 1924 nineteen inches of rain fell and the lake rose seven and one-half feet in five days.

My Uncle Rufus, R. E. Thomas, joined my dad in 1925 and they went in together hauling produce from the Lake as farming operations had resumed by then. Our family stayed in Fort Lauderdale and my dad traveled back and forth. I attended the South Side School.

We went through the hurricane of 1926 in Fort Lauderdale. This hurricane wrecked Miami and went on to do much damage to Moore Haven and the west side of Lake Okechobee.

Before it struck, we left our house and went to the home of neighbors, the Smileys. They had a player piano and during the storm they played it even though the house began to shake.

There was a bakery nearby and bread was in the oven and jellyrolls had been put in a big desk. A milk truck stalled nearby. During the eye of the hurricane, we got milk out of the truck and then we went to the bakery and had milk, bread and jellyrolls to eat.

In the second part of the hurricane the roof started to blow off the bakery and we tied it down. The windows were blown out. We went a block and a half to our house figuring it would be blown away.

It was still standing with only a few shingles blown off, but everything still got wet.

We return to the Everglades. The hurricane of 1926 killed the boom and a month or so later we returned to the Glades.

Daddy moved us back in the Model T and the truck. We went down U. S. 1 to Lake Worth then west to Military Trail and crossed the West Palm Beach Canal and took the road down the canal to twenty mile Bend, as we do today. We crossed and followed the rock road to Belle Glade and on to South Bay.

The road to Lake Harbor was a muck road. From there, we then took the muck road on to Sebring Farm. The move took all day.

We rented a house from a Mr. James. Vernie Boots family lived nearby. Mr. Boots was farming too. He and his boys had a contract to keep the muck road from South Bay to Clewiston leveled off.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

There's an expectation that if you miss your tour because of a flight cancellation, your policy will cover you.

Her case raises a few questions: What should you do when your flight is canceled and you miss your tour?

What does travel insurance actually cover when you miss a flight? How can you get an insurance company to pay a valid claim?

Before we get to that, let's have a look at Aubry's claim.

"All flights were full." The trip to southern Africa was a real bucket list tour. The "Treasures of South Africa" features a safari, a rail journey and a trip through South Africa's famous wineries. Zimbabwe and Botswana were on the itinerary, too. Aubry had been planning this special trip for a while and couldn't wait to see this scenic and fascinating part of the world.

But on the day of her trip to Johannesburg, she flew from Washington, D.C., to New York, and that's as far as she got.

United Airlines canceled her flight to Johannesburg. "United couldn't offer an alternative flight," she said. "At that point, I would have been willing to pay for a different flight on a different airline. Unfortunately, there were no options available. All flights were full."

Aubry reluctantly asked United to fly her back home, but it couldn't do that. The airline paid for a train back to Washington.

"I spoke to a woman at Smithsonian and she offered to start my claim with Travel Guard," she recalls.

Travel Guard replied with some bad news.

"They'll only pay me \$1,000 of a \$12,000 claim because they say the problem was a missed connection," she says. "This wasn't a missed connection. My flight was canceled and there were no other connections, and no options."

So does that mean Aubry will lose \$12,000 on a technically? Let's find out.

What should you do when your flight is canceled and you miss your tour?

If you're on a tour and it looks like you're going to miss your flight, here's a checklist:

1. Get in line at the service desk, call your airline, text your airline -- or all three. You want to open several channels of communication to see if you can get rebokod on the next available flight to your destination.

Pro tip: If your airline can't offer you an alternative flight, ask it to endorse your ticket to another carrier -- in other words, fly you on a different airline. They can sometimes do that.

2. Contact your travel advisor. If you've booked a pricey tour, chances are you worked with a travel agent. Now is the time to call the agent because that person may be able to find a way to get you to your destination. (Remember, they received a commission for your booking, and you may have also paid them a fee, so this is not an act of charity.)

3. Reach out to your tour operator. Sometimes they may have a creative idea for how to get you to your destination, like rerouting you through Chicago or London. But you definitely have to keep the tour operator in the loop so that they know whether or not you're coming.

3. Contact your travel insurance company. Again, if you've plunked down \$12K, you almost certainly have travel insurance. Many travel insurance companies can help you find a better flight or help you get

home. At a bare minimum, your travel insurance company needs to know that your trip is off and that you need to file a claim. Someone can help guide you through the process.

