

Slices of
‘The Big Apple’
This is New York City



An anthology of
Wit, Reflections
& Amusements

Cliff Strome
Licensed NYC Private
Tour Guide

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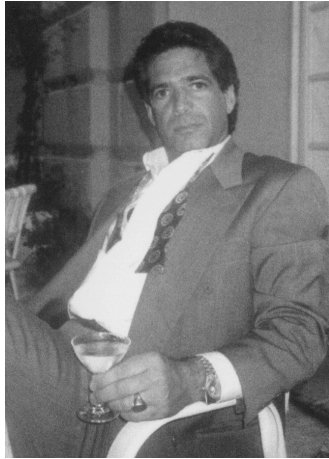


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Cliff Strome,

is a Licensed New York City Guide, recipient of The City of New York Dept. of Consumer Affairs highest rating, nominated Best Private NYC Tour Guide by The Association of New York Hotel Concierges (2011 and 2014), awarded The TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 & 2017,). Cliff has achieved the highest percentage of five star reviews (Excellent) on TripAdvisor, at the rate of 99% based on over 500 reviews.



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*For Aline
My wife, my candle,
the light of my life.*

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INTRODUCTION

From the heart and through the eyes drawn from the mind, body and soul of a lifelong New Yorker, one who has always had an active life, relentlessly seeking extraordinary encounters, incessantly expressing eccentric and amusing perspectives, initiating countless humorous conversations and situations, reacting in an offbeat and unexpected manner to the antics of others, this anthology has been written defining New York City as never before. Come and take this “tour” of New York City with me. Surely, you’ll be amazed, entertained and amused. You are about to experience “The City” up close in the most entertaining and memorable way.

If you love folklore, hilarious situations, everyday life, twists and turns, humor that gets you thinking and laughing, sometimes at the same time, delve into perspectives on urban life, new spins from the pavement, craziness, seldom known historical factoids, trivia, wisdom, stupidity, anger, wacko but, as times sensible, opinions and the unusual and unexpected, then this “tour” is yours to enjoy.

Experience “The City” in completely new ways. *Slices*, is a compilation of life experiences, opinions and reflections, all peppered with armchair wisdom fascinating trivia, humor and good fun. If you love life, people and New York City be prepared to spend some well-spent time. Enjoy and please don’t take everything too seriously.

Tourly yours,
Cliff Strome

Chapter 1

Just for Openers

“No! You go!”

Driving in Manhattan is spiked with numerous insanities. Anyone can who has been here can write a paper on the subject even if they’ve never driven a car. Aside from the maddening traffic, the gridlock, lousy drivers, taxi drivers, insane Uber, Lyft and Via drivers, who happen to think that they own the road with zero experience driving in New York City along with pedestrians texting their way across the street against the light, messenger cyclists, truck drivers, pedicab suicidal crazies, skateboarders and baby carriages and pedestrians, this place is a vast expanse of madness on the pavement.

Recently, I took my Fiat to the dealer to pick up a car cover. My red Fiat cabriolet convertible is my toy. I love it!

Upon exiting the Westside Highway at 96th Street I encountered a bit of slow moving traffic piling up on the way to the intersection at West End Avenue, known to be a busy intersection with a traffic signal that that is timed to provide a long wait. No one was moving. Suddenly, a car pulled up on my right and vectored at an angle toward the front of my car in an apparent attempt to get in front of me. I tapped my gas pedal to ensure that this intruder was not going to succeed in encroaching ahead of me.

Glancing at him I had noticed he had been talking to me but was unheard. I opened my window and he told me, “Don’t be foolish because I’d hate to damage

your cute little car while you attempt to prevent me from cutting in.”

“I’d hate to knock into your car, too.” I told him.

“I was ahead of you,” he retorted.

“In what dream?” I replied and chuckled.

He laughed too. Then I told him,

“If you are really in a rush, fine! Go ahead help yourself! I insisted.

A few moments later the traffic ahead of us started to move forward and the two of us were “neck and neck.” He waived me on to proceed first! I did the same for him and as a result we continued waiving to each other on and on and on, remaining in place, stopped, and listening to the noise of motorists honking their horns behind us begging for us to clear the way and get going. We continued to “play our little game” just long enough to avoid anger from behind about to reach catastrophic proportions.

So, I let him go first, we smiled and waved to each other as we continued on our way.

No cursing, no flipping “the finger” and there was no anger or childish behavior, just a jocular encounter with a happy ending, except for those behind us, of course who couldn’t get to the intersection fast enough to proceed before the next green light.

The Legally Blind Woman

Located on 23rd Street between 6th and 7th Avenue there is a residence for the unsighted, or "legally blind." What's the difference you may ask? Well, that was my question when I had first heard the term, "legally blind."

