

# MY QUEEN(S) Mother

STORY BY DINA LAURA

When I think about Mother's Day, I have to admit ... a part of me groans inside. Why do we need another "Hallmark Holiday" reminding us to celebrate our moms? If you are like me, and you think your mom is the greatest thing since puppies, shouldn't EVERY day be Mother's Day? But then I remember how chaotic life can get and as a writer/actor/server/dog walker, a day where I can catch my breath and devote myself to the wonders of my mom might just be exactly what the doctor ordered! And what better place to treat my mom like the royalty she is than in the borough where she went to high school?

Sunday usually begins with a good cup of joe and the latest edition of "CBS Sunday Morning" (a weekly ritual for both of

us). But on Mother's Day, I have an extra special treat for my mom: exquisite coffee made by the equally exquisite Natassa Contini, owner of Chateau Le Woof (30-02 14th St., [www.chateaulwoof.com](http://www.chateaulwoof.com)), a cozy coffee shop and pet store. Coffee and dogs? Count us in! Open since September of 2015, this charming haven already has quite a following, due at least in part to La Colombe, a magnificent craft coffee whose high-end Workshop line can't be found anywhere else in Queens. And yes, moms, there's a specialty coffee "cocktail" on the menu for Mother's Day, The Bumble Bee, a latte made with a double espresso shot, homemade vanilla and wildflower honey, which can be served hot or iced. Yum. While sipping our lattes, we'll browse the wide variety of holistic pet products for sale, some of which are locally

sourced or available in Queens exclusively at this store. Chateau Le Woof also hosts various in-store events, including seminars on pet health/nutrition, private doggie birthday parties and an upcoming doggie-themed tattoo night! Puppy "happy hours" run Monday/Wednesday/Friday from 7 to 8 p.m., where canines (and their humans)

can mix and mingle. And check out the yummy craic (pronounced "crack") brownies and Aunt Angel's Oreo truffles, both made by local Astorians. Bringing locals together is owner Natassa's focus: "The charm about Chateau Le Woof is that it's a community. Everyone that comes in knows one another. It's like the

local Cheers but with coffee instead!"

After our wonderful wake-up call, we'll journey to Bayside to a very special bookstore, Turn the Page ... Again! (39-15A Bell Blvd., Bayside, [www.turnthepageagain.com](http://www.turnthepageagain.com)). Truth be told, my mom and I are both book junkies. My mom, however, is an Olympic reader, consuming

about three books a week, while divulging plot spoilers along the way (and then denying ever doing it). Discovering this gem is an absolute delight, and their extensive collection of used books are priced from \$1 to \$5. Turn the Page ... Again is operated by Transitional Services for New York (TSINY), and is an affirmative busi-



ness enterprise, helping people with emotional disabilities get re-acclimated to the workforce. Employees can stay up to a year, and a job developer works with them throughout to help them achieve their goals – whether it's more education or job placement. The bookstore's inventory is maintained exclusively through donations from other bookstores, the Queens Library or private donations. In fact, individuals donating books can get a voucher toward future purchases. Customers wanting a particular book can sign up for the "wish list," and the bookstore will notify you when they find it. Buying a book at Turn the Page ... Again benefits a great cause as well as your soul. The trick is finding something my mom hasn't read yet!

Nothing like a good book to work up an appetite, so it's time to take my mom to lunch in Sunnyside, at the Dog and Duck Pub (45-20 Skillman Ave., Sunnyside, [www.thedogandduckny.com](http://www.thedogandduckny.com)). Located on a picturesque, tree-lined street, both the exterior and interior of this establishment are warm and inviting. (What else would



you expect from an Irish pub?) The Dog and Duck features an eclectic menu that offers not only classics like bangers and mash and fish and chips, but pleasantly surprising dishes such as wild mushroom risotto, duck confit, and curried monkfish. That's because owner/chef Padraigh Connolly, who graduated from the Westminster Culinary School in London, wanted

to design a menu that went beyond traditional pub fare. And for those looking for more drinking/entertainment options, the Dog and Duck has plenty to offer. The bar regularly features live music, happy hour specials Mondays through Fridays from 4 to 7 p.m. and half-price bottles of wine on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4 to 11 p.m. Personally, I'll go straight for the Bloody Mary to accompany my meal and for my mom, it's always champagne. The restaurant is serving a three-course prix-fixe Mother's Day menu for \$33 per person that kicks in at 1 p.m. and runs for the remainder of the day. (Note: the regular brunch menu is being offered from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. only.)

Now it's time to walk off our delicious meal, and what better way to do that than a stroll through history at the Lent-Riker-Smith Homestead ([www.rikerhome.com](http://www.rikerhome.com))? Built around 1655, the house is the oldest private dwelling in New York City and is listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks. The focal point of the house is truly its current resident,

Marion Duckworth Smith, who is only the third owner in the house's 360-year-old history. Marion moved into the house in 1983 along with her late husband, Michael Smith, and has been restoring it ever since. She positively beams when discussing her home's illustrious past and the treasure trove of items she has on display for her tours. A guided tour of this incredible home, enriched by Marion's fascinating tales, is a MUST for any Queens resident. Besides the inside of the home, the outdoor area boasts beautiful plants and flowers throughout the property (there's even a secret garden in the back complete with a key on the wall), a gingerbread house, and a cemetery with 132 marked graves (don't miss the entrance gate with the name "Riker" on it). Marion's husband took her to see the cemetery on their second date, which might seem ghoulish to some, but to Marion it was love: "This house has been waiting for me. I'm going to bring it back to life and it's going to bring me back to life. And it did. It's been wonderful ... My childhood dream was to have an old house that I could fix up and I've never regretted it." Marion's ultimate goal is to live out her days in the house and then donate it, where it can be open to the public forever as a park and a museum. Marion's personally led tours are \$25/person and are scheduled for Saturdays on June 4, 11, 18 and 25. RSVP by emailing [info@rikerhome.com](mailto:info@rikerhome.com). Private tours can also be arranged.