Aubry mentions that she asked United for help and eventually contacted Smithsonian, but there's no mention of a travel advisor or direct contact with Travel Guard. It's possible that one of those parties could have helped fix this before it became a \$12,000 claim.

What does travel insurance actually cover when you miss a flight?

Aubrey had a standard Travel Guard insurance policy. The coverage can apply in several ways.

Trip interruption coverage kicks in once your journey starts. It offers financial protection if an "unforeseen covered event" ends your trip. This benefit reimburses you for the unused portion of your trip and covers the cost of alternative transportation to resume your itinerary or return home. Covered reasons for interruption can include unforeseen medical emergencies, natural disasters, or significant travel delays.

Trip cancellation coverage reimburses you for nonrefundable trip expenses when a covered cancellation happens. While specific coverage varies by plan, common covered reasons for cancellation often include unforeseen work obligations, jury duty, and illness of the insured or a close family member.

The bottom line is, if you have an insurance policy from a reputable and licensed company, you should be fully covered when an airline cancels your flight and you can't catch up to your tour.

In Aubry's case, the interruption benefit maxed out at \$1,000, a representative told her. But a look at her policy said otherwise. It promised coverage of up to 100 percent of the cost for a cancellation and 150 percent for an interruption.

It looks like something got lost in translation.

How can you get an insurance company to pay a valid claim?

Aubry initially went through Smithsonian Journeys, which helped her file a claim. A Travel Guard representative asked United Airlines about the circumstances of her cancellation.

And then our advocate Dwayne Coward found the problem. Travel Guard claimed United sent it a message that failed to fully explain the circumstances of her cancellation. Yes, United had canceled her flight from New York to Johannesburg.

"But United didn't address the lack of alternative flights," she added.

A closer look at her Travel Guard policy reveals that it covered mechanical and equipment failure of a common carrier (like an airline) that results in a delay of your trip for at least 72 consecutive hours.

Travel Guard just needed the evidence.

And that brings us to the best way to get an insurance company to pay a valid claim. You have to send it all the paperwork.

Fortunately, Travel Guard hadn't officially turned down her claim -- a representative had only told Aubry by phone that it would only cover \$1,000 of her claim. There was still time.

Will this claim get paid? Dwayne recommended that Aubry ask for a second letter with more detail. United then sent Travel Guard more information, but it wasn't quite enough.

"It didn't mention when the next available flight was," she says. "It also stated there was extreme weather. That's not true. We were cleared for takeoff and had to wait because there was a bit of a backup."

While we waited, United discovered a mechanical issue on the flight and we went back to the gate where we sat for three hours until the flight was

canceled. United didn't explain any of that in the letter."

Our advocacy team has a few connections over at United, so we contacted the airline on her behalf to get the correct documentation. Finally, United sent the needed proof directly to Travel Guard.

The company then paid the full claim.

Aubry's case is an important reminder that when your insurance claim is denied, you need to find out why -- and then take action. But it's also a lesson about contacting the right people when your trip gets delayed. Aubry didn't know that her travel

insurance company could have possibly helped her when she was stuck in New York. But now she does -- and now, so do you.

Christopher Elliott is an author, consumer advocate, and journalist. He founded Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps solve consumer problems.

He publishes Elliott Confidential, a travel newsletter, and the Elliott Report, a news site about customer service. If you need help with a consumer problem, you can reach him here or email him at chris@elliott.org.

PROBLEM SOLVED

BY CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Amex denied me a credit because I was \$3.47 short. Why can't it have a heart?



Illustration by Dustin Elliott

Cole Juchems thinks he's earned a \$350 credit from American Express after meeting the spending requirement on his platinum card. But Amex says he's \$3.47 short and refuses to give him the credit. Is he out of luck?

Q: American Express offered me a promotional credit when I renewed my Amex Platinum card annual fee in July 2024. The offer was for a \$350 credit, roughly half the \$695 annual fee, if I spent \$4,000 on the card over the next 90 days.

At the end of 90 days, I added my spending and found that I'd met the minimum amount required. I reached out to Amex again to inquire about the credit, only to be told that I'd figured incorrectly and was \$3.47 short.

I understand the calculation error was mine, but I find it surprising that Amex wouldn't make an effort to retain a loyal cardmember in good standing by waiving the last \$3.47 and awarding the credit. I've made upwards of \$25,000 in purchases since opening my account in June 2023 and am disappointed that the company values my loyalty at less than \$3.47.