I had owned and operated New York City's largest one-hour photo store in the 1990's on West 23rd Street known as "Clicks." Those days are long gone, one-hour photo has been a "dinosaur industry" for nearly twenty years now. I had noticed, prior to signing my store lease, a huge residence for blind people nearby. Hum! Consequently, I knew that I was opening my photo business in the right place, huh? How could I fail with a huge residence for legally blind people right down the block?

Seriously, over the years, a ton of business from the "blind" residence flowed into my store. Amazing! "Legally blind" is not totally blind. "Legally blind" in numerous instances, is blind enough to obtain Federal, State or City financial assistance but not blind enough not to take pictures and pay for developing and printing in cash without needing help to identify the denomination of the bills they were conveying to our cashiers. In fact, one of my most talented and prolific customers was a "legally blind" woman who had lived in that residence and she was truly a terrific photographer. She saw things that no one else did, really! On with the story . . .

One day, as I was approaching the blind residence, I had noticed two young men with their jeans worn at about mid hip level, wearing black head wraps binding their hair, known as "do rags." The pair was

standing, leaning against a storefront, each with one foot propped up against the storefront, puffing on their cigarettes, and chatting, but not yet noticing the octogenarian, a Caucasian woman about five feet tall tapping a white stick from side to side, obviously unsighted, or rather perhaps "legally blind." They were slacking, smoking, "hanging out" and claspings their beers or malt liquor cans in brown paper bags. She, unknowingly, tapped one of them in their shin with her stick, while navigating her way back home.

"Why don't you look where the fuck you're going?" one of them shouted at her.

"Why don't you go fuck yourself you motherfucker?" she burst forth in "kind."

I had to hold back my laughter, although there was a huge dose of tragedy here. I had to take stock. New York City! That was the best example of this city's demonstrative and diversity, that day, so far! A tiny elderly woman, unsighted or "legally blind" frail, and impaired shouted out in her defense, rose to the occasion, roared expletives, unable to defend herself physically or take anything back home except her self-respect and dignity and that's big.

She had won the encounter on the sidewalk that afternoon. An elderly legally blind woman stood up against two "gutter urchins" whom she couldn't see and gave them the tongue-lashing they deserved.

Let's give her some kudos! She took what they had to throw at her and stood "tall" moving forward with dignity and pride. Wishing her well I, and a number of other pedestrians, applauded her courage and conviction!

As for the two offenders, they are part of New York City's palette. Without them, that New York City moment would not have occurred. The grit and guts evidenced by the unsighted woman evolved over the years due to similar experiences, no doubt.

Who knows? Perhaps she had an eye on them all the time, using the moment as an opportunity to shout her anger without fault. How little we know. Could be that she may have been one of my best photo customers? Such is New York City. That wouldn't surprise me. Hum? Nothing surprises me here any more. Nothing!

“Can’t Go To Motor Vehicle Without a Pen!”

Who among us has never lost their wallet? We’ve all misplaced that most precious cargo at least once. Either it’s been stolen, misplaced, slipped out of our back pocket, carelessly left behind or just gone missing! No one takes the blame for the loss of his or her wallet. We all endure the agony when we realize “IT’S GONE! SHIT!

When we become aware that our wallet has “split” what’s the first thing we mourn? It’s our driver’s license! More than our money, credit cards, pictures, health insurance card, 1987 Red Cross beginner swimmer’s card, library card or anything else that you’ve placed beneath your butt and haven’t needed for years and years! When we’re separated from our driver’s license we turn into ice. It’s the driver’s license that suddenly drives us all in a spiraling shit storm!

“My wallet, where is it?”

All we think about is our driver’s license and the hassle we’re going to go through replacing it, not to mention the anguish of not having it as we go about our daily business without a valid government issued ID.

We have to appear at the dreaded Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) or whatever they call it in your state. We trudge though that painfully sickening place, infused with lines, documentation requirements, something that we’ve forgotten to bring with us, the needed money order, your birth certificate, proof of citizenship, small pox vaccination card, urine sample, statement of no child support, high school diploma, biometric chart and all those

Patriot Act requirements, now mandated to “prove” that we and the 85 year old blue haired lady from Boca Raton, with the LV bag, standing in front of us, are not terrorists or illegal aliens. What a thrill! We may even need an eye exam and another road test. I’d rather go to the dentist, the IRS, an accountant or even submit to a colonoscopy! But please, PLEASE not the DMV! On second thought, I’ll just pass on the colonoscopy, another pain in the ass.

The unbearable reality of facing the people who “work” at the DMV puts me into a cold sweat. They’re incredibly helpful, knowledgeable and eager to provide welcoming eye contact, smiles, and a big “glad you’re here” attitude! They move the lines as fast as possible and always provide the right information punctuated with blank stares matching their brains. No doubt, even the U. S. Postal Service would gladly accept most of them if they would dare to apply. There are few exceptions folks, let’s be fair, few, too few.

Not the DMV, no! My heart rate set a record, my skin, white as a sheet, beads of sweat covered my face and I nearly pass out but couldn’t because the place was too packed and I couldn’t have hit the floor if I tried.

