

LONG ISLAND

Sheila Sustrin, teacher, children's book writer

BY BETH WHITEHOUSE

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After Sheila Sustrin died on Monday at age 76, her identical twin sister, Letty, placed a copy of their latest children's book, "The Teacher Who Would Not Retire Loses Her Ballet Slippers," into her coffin.

The Deer Park sisters — both retired elementary school teachers — wrote five children's books together about retired schoolteacher Mrs. Belle, who always wears ballet slippers. "She dedicated her life to children," Letty Sustrin said of her sister, who died after battling cancer for years.

The twins worked side by side for 38 years in the Brentwood school district, 18 years teaching kindergarten at Northwest Elementary, now called the Freshman Center, and 20 years teach-

ing first grade at Laurel Park Elementary. They were known for dressing identically, but each would wear individual jewelry such as a pin or a necklace or a ring with her first initial.

Both took early retirement in 1998, and in 2002 they published their first book, called simply "The Teacher Who Would Not Retire." Subsequent picture books in the series, aimed at children ages 4 to 10, included "The Teacher Who Would Not Retire Goes to Camp," "Discovers a New Planet" and "Becomes a Movie Star." The last two books were launched at the YMCA Boulton Center for the Performing Arts in Bay Shore.

Neither twin married, and they lived together. "We got married to our jobs," Letty said. "The kids became our kids."

Indeed, one former student

who lives in Texas wrote this about Sheila on Legacy.com: "Letty, having you and Sheila as my 1st teachers has made such an impact on my life. . . . Sheila will be greatly missed by countless people whose lives are better for having you and her as our teachers."

The Sustrins visited Long Island schools to read from their books and were so involved with their second career that they named their Scottish terrier Belle after their protagonist. Letty said she's not sure if she will carry on the series alone. "This is something I have to think about," she said.

In addition to Letty, Sheila is survived by a cousin, Marilyn Weissman of Sanford, Florida. Donations can be made to the North Shore Animal League, Little Shelter in Huntington or Bideawee in Wantagh.



The lead character in books written by Sheila Sustrin, left, and her twin Letty Sustrin was named after their Scottish terrier Belle.

LONG ISLAND

Albert Passuello, footballer, actor

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY

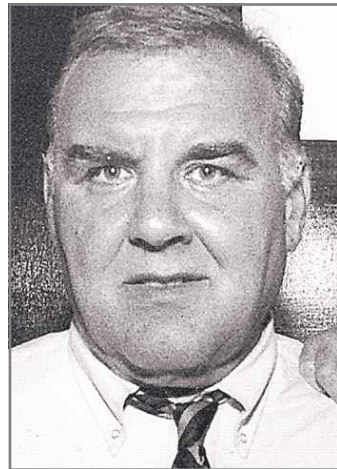
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Albert "Tank" Passuello, who at Hofstra University anchored the football team's line as well as performed on stage in a theater department he would later direct, has died. He was 76.

The restaurateur and tavern owner was a confidante of pro football great Joe Namath and friends with Jets coach Wilbur Charles "Weeb" Ewbank during the team's first heyday, as well as a force in Long Island theater. He died Oct. 1 of complications from diabetes in Bonita Springs, Florida, where he had moved from Merrick about five years ago.

Born in Brooklyn and raised by his grandfather, Passuello attended vocational school and served in the U.S. Marine Corps before attending Hofstra, with which he would have a lifelong relationship.

At 6 foot, 2 inches and more than 320 pounds, No. 77 was the biggest football player Hofstra had ever fielded at the time, prompting the nickname "Tank." He was a standout center and defensive lineman from 1960 to 1963, when Hofstra lost



Albert Passuello was known as "Tank" when at Hofstra.

just four games in four seasons.

Off the field, Passuello was involved in more than a dozen performances at Hofstra. He would return to the Hofstra stage in 1974 to start The Gray Wig theatrical company with three other alumni. Film director Francis Ford Coppola, who graduated from Hofstra, wrote a play for the troupe, according to a 1999 New York Times article on theater on Long Island.

Passuello produced and starred in more than 100 pro-

ductions through Gray Wig, including "Guys and Dolls" and, in 1976, "Fiddler on the Roof," in which he played Tevye.

The Hofstra president at the time, James Shuart, a close friend, appointed Passuello director of theater services at the university. He held the job until his retirement in 1999 from the university, where he also worked full time at the campus pub, Hofstra USA.

After graduating from Hofstra in 1963, Passuello for 10 years ran Bill Kusivich's popular bar/restaurant called Meadowbrook near the campus and began producing serious theater in the basement, including Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," according to a New York Times article. Passuello played Estragon.

When the New York Jets practiced across the street at Hofstra, Passuello became friends with Namath, the Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback, and Ewbank, who is also in the Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

Some of the Jets' stars from those years, during which the team scored its Super Bowl upset in 1969, were friends of Passuello. Namath joked that

the popular Passuello was the reason the Jets were attracting such big crowds.

In the 2005 biography "Namath" by Mark Kriegel, Passuello is mentioned several times as a confidante of the great and brash quarterback.

One night, the biography states, Namath was drinking heavily at Passuello's bar in part as a painkiller for his knees, ankle and elbows. When Namath ordered another glass of Johnnie Walker Red, Passuello is quoted as telling him, "Joe, you've got a game tomorrow."

In 1972 Passuello opened The Treehouse with Hofstra alum Bill Dineen in Merrick and operated the tavern-restaurant for three years before going to work at Hofstra.

A memorial event open to the public is planned at Hofstra's University Club on campus from 6 to 9 p.m. on Thursday, said his son, Christian, of Oceanside.

In addition to his son, Passuello is survived by his wife of 47 years, the former Vivian Gustafson; children Michael, of Sea Cliff, and Dana, of Seaford; and nine grandchildren.

A private family service was held in Florida.

NATION

Gail Zappa, 70, widow of musical icon

LOS ANGELES — Gail Zappa, the widow of music legend Frank Zappa, has died at her Los Angeles home. She was 70.

Family spokeswoman Marcee Rondan says Zappa was surrounded by her children when she died Wednesday. There's no word on the cause of her death.

She was 22 when she married Frank Zappa, a prolific songwriter, musician and head of the band Mothers of Invention. They had four children: Moon Unit, Dweezil, Ahmet and Diva.

Frank Zappa died of prostate cancer in 1993. His widow, as head of the Zappa Family Trust, continued to promote his work, putting out dozens of posthumous albums and licensing his image. — AP

LEGACY
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