I don't expect Amex to make an exception in my case, but I would appreciate it if your team could inquire on my behalf, if for no other reason than to see how Amex responds. Any help you can offer is appreciated. -- Cole Juchems, Pekin, Ill.

A: Amex should have considered letting the \$3.47 slide, or given you a way to make up for it. You spent nearly \$4,000 on your card in just three months -- and over \$25,000 in a little over a year. I think you've more than proven your loyalty to the company.

But that's the problem with credit card companies. They push you to spend more, which may be good for Amex, but not necessarily for you.

I would carefully reconsider bonus offers like these, because you could easily overextend yourself and end up in debt. You were smart to keep close track of your spending. If you hadn't made an error, you would have received the \$350 credit while meeting the minimum spending requirement.

You did the right thing by contacting Amex to inquire about the credit. You also kept a detailed paper trail of your correspondence. You could have also appealed to an executive at Amex. I list the names, numbers, and emails of the American Express executives on my consumer advocacy website, elliott.org.

I contacted American Express on your behalf. A representative acknowledged the unusual circumstances of your case and agreed to issue the \$350 credit to your account.

"I appreciate very much the help that you and your team provided," you said. "I doubt that I'd have gotten a positive result by working within Amex's internal customer service structure. It's obvious that your team's inquiry on my behalf led to this timely, positive resolution."

Christopher Elliott is the founder of Elliott Advocacy (<https://elliottadvocacy.org>), a nonprofit organization that helps consumers solve their problems. Email him at chris@elliott.org or get help by contacting him at <https://elliottadvocacy.org/help/>

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HEALTH

The power of a dancer's ankle



Yale orthopaedic surgeon (and one-time ballet dancer) Arianna Gianakos explains the mechanics — and risks — of being en pointe.

In theater, "break a leg" is a phrase used to wish a performer luck. But for ballet dancers, it isn't simply an expression but an occupational reality. The intense physical demands of ballet put dancers at high risk for foot and ankle injuries, from blisters and bunions to stress fractures and tendonitis.

"I think ballerinas are probably some of the toughest athletes, in terms of the physicality of what they have to endure, along with their commitment," said Dr. Arianna Gianakos, an orthopaedic surgeon and assistant professor of orthopaedics and rehabilitation at Yale School of Medicine (YSM), who specializes in sports-related injuries.

Ballet dancers often push their bodies to the limit: They support all their weight on the tips of their toes when rising to what is known as en pointe. They soar through the air in gravity-defying jets. They spin their bodies by the waist and their legs when performing a fouetté. The stress these motions place on the body — especially if done to overexertion or without proper technique — may cause serious pain and injury.

Like many orthopaedic surgeons, Gianakos was drawn to the field by her own experience as an athlete. She's been in her patients' shoes — as a dancer, a basketball player, and a track and field athlete. Indeed, as a college athlete, she had her own share of injuries, including tearing her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and sustaining ankle ligament instability, both requiring surgical intervention.

"As an athlete, all you want to do is get back to the sport you love," she said. "When you can't get back to it — not because you don't have the grit and determination, but because you're physically unable to do it — it can be detrimental to an athlete's overall well-being."

In an interview, Gianakos explains the mechanics of being en pointe, the most common injuries experienced by ballet dancers, and how she centers her patients in her work as a surgeon.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What happens to the foot and ankle when a ballet dancer goes on pointe? Walk us through the mechanics of how they make it look so effortless.

Arianna Gianakos: Even though they make it look effortless, it isn't effortless. It takes a lot of skill, training, and hard work.

It's complex biomechanically because it requires the dancer to have appropriate strength, flexibility, and

Gianakos: Ballet dancers experience either overuse injuries or traumatic injuries. Because this sport requires a lot of athleticism, we see stress fractures, particularly in the metatarsals, which are the bones in the forefoot, as well as under the sesamoid, which is under the great toe, and the navicular [in the midfoot]. Those injuries can be exacerbated in patients who might have some nutritional imbalances or deficiencies or who aren't as well trained and haven't been practicing those moves as much.

Posterior ankle impingement is a very common injury for dancer athletes. It is essentially compression in the back of the ankle. If you're in a pointed position repetitively, you get pinching in the back of the ankle joint. That can cause a lot of inflammation and scar tissue. It's one of the injuries I often see in ballet dancers, gymnasts, and soccer players.