I planned to go to the DMV the morning after I had become aware of my wallet’s departure. I arrived very early that morning with the hope of getting out fast. The only way to clear that place is to yell, “FIRE.”

For me, the most convenient DMV in Manhattan is located downtown on Worth Street. It opens at 9 AM therefore; I arrived at 8:30 and was far from the first person in line. I found my spot and looked back every

few minutes and observed that the end of the line in no time disappeared from sight.

Why do people relish the joy of seeing people in line behind them? Isn't it the people who are in front of you that really matter?

I started to "shiver" a double meaning, as in wait and mourn, *shiva*, for myself over the aggravation that I was experiencing. It was a clear and sunny January morning. Having not heard the weather report that morning or taken the time to open my window at home, I had failed to get a sense of the temperature outside. To me, it had "appeared" that the temperature was warm. That was dumb! That's not the way to be weather-wise! How can you determine air temperature by looking out of a window? This was before the day of the smart-phone so I was unable to use an app to check the temp.

I had left my apartment wearing a leather bomber jacket, not quite the best choice for a windy twenty-seven degree day or for flying B-25 Mitchell bomber missions over Hamburg. That decision, the jacket together with my wait in line had created two sources of discomfort for me. The cold and waiting are two of my favorite things, yeah. Such a thrill!

I also needed some amusement, someone to talk with, a newspaper, a cup of hot coffee, something, just anything! As if this was not enough, I had to pee, my eyeballs had turned pale yellow by now, discomforts number three, four and five. Perhaps there was some alcohol still left in my system from the previous night's libation? Wishful thinking, sure but by now it wouldn't have helped.

Suddenly I began hearing a weird incantation, incredible! It was a song, a lyrical phrase repeated continuously, heard coming from the distance, at the end of the line. I looked back and saw a thin, young Asian man wearing all the “right stuff” a hat, gloves, scarf and earmuffs. He appeared a bit shabby wearing well worn-out clothes. This guy seemed to be properly prepared. I had noticed that one of his hands was clasped holding something. As he walked closer and closer I heard what he had been chanting and I suddenly recognized what he had clasped in his hands.

“Can’t go to Motor Vehicle without a pen. Can’t go to Motor Vehicle without a pen.” He sang this over and over again! The only thing he said that broke the rhythm was, “Cheap pens, one dollar” then he resumed,

“Can’t go to Motor Vehicle without a pen.”

Okay, I got it. This guy had a gig. This was his “thing.” He made “a living” selling pens to those waiting in line at the DMV! Smart guy! I now had one of my six problems solved! Not cold, not coffee, not wait, not pee, not DMV but boredom. I seized the opportunity to have a conversation with this enterprising gent and found out exactly what he was up to hoping to end my dreaded boredom.

As a businessman, I want to know everything about other people business operation. How much did the pens cost? How long has he been doing this? How many pens does he sell on an average day? Did he have any documents, a resale certificate, business registration, etc.? Was he listed or registered with the NYSE, SEC, DOT, FDA, FEMA, FCC, FAA, ICC, DMW,

EPA etc.? He was actually a very nice guy and he told me just about everything about his business.

"I come every morning before "motor vehicle" open. I get here before eight o'clock and bring 100 pens with me. They cost me three cents. I live with my grandmother a few blocks away in Chinatown. She has rent-control apartment and I pay rent and food with this little job. I make ninety seven dollars every day, tax free, not too bad, eh?"

The only thing he wouldn't tell me is where he got the pens. No doubt it was in Chinatown, certainly not Bergdorf's or Mont Blanc! A little business, even at this level was a brilliant idea. He was protective of his turf. It was a business without overhead and cash sales only. Who could blame him? It was pure genius.

He told me that he had been running this pen business for over three years. From his perspective he was doing quite well, netting over \$25,000 per year, and working an average of only three hours a day. If he was on a payroll, in New York City, unmarried with two dependents, he would have to earn over \$45,000 a year gross, file tax returns, have a boss, punch a clock, put in eight hours a day and deal with all the crap that comes with a job, right!

Not so bad. I actually admired the guy's, entrepreneurial creativity, resourcefulness, cheerful demeanor and contentment. Isn't that what we all want for ourselves? He had the benefit of supporting his grandmother and because he was her descendent, living in her rent controlled apartment in Manhattan, no doubt that is where he'll live for the rest of his life, "on the cheap!" That rent-controlled apartment is "grand-mothered" to him. It's a "life estate". What's

that worth? Of course one day, down the road, there might be a real estate assemblage and quite possibly he'll receive a pile of cash from the developer and may just become president and CEO of a pen company, eh! This guy had it made! It's very simple: Want less! No struggle, no complications, no fancy lifestyle, no car payments or strangling obligations.