This taste of history reminds me of a time when you had to do everything yourself, so why not stop by Optimistic Crafts (37-02 Astoria Blvd., Astoria, [www.optimisticcrafts.blogspot.com](http://www.optimisticcrafts.blogspot.com)), a DIY craft studio? Their



mission: to be a crafty oasis for sharing projects, project inspiration and how-to's. Optimistic Crafts is the brainchild of Elisabeth Prescott, a woman who learned to crochet at the tender age of 5! The studio is open on Saturdays and by appointment on other days. Classes are available in knitting, crocheting, embroidery and sewing (all of which the very gifted Elisabeth can do), as well as private project consultations for a mere \$15/hour. Crafters can bring in their own project to work on in the space on Saturdays for a suggested donation of \$5 to \$10/hour. The studio is also a mini shop, featuring carefully selected yarns, supplies

and "crafty" gift items. My mom was a big knitter back in the day, so maybe Elisabeth can teach me to "knit one, purl two." A Mother's Day special: the entire month of May, \$5 only for 2-hour beginner knitting, crocheting or embroidery classes for joint mother and daughter attendees (check Facebook for scheduled Saturdays and/or email [optimisticcrafts@gmail.com](mailto:optimisticcrafts@gmail.com) for appointments on evenings and Sundays).

Growing up, the baby grand piano in my living room stood testament to the role music played in my family's life. And we weren't just music players; we were music LISTENERS. And back then, it was all about spinning vinyl records on what my mom still lovingly refers to as a "Victrola" (a turntable for you younger folks). And there is a perfect place in Astoria to buy vinyl: Hi-Fi Records (23-19 Steinway St., [www.hifi-records.com](http://www.hifi-records.com)). Owner Javi



The Lent-Riker-Smith Homestead

Velazquez is simply passionate about records, ever since his older sisters abandoned their Bob Dylan and Joan Baez albums and left them to him. The store has records from every era, past to present, including one of my faves—Blondie (“Parallel Lines” was my very first rock album). Besides mainstream music, Javi supports the local music scene wholeheartedly: “We wanted to have a local music hub where people could come together and exchange ideas, learn about music, promote and enrich these local bands and enrich their lives by knowing them.” Live, in-store performances have featured some of these very talented local indie artists such as The Gantry and Bria Monet. Every Sunday, Hi-Fi has a pop-up shop at Single Cut Brewery from noon to 5 p.m. with a live DJ complete with giveaways, raffles and albums for sale. You don’t own a turntable? That’s okay. Hi-Fi has audio equipment available too, to turn your home into (as Javi puts it) the “ultimate audio castle.”

Now that we’ve gotten our music fix, mom and I are down for some more neighborhood shopping. I should mention that my “Queens mother” was actually born in the Bronx (sorry Queens peeps, she is still a devoted Yankees fan) but later moved to Queens and attended Jamaica High School. Nowadays she calls New Jersey home, but loves to visit me and always asks if we can “walk on the avenue” and by avenue, she means Ditmars Boulevard.

My mom is the ultimate window shopper, and half the things she buys, she returns the next day (a retailer’s worst nightmare). Except, however, in the case of two exceptional stores: The Little Soap Shop (22-07b 36th St., [www.thelittlesoapshop.net](http://www.thelittlesoapshop.net)) and The Brass Owl (36-19 Ditmars Blvd., [www.thebrassowl.com](http://www.thebrassowl.com)). Both are featuring excellent gifts for Mother’s Day. The Little Soap Shop has washcloth and soap sets for \$15, as well as gift boxes with



The Dog &amp; Duck



HI-FI

lotion, soap, lavender sachets and lip butter stick for \$30. Custom-made baskets range from \$40 to \$75. All of these items are made from organic ingredients and are paraben free. (FYI, all soaps at this lovely shop are handmade, hand-cut and individually wrapped!) The Brass Owl has a pop-up shop the day before Mother’s Day from noon to 5 p.m. with three local artists, Single Girl Cookies and card artists Silly Reggie and Widy Cat. On Mother’s Day itself, The Brass Owl is giving 10 percent off all purchases for moms and a “candy bar” where you can create your own bag of complimentary sweets. Make sure

to pick up your very own “I Represent Queens” T-shirt that mom and I are sporting in our photo. (Don’t we look super cute?) FREE mimosas will be provided on both days. What a great place to end our day with a champagne toast – my mom’s

favorite. Bottoms up!

What I love about all of these places is their commitment to bringing the community together, whether it’s through harnessing the multitude of local talent or hosting events that allow local residents to meet and get better acquainted. And that’s the best part of this Mother’s Day for me: exploring Queens with my beloved mom, and mixing with our people. My mom may have been born in the Bronx, but her heart (and mine) belong to Queens. Happy Mother’s Day to all you moms out there, and make sure you say hello to us (or buy us a champagne) if you see us out and about!

CHERRY BLOSSOMS AT SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK

# SPRING

## Has Sprung!

**GREAT DISCOUNTS**  
at the best spots in  
Astoria, LIC, Sunnyside

**SPELLING BEE**  
AT APAC P. 6

**MOTHERS DAY**  
GUIDE P. 32

**"FOOD TEMPLE"**  
AT WARIQUE P. 45

**AWESOME**  
DESSERTS P. 50