What does treatment typically look like for dance-related injuries? Gianakos: In general, we need to make sure they're eating well, healthy, and stay hydrated, as well as pay attention to their mental health. If there is an injury, we need to make sure that the athlete knows it's okay to take a little time off so that they are properly diagnosed. If there is an injury and it's something that sidelines them for a period of time, they not only need an appropriate physical therapy protocol but a sport-specific therapy program, too. You can't just have them sit on a bike and expect them to be able to return to an elite level of dance. They also need to speak with someone on the mental health side of things. Mental health is important not only to return to dance but also so they're not fearful about re-injury.

Foot and ankle injuries can have a major impact on a dancer's quality of life. How do you approach treatment? Does recovery look different depending on the individual patient?

Gianakos: The biggest thing is developing a really good rapport with my patient. I want them to be able to trust me as their physician and their surgeon. I want them to be able to be open and honest about what they're feeling both physically and mentally, so that I can better understand their injury entirely.

I also want to understand the individual's goals. So, in a ballet dancer's situation, their goal is to get back to doing things that require excessive range of motion, strength, balance, all these things. Depending on the injury, they might need some time where they are immobilized. But I try not to immobilize people in general with foot and ankle injuries. If someone is immobilized for too long, particularly a ballet dancer, they are not going to get the range of motion back because of all the scar tissue that will build up there. I usually want them at least doing some range of motion exercises early on.

Another thing that I try with my practice is, if it's feasible, minimally invasive approaches to help expedite recovery and reduce risk of wound complications. I also do regular check-ins with the athlete to see how they're progressing, including having direct communication with their therapist or trainer to understand if they're meeting recovery milestones.

What are some of the ways dancers can minimize serious injury? What should people keep in mind before starting en pointe?

Gianakos: Knowing your body and listening to your body is important. That's a good first step. Seeing a physician is also important. There are a lot of athletes who play through pain. If you do that, you can put yourself at increased risk for damage down the road, including a more severe injury.

Dance is a great sport, but it's something that takes time and dedication. Start off with basics and really focus on technique, so that you can then progress to some of these more advanced moves that require a little bit more strength and stability.

You also need to stay on top of nutrition, like eating healthy and staying hydrated, and having social support is important.

near the plant to determine if a thyroid cancer was caused by a change in their DNA or by radiation. It examined the stored local thyroid cancer from before 1979 through the present, eliminating any from patients they couldn't prove were born, bred and raised in central Pennsylvania.

"What we found was that about seven years after the accident, there was a change from sporadic to radiation-induced cancer and then back again," he said. "What that tells us is that there probably was a source of radiation exposure."

The incidence of thyroid cancer has tripled in the past three decades. While some say the disease is more easily detected because doctors scan more patients than before, others say more people are developing the disease.

Goldenberg falls into the second camp and wonders if the rise in obesity rates could be playing a part. "It is generally a woman's disease and women make estrogen with fat, so that just makes sense," he said.

Whether obesity or radiation exposure, he hopes new techniques and research methods will provide answers.

"Everything needs to be called into question," he said.

Scientists find cellular brain changes tied to PTSD

The human brain is made up of billions of interconnected cells that are constantly talking to each other.

A new Nature study zooms in to the single-cell level to see how this cellular communication may be going wrong in those affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Until recently, researchers did not have the technology to study genetic variation within individual cells. But now that it's available, a team led by Matthew Girgenti, PhD, assistant professor of psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine, has been analyzing brain cells to uncover genetic variants that might be associated with psychiatric diseases such as major depressive disorder (MDD) and PTSD.

We're trying to figure out what's gone wrong in psychiatric disorders so that we can understand the neurobiological mechanisms that are in play in these diseases. The hope is that we can identify areas where we can potentially treat them—that's the ultimate goal.

Their latest study is one of the first to examine a major psychiatric disorder, PTSD, at the single-cell level. For years, doctors have prescribed antidepressants to treat the condition because there are currently no drugs specifically designed for PTSD. Girgenti hopes that identifying novel molecular signatures associated with the psychiatric disease can help researchers learn how to develop new drugs or repurpose existing ones to treat it more effectively.