So? Who's the smart one here? That depends on who you are. That's New York City; filled with resourceful people who find a way to survive, one that suits them. There are so many opportunities to make money and put your life together in an uncomplicated way. One simple incantation, a few hours a day, 100 pens and a pair of earmuffs and you're in business! Until . . .

My license expired sometime the following year. That was bad news because it was time for the mandatory eye exam. I had to "report" back to Worth Street and get on the DMV line again. Fortunately, this time I checked the weather conditions before I had left home and brought something to read as well. I took a very long leak before I left my apartment, a big plus, I mean piss. I found my place on line and looked for my Chinese pen friend, hoping to see him. This time, I actually had forgotten to bring a pen with me. I was looking forward to giving him a little business, but it didn't happen. Instead, I spotted someone else. It was big African-American gentleman, football player sized, walking the line, with a swagger blurting out a faint incantation similar to what I had heard in the past. From a distance, as he got closer the lyrical cadence and message from the baritone voice became readily familiar. When I heard the words I knew, "Can't go . . .

Dr. Bartha vs. Big Bartha

In this town buildings are demolished in many ways. But there's only one "demo job" that went down like Dr. Bartha's townhouse on July 16, 2006. Most often buildings are destroyed legally. Laws and regulations exist and if a demolition complies then it usually provides for safety, does not pollute the air, and prevents gas and water leaks, electrical fires, roof and floor collapses as well as an occasional explosion.

Zoning considerations and housing laws prevent people from losing their homes, limbs, lives, loved or not so loved relatives, significant others, former wives, partners, friends and their partners, housekeepers, pets and tenants as well.

Some buildings collapse spontaneously. Structural failures creep up due to age, poor maintenance, and no maintenance, faulty inspections, and inferior construction, poor design. Flawed planning causes building failures too. Fire claims buildings, usually caused by carelessness, smoking in bed, stupidity, defective wiring, illegal and unlicensed renovations, kids playing with matches or Bic lighters; Zippos are dinosaurs now although they do appear now and then. And let's not omit "do it yourself" types and slop jobs conducted by unlicensed contractors who simply don't know what the hell they're doing do take their toll too.

Gas leaks bring down a few now and then, as did Dr. Bartha's. Yes, buildings collapse for a multitude of reasons. But, Dr. Bartha's home collapse was truly tragic, stupid and unique and to top it off it also provided a huge financial benefit for his estranged

wife! Ka-ching! That was not part of his grand scheme.

Dr. Bartha, a 66-year-old immigrant from Romania entered The United States in 1974, settled in the borough of Queens with his Dutch finance. He also brought memories of a haunting past including a cruel eviction from his home, as a young child, with his family, by the ruthless communist Romanian government led by the despicable Nicolae Ceausescu and his equally cruel and ruthless wife, Elena. He had witnessed his wealthy father take a beating and thrown into prison by that brutal government. The family had endured extreme poverty and he too had ultimately been imprisoned unjustly as well.

On July 26, 2006 Dr. Nicholas Bartha made good his long-standing promise to his estranged wife, to die in his townhouse located at 34 East 62nd Street. Apparently, in order to prevent her from claiming her half share of their home, as mandated by a divorce judgment. He induced a gas explosion and destroyed their beloved townhouse killing him in the process.

The building had been landmarked by the City and therefore could not be destroyed legally but that did not prevent his illegal prescription, one that would cure his compulsion and provide the justice he was seeking. Therefore, the good doctor's remedy was to blow it up with him in it!

That was a double demo job. It turned out that he did his estranged wife a hefty favor because the property had greater value without the structure. It was a voluntary, lethal, illegal teardown uptown putting the good doctor inside out. Consequently, he gassed over the property to his former wife, with substantially

enhanced value, the one he hated the most. Jumpin' Doc Barth is a "flash, flash, flash!" What a gas☺!

In truth, this is a tragic story. The house had been Dr. Bartha's incessant dream but it had turned out to be his worst nightmare. Divorce is very nasty business. The court system and divorce laws in The State of New York are engines for delay resulting in huge costs, fees and injustices, as most New York State divorce litigants well know.

Putting all that aside, another means to demolish buildings is accomplished with "the big mamma", or as they say, "Big Bertha" steel demolition balls, not to be confused with Dr. Bartha's pair, gassed out of existence! He gassed his balls out of existence!! Not even covered by his health insurance! No, Dr. , double ball-a-rectomy included, sir!

Of all the big mamma jobs, "The Midnight Demolition" brought to you by, Mr. Resourceful or Mr. Chutzpah, depending on your point of view, real estate magnate Mr. Harry B. Macklowe!

We all know that "the devil is in the details" as to crossing the line and breaking the rules. Doing so in New York City could result in dire consequences. That's just one reason why lawyers and accountants make big bucks, defending naughty boys and girls. Mr. Macklowe, it seems, knows just how to do that, making big bucks, a real pro, indeed. He's got a big pair of his own too, swingin' in the breeze just like Big Bertha, the crusher!