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For the new study, the researchers used postmortem human brain tissue from donors with and without PTSD. They also analyzed tissue from individuals who had been diagnosed with MDD—which is often diagnosed in people with PTSD—to better understand both the commonalities and where mo-

lecular mechanisms diverge between the conditions. Specifically, they looked at the dorsolateral pre-



frontal cortex, the region of the brain associated with executive functioning and emotional regulation. "It's the most uniquely human region of the brain," Girgenti explains.

Across all three groups, the researchers isolated individual cells from this brain region, paying particular attention to the nuclei, which package the cells' DNA and make RNA. This allowed the team to observe genetic variation across the groups.

Key genome alterations revealed in brains with PTSD and MDD

Among brains with PTSD, the analyses revealed gene alterations in a type of neuron known as inhibitory neurons. "These are the fine-tuning neurons," says Girgenti. They regulate other neurons and prevent them from overfiring.

In brains with PTSD and MDD, the team observed a decrease in the amount of communication from these neurons. The researchers believe that this decrease in communication may contribute to a hyperexcitable state in the prefrontal cortex. Following a traumatic event, this hyperexcitability could cause symptoms typically associated with PTSD, such as hyperarousal (overactive fight-or-flight response) and nightmares.

The researchers also discovered differences in the microglia, which are the brain's immune cells. Interestingly, they found that these cells were overcommunicating in brains with MDD, but under communicating in those with PTSD.

"PTSD and MDD are generally

very similar to each other and have a lot of shared genetic variability," Girgenti says. "This is a finding that seems to differentiate the two." His team hopes to further investigate these differences and how they might drive the two disorders.

Furthermore, they found that brains with PTSD also had genome alterations associated with downregulated endothelial cells. These cells are part of the brain's vasculature and interact with the

rest of the body. Prior research has shown that individuals with PTSD have elevated levels of stress hormones, which travel to the brain through blood vessels. "We think there could be an increase in the amount of stress hormone that's getting into the brain because these endothelial cells are compromised," says Girgenti.

Unlocking secrets of the brain to inform new therapies

Unlike Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, which are associated with noticeable changes to the brain when imaged, scientists know very little about the neurobiological mechanisms underlying PTSD. By zooming in to the molecular level, Girgenti hopes these insights will help lead to better therapies for the disorder.

"We've already identified pathways—pathways refer to how genes talk to each other—that we think are targetable by particular drugs," he says. "This was only made possible by looking at those individual cells and those individual molecular changes. Now we have to try and find drugs that will reverse that."

In future studies, Girgenti's team plans to examine other regions in the brain that might be involved in PTSD pathology such as the hypothalamus, which regulates the production of stress hormones.

"The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex has been very well studied," says Girgenti. "But there are other regions of the brain that we know a lot less about, and they're just as likely to hold secrets for what is wrong. And there could be even better regions to look at when it comes to therapy."

To understand Alzheimer's Disease, researchers turn to Myelin sheath

Four microscopy images show a neuron fluorescing green and amyloid aggregates fluorescing in red as well as how the amyloid wraps around the axon. At the bottom of the figure is an illustration of this wrapping.

The disruption of axons—the thread-like part of nerve cells that transmit signals—has been linked to electrical signals is associated with Alzheimer's disease. One way axonal function may be hindered is through damage to the myelin sheath, a fatty coating that wraps around axons. Similar to the plastic or rubber used to insulate a cable, the myelin sheath allows neurons to quickly communicate with each other. When the structure is impaired, so is the conduction of electrical signals.

To better understand any pathological processes related to Alzheimer's disease that might affect the myelin sheath, Yale researchers analyzed proteins in human brain tissue, focusing on the sub-compartment that lies between an axon and its myelin sheath.

They found proteins in this sub-compartment that differed between people who did and did not have Alzheimer's disease and discovered structural abnormalities at the myelin-axon interface that may hinder electrical signaling. The team published their findings June 13 in *Nature Neuroscience*.

They also learn how the proteins that make up the myelin sheath are affected in the diseased state compared to a non-diseased state, we might be able to figure out what's going on when the disease develops in healthy controls.

seems that the total amount of the myelin in the myelin sheaths is relatively preserved," says Grutzendler.

Nerves are coated in myelin, but have tiny gaps called "nodes of Ranvier" where the nerve is exposed to boost signals. Right next to these gaps are "paranodes," where the myelin sticks tightly to the nerve, helping anchor it in place and organize the nerve for fast, accurate signaling.

within their area of interest with a special antibody. That allowed them to isolate the proteins and then identify them using mass



spectrometry. "This approach allows us to look at the specific proteins that are contained within the very, very narrow space of the myelin sheath," Grutzendler says.

Their analyses revealed protein differences between tissue affected by Alzheimer's disease and that of healthy individuals. Some of these differences were related to the formation of amyloid—abnormal protein aggregates that can accumulate in tissues and are linked to Alzheimer's disease—axon growth, and lipid metabolism.

"Myelin requires a lot of lipids [a group of molecules that includes fats] for normal function," Grutzendler says. "In Alzheimer's disease, lipid metabolism could be abnormally affected in a way that alters the normal function of myelin."

Imaging analyses show abnormalities at paranode region

The team also used a super-resolution imaging technique called expansion microscopy to further analyze brain tissue samples. Interestingly, they found that the amount of myelin in tissues affected by Alzheimer's disease did not significantly differ from age-matched healthy controls.

While they did not find differences in the amount of myelin, the team did find changes in the proteins at these paranodes. These changes could be how well the nerve signals travel.

Paranodes are also important because they contain channels that help transfer nutrients between the myelin and the nerve, as

well as clear waste. The team discovered that amyloid can build up in unique spiral-shaped loops around the axons, often forming near the paranodes. "These channels are clogged up by the accumulation of these amyloid proteins," says Grutzendler. "As a result of that, we think this is affecting the function of the axon and myelin together."

If we learn how the proteins that make up the myelin sheath are affected

in the diseased state compared to a non-diseased state, we might be able to figure out what's going on when the disease develops.

In some cases, the researchers observed swelling of the axon near these amyloid loops. "It's possible that this amyloid accumulation around the axon causes constriction of the paranode channels and leads to swelling," says Grutzendler. "It's almost like tying a knot around a straw—if you constrict it and keep blowing into it, you'll see an enlargement of the straw by the knot."

There were also abnormal patterns of myelin around axonal spheroids—bubble-like structures on axons that form due to the swelling. "This can have important implications because not only is the spheroid affecting electrical conduction, but also the different degrees of myelination of the spheroids on top of that," says Grutzendler. "It's a double whammy."

In future studies, Grutzendler's team hopes to use these protein data to see if they can improve some of the abnormalities they found in the diseased state.

"We are still at the hypothesis-generating phase," Grutzendler says. "We have a lot more work to do in the future."

Thyroid cancer surges. Is TMI responsible?

In most cases, the cause of thyroid cancer is unknown, according to Dr. David Goldenberg, chief of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery at Penn State Health. But, for years, the vast majority of his thyroid cancer patients have told him they blame the 1979 partial meltdown of a reactor at Three Mile Island near Middletown, Pennsylvania, for their disease.

Although he generally doesn't agree with them, Goldenberg's research indicates some of those suspicions may be true.

In most cases, thyroid cancer just happens and it's bad luck," he said. "In some cases, it's passed along in families but it's directly hereditary." One of the only known risk factors for developing the disease is exposure to low-dose radiation, with a seven- to 20-year incubation time before the cancer appears. "The younger you are when exposed, the more likely you are to develop thyroid cancer," Goldenberg said.

The thyroid gland, which is responsible for metabolism and hormone regulation, is sensitive to radiation, and that's why people treated with radiation for childhood cancer and those who live near nuclear ac-

cident sites sometimes develop thyroid cancer.

Often, the disease is discovered by accident—a medical provider discovers a nodule in a patient's neck during a routine examination, or a radiologist spots it during imaging for something else. Symptoms typically don't occur until the cancer is more advanced.

After surgery removes all or part of a cancerous thyroid gland and any adjacent lymph nodes that may be affected, radioactive iodine pills or liquids are often used to kill any cancerous cells left behind.

Goldenberg said the prognosis for thyroid cancer is excellent, with a cure rate approaching 98 percent.

Multiple studies on the demographics of those who develop thyroid cancer show that although Pennsylvania has the highest rate in the country — "for reasons not clear to us," Goldenberg said — the highest concentration is not in the central part of the state, but near Pittsburgh.

People living in the three ZIP codes surrounding Three Mile Island didn't develop more or deadlier cases of thyroid cancer after the 1979 event. A molecular study that Goldenberg published in 2017 identified molecular mutations in patients