He has had his ups and downs carrying huge debt, highly leveraged, confronting enormous note payments, and he fell into arrears many times. But surely people who operate stratospheric empires,

such as he, calculate their risk-benefit ratios, as any good businessperson often does. Those who do so go forward implementing their decisions to build, demolish, or “de-construct”, at times without permits, often as part of the process. “The Midnight Demolition” turned out to be, in the end, a very risky but brilliant move.

City laws govern demolition of all SRO’s single resident occupant housing. Such housing provides refuge for those who live alone having little or no resources or income or for those who chose not to show what they might have.

The City mandates payments from developers who demolish SRO’s and together with the fines mandated by the court to cover violations that deny needed housing for the poor or those who pretend to be unfortunate. There was a four-year construction ban on the site that Mr. Macklowe crushed. Ultimately, Mr. Macklowe was ordered to pay the City approximately \$5 million for the demolition of four SRO buildings on West 44th Street to “make way” for the construction a new Hotel, The “Millenium” Hilton.

The money he had paid was deposited into the City SRO fund and was used to provide housing for those in need. The City, due to the construction of the hotel, reaps hefty benefits by collecting real estate taxes, room taxes and taxes on all other goods and services provided by the new hotel. The “Millenium” also adds vibrancy to the immediate area and reduces blight in midtown.

This incident reminds me of a story about an Orthodox Jewish man who paid a visit his rabbi on a Saturday afternoon seeking to obtain permission to

shave. He had asked the rabbi if he could shave on that Saturday due to his impending participation in a wedding ceremony. He approached the rabbi, who happened to be shaving at the time, and requested permission to shave.

"Absolutely not!" exclaimed the rabbi.

The Orthodox man questioned the rabbi's denial as the rabbi was shaving that day, a Saturday, right in front of his nose!

"How come you can shave today, on the Sabbath and deny me the same privilege?" inquired the orthodox man.

The Rabbi's retort, "I didn't ask anybody!"

Macklowe was prepared to face the consequences. But, he made sure he had his ducks in a row, sort off. Macklowe had the good sense not to ask anybody, just like the man who approached the Rabbi therefore; he went forward regardless of the consequences, which he knew, and got the job done.

As for the City, its laws, rules and regulations governing SRO's, at times fail to make much sense. What was the City's "wisdom" to discourage Mr. Macklowe's deconstruction of the buildings? The money he paid into the fund rather than letting the buildings stand provided far greater value to the City. The new hotel provided enormous tax revenue as well, directly and indirectly. Paying the City SRO fund and allowing the hotel to rise turned out to be the best win-win situation for Macklowe and the hotel owners, the City and ultimately for those who depend on SRO's as a means of shelter.

At times, laws and obstructive government regulations disable us from moving forward and

thwart positive objectives. Listening to those who govern us incessantly chatter and harp on and on about all the good that they provide, when in fact, most often, they are running in the wrong direction! In the end, Harry B. Macklowe did us all a big favor and not the least for himself.

The most intriguing footnote of the entire episode was created by the manager of the new Hilton built on the site because he had misspelled the word millennium by omitting the second “n”. All the signs, invoices, envelopes, print ads, website, stationary, menus, brochures and miscellaneous material had been put in place! Schmuck!

Harry went on to bigger and better projects or should we say taller? He purchased a relatively small piece of land to the west of Park Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets and constructed a new mega goliath tower that has risen to 1396 feet.

In order to create the space for this goliath he purchased the Drake Hotel, built in 1926, for \$400,000,000, and promptly demolished it. Now that's balls, even bigger than the poor departed doctor's! The Drake Hotel located on Park Avenue at 56th Street, had been an iconic classic and fortunately Macklow's paperwork was all put together with all the T's crossed and I's dotted. You're so New York City Mr. Macklowe! Goody goody!!

On October 21st 432 Park Avenue topped out and is as of this printing the tallest building in the City exceeding the height of the roof of World Trade Tower I, which is 1368' high, without the 408' pole.

Currently, there are three other behemoths under construction in the West 57th Street that will top Mr.

Macklowe's 432 Park Avenue tower. How nice to witness the birth of another "slice" of New York City's spectacular construction hubris!

Oh, one more thing. Mr. and Mrs. Macklowe are 80 years old and his girlfriend is 54. She was born the year the Macklowe's tied the knot! Henry filed for divorce but she's giving him a very hard time even though he offered her one billion bucks! The word is that he's constantly repeating Henny Youngman's line, "Take my wife, please!" So far there are no takers. Sorry Harry . . . that's life in the fast lane ☺

Acts of Kindness, a 1,000 a Minute

A ninety plus year old man had entered the B train a day or two prior to December 7th Pearl Harbor Day last year. He sauntered in, somewhat tilted, fragile and more than a bit wobbly. Fortunately, he had a cane, an oak stick, a perfect match for the hands and knuckles that revealed his years of work, sweat, toil and pain, no doubt.

His accumulation of years was no secret. Grasping a subway pole, he gained his balance, as the train accelerated out of the Columbus Circle Station. He remained vertical due to the volume of people, safely sandwiched among them; "sardines" all in a rhythmic upright sway. It was apparent that this standing package of skin and bones was in great need of a place to sit. No one deserved that more. I could only guess what countless sacrifices he had made for family and country in times past.

I got up and surrendered my seat to him without hesitation. Suddenly he was aware that my seat was his and without a moment's hesitation he smiled and slowly parked himself down. He settled in, resting comfortably and well assured that the lurches; starts and stops of the train would not topple his fragile frame putting him in grave peril.

After he had seated himself I noticed the red baseball type hat he was wearing. It was adorned with about fifteen metallic military ornaments, the types that are available at Army-Navy stores. Heroic acts, wounds or service are not needed to obtain them however he, had earned the right, of that I was certain. They were positioned haphazardly on the front of the cap, just below the stitched yellow lettering, "WW II." That

was a dead, or should I say live, giveaway that this gent had fought in "The Big One" or "The Good War" as it has been called. His age and persona seemed to confirm that he was "the real deal."

I had asked him, looking squarely into the depths of his sunken, glassy and wet eyes:

"Pacific or Europe?"

"Pacific" was his reply, in a barely audible soft whispered shallow voice.

"Iwo Jima, Midway, Okinawa?" I inquired.

"Bataan!"

Bataan was one of the most brutal and horrific sagas of the war. The cruelty and atrocities inflicted by the Japanese during "The Death March" ensured slim odds of survival, even for the most hardy, tenacious and committed soldiers of our most resolute and indomitable troops. Far too few survived.

"I want to thank you for my freedom kind sir. Thank you!" I told him with a bit lip and most grateful salute.

"And thank you for thanking me." he responded, his voice quivering with emotion.

I detected a tear rolling beneath his moistened right eye. It touched me very deeply. My tear would have to wait for a wipe. I was too touched by him to remove it.

How often people's sacrifices are undetected, and unacknowledged? We go about our business, our lives, without a thought that our precious freedom is a gift from those we seldom thank and, of course, from those who are no longer "with us" those whom we no longer can thank. We all should seize opportunities when they arise to express our gratitude to our silent heroes. My acknowledgment

made him feel very worthy and it gave me a sense of warmth and satisfaction. I was delighted that I was there to give up my seat to him. If only I could do that every day. Since then I always keep my eyes open for opportunities to provide my appreciation to who deserve some acknowledgement and recognition.

Ladies and gentlemen, New York City salutes you! Heroes are all around us. War heroes and heroes who do their backbreaking jobs keeping this City moving forward for menial pay. The first responders, firemen, nurses, teachers and countless others who embrace their daily tasks enthusiastically, performing their duty and responsibilities without a second thought are the backbone of our society more than we care to admit.

Do not look at people and judge them because they happen to be old, or because their clothing is torn and ill fitted, or those who may seem to be mumbling about a distant memory or appear, to you, to be useless. You never know who is seated next to you on the subway or who is standing beside you as you wait for the walk signal to change on a street corner. Don't look upon laborers as less important than you because all those who engaging in honest work are entitled to be treated with dignity.

Everyone has something to offer and if you do not know him or her then perhaps you can. Everyone has a story, a victory, struggle, a past and what lies beneath what you see on the streets of New York City has a history, one that we all carry inside, beneath a worn out jacket or ragged and torn pair of shoes that's shrouded in rags.

We are in this together and no matter where we are in life at any particular moment, we all make a contribution. Kindness has always graced this City in abundance. Just try, give some. It's a wonderful connector.

I have asked numerous people to do the one-minute test! That is, stand on a corner, with ample pedestrian traffic, open a street map, and count to sixty. I guarantee, GUARANTEE that before you hit sixty you will be approached and offered assistance. Since I have suggested this little experiment to acquaintances and visitors, only once has someone claimed that no one came to their assistance.

In fact, I have tried it myself a number of times and it has never failed. New Yorkers are the kindest people on earth. It must be so! Why? How else could over eight million people live together in such a relatively small place with such a broad diversity of cultures and languages accomplish so much? Apparently we co-exist harmoniously. We have to get along. It's a no brainer! I don't think there's another place on earth that can match our record of success! This is truly the melting pot of kindness, an example for the world.

Caucasian boys aid elderly African American women across the street. African American teenage boys assist Caucasian women who are in need of help and then carry their baby strollers up the stairs to exit the subway. I've seen several elderly people waiting to "catch" a cab in the rain and a younger person laden down with packages who watches the cab that was intended for him, speed away without scorn or disappointment. I've seen unsighted people aided

across streets by those who come from opposite directions taking their time to provide assistance. That's New York City! It is no longer the metaphor for rude and crude, the rough and tough ill-mannered arrogant, urban, cosmopolitan insensitive horde. It is the new "Heartland." The place to embrace each other and the pot that began melting long before we had ever heard of California, Oregon, Kansas or Colorado! Come and "be a part of it". Come and be as nice as you can be and guess what? You'll know what it is to be a New Yorker. You too can be a part of 1,000 acts of kindness a minute, and that's in a "New York Minute." Want a genuine New York experience? Please be kind!

"I'm one of the Owners!"

Recently I had the pleasure of providing a tour for four lovely ladies from Florida. Their tour was proceeding nicely, taking in the sites they had requested.

As part of the venue we had decided to have lunch at Katz Deli and savor those spectacular pastrami sandwiches, the best on earth. The current owners, fifth generation, still followed the recipe created by their great great grandfather who had brought it from his homeland, Romania. Katz Deli is the standard by which all other delis in New York City are measured and for many delicious reasons.

Located on East Houston Street in the venerable Lower Eastside, this landmark has been helping "New Yorkers and visitors increase their cholesterol since 1886."

One of the signs, an original, is still displayed outside the restaurant, "Katz, That's All." According to legend, a phrase used by tour guides as a defense mechanism, that it just might not be true, according to legend resulted from the following conversation between the original Mr. Katz, the founder, and the sign painter who had been summoned to paint the sign.

"So, you want me to make you a sign?" asked the sign maker.

"Yeah" replied Mr. Katz.

"What do you want it to say?" asked the sign painter.

"I want it to say Katz."

"That's all?"

"Yeah"

So there it is, "Katz, That's All"

My chauffeur parked on Ludlow Street, along side the restaurant. We immediately noticed that there was a huge line of hungry and freezing patrons waiting to get inside. My guests were in no mood to stand in line in 26-degree weather even for the best pastrami on the planet. As their trusted New York City guide, providing high-end Custom & Private tour experiences, it was my responsibility to go into action and not disappoint.

There was no way I was going to allow these four ladies to bear the burden of standing at the end of what looked like a line that was halfway down to Wall Street in Artic weather and allow them to shiver their tanned butts off. Not on my watch! I had to have a plan. There was no way that they would have tolerated a hint of such a suggestion.

Together we walked directly up to the front door. I can only imagine what they were thinking.

“How is Cliff going to get us inside?”

“How can he?”

I reached into my pocket and removed a toothpick, a very powerful weapon. People from other places use guns but experienced New Yorkers use toothpicks. I placed that toothpick between my teeth and just like a switch, bingo; I transformed myself into the suitable persona. Wearing a suit and topcoat, I extended my hand to the uniformed security guard who was standing directly in front of the entrance. His job was to maintain order and prevent “gate crashers” from “cutting” into the line.

Fortunately, he had seen me there many times. He had observed me walk in with small groups of people frequently and must have assumed that I was a guide

or perhaps a “friend of the house.” Who knows? It was not the first time I had given him money. I’ve always been warm, friendly and respectful, acknowledging his presence even if only to say “hello” or ask, “How you doin’ man?”

Those are gestures of respect and they’re powerful. Most people ignore uniformed people who are positioned to maintain orderly conduct

I approached him with my customary salutation, such as:

“Hey, my man, how you doin’? You lookin’ good!”

I handed him a \$10 bill, folded several times so that the only part of the bill that was visible was the one large numeral 10 that appears on the back lower right side corner of the bill. There’s one large numeral on a 5, 10 and 20 dollar bill and it is important to make sure that a service provider sees the number on the bill when tipping, such as a parking lot attendant, doorman or delivery man so that they can see that you’re not giving them a single or perhaps a five. When I extended my hand with the bill I looked down, suggesting him to do the same. He saw that it was a ten. We shook hands obscuring my “donation” to the onlookers. I gave him a wink and he responded with a smile. Telling him what the bill was for was totally unnecessary.

He promptly opened the door for the four frigid Floridians and he enabled them to enter the warmth of Katz.

Suddenly, a short statured sixtyish year old woman, standing about fifth in line, no doubt she had been on line for quite some time, bearing her red nose, shivering noticeably she shouted out,

“Hey mister, there’s a line here!”

With my toothpick in place I retorted in a demonstrative DeNiro voice, inches from her iced encrusted face just a bit above a whisper.

“I’m one of the owners!”

My eyes drilled right through her. She respected the authority of the toothpick and the “threads” that I carried on my back; a well-pressed suit, scarf and a cashmere topcoat completed the “getup”.

By this time my guests had entered Katz and were out of the cold, warmly inside.

As I began to enter, I heard her voice from behind me, with pitched volume, aimed directly at the security guard.

“Is he one of the owners?” she shouted.

“Yeah, he is!”

What is this incident all about? Pushing buttons, providing my guests with comfort and fulfilling my value proposition, fun and memorable New York experiences. It’s about gaining “an edge” rescuing my guests from the cold. Providing the security guard with an opportunity to “make a buck” too is another benefit.

“Is it dishonest, amoral or unfair?” you may suggest? Sure, just a little bit, in truth. As for the woman who expressed her annoyance, whether I pulled it off or not she was going to be just as cold either way. She could have done the same thing but either she didn’t think of it, have the nerve or just felt it was wrong.

Most of all, this spontaneous maneuver, rescuing them was “a game” rewarding me with a moment of dominance and confirmation that my customers are going to have the best New York experiences

possible. Doing what I do brings great pleasure, not only for my guests but for me as well.

“They Better Not!”

This little story is so New York City. It makes a point and it's quite hysterical. That's why I must tell you, here goes:

We are fortunate to have lots and lots of Korean delis in New York City. Koreans do a terrific job of showing the rest of us how to maximize and use every square inch of retail space. The Koreans are experts operating food stores that are stocked to the teeth with fresh and delicious food, hot and cold of every variety imaginable, consistently and abundantly, well presented, organized and reasonably priced. It's amusing that the rest of us seem to be far less able to make this happen. Amazing but true!

The best Korean deli, in my opinion, was located on Fifth Avenue between 18th and 19th Streets in The Flatiron District. They raised the bar. The place was impeccable, organized, clean and fresh, well-lit, efficient, friendly and run like a ship. I used to go there for coffee often.

On one occasion I walked in and asked the counter man for a cup of coffee to go,

“Just a little milk, no sugar please.”

“Si, jou got it man, no prolen!”

I knew from his accent that he was Hispanic, duh. They're such friendly, warm and accommodating people, “the salt of the earth.”

He prepared my coffee, just as I had requested, and he gently placed the cup on the counter. I reached into my pocket for a dollar, it was a number of years ago, a dollar as quite sufficient back then, and I as I prepared to pay him. He said,

"Jou hab to pay ova der" as he pointed to a little Korean woman seated behind one of the cash registers about twenty feet toward the rear of the store.

"Certainly" I told him.

"What's the matter? Don't they trust you?" I queried.

His reply, "***They better not!***"

I roared with laughter, he smiled broadly!

Who among us has the right to condemn this man for making that "honest" hilarious comment? Certainly, it was "tongue and cheek" a humorous quip that had evoked a laugh and a smile creating a brief connection. Should it have been taken seriously? Nah.

The world is a place where everyone seeks an edge, an advantage for themselves and their families. This guy was guilty of intentional amusement. He, on stage, had seized the opportunity, front and center, and spontaneously created a quip that I've shared with hundreds of people creating waves of laughter. Would he have been a thief if given the chance? You know, "the truest things are said in jest." Do we know if the Koreans who own that place fork over 100% of the sales taxes they collect from the public? Take a guess! It's all part of the "food chain." "He who is free of sin . . ."

We, as New Yorkers, know who we are and are unashamed. We work together, Korean and Hispanic, any combination, any permutation. His comment was a microcosm of New York City. We take it with a grain of salt and we laugh with, not at each other and ourselves constantly. Generally, we fully accept who we are, recognize and celebrate the differences among us. That's just one of the things that has

enabled us to continue to make New York City such a terrific place.

Sure, there are those who are ready to rip us off and take from us what they can, be it the most successful attorneys, real estate moguls, window washers or plumbers, the rip-off electronics retailers or your housekeeper. We are all intertwined and struggling to survive in the same tank; sink or swim. We know that this is a “dog eat dog” world and City. But, what makes New York City so special is that a total stranger may be the person who will save your ass and go out of their way to protect you. This is the place where most of us try to elevate ourselves in order to play the game, survive and protect ourselves, loved ones and fellow citizens. But, more than that, we climb walls, wade through sewers, run miles, jump into rivers, dive into freezing water to rescue people from landing on The Hudson River, run into building fires, kneel, crawl and cry doing whatever it takes to help our brothers and sisters, black, white, yellow or green.

We are New York City and we are the world. When it comes to caring and helping each other we raise the bar. We are the greatest collection of people in the world; right here, New York City and “der’s nutin” you can do ‘bout it!

220 Central Park South

“White brick” has been anointed the crown of being the low end of “the stick” when it comes to post war residential construction material; a ubiquitous surface material for residential buildings built in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Visually, it became an expression of low quality construction unlike the quality and appearance of pre-war era construction and design. Large rooms, high ceilings, generally characterized a pre-war building; beau arts ornamentation, Art Deco, real solid walls not the Georgia Pacific 3/8 inch wallboard that an angry five year old can punch a hole through. “White brick” has always been a synonym for a cheap crap slap job construction. “Oh, you live in the “white brick” building over there? Eh?” Such phrases cast the notion that you live “in a white brick” because you’re unable to afford something better! But, in truth, such buildings are not easily affordable, especially in Manhattan, especially in these times. There’s a large dose of snobbishness in that statement; nothing to be ashamed of. I’d live in a white brick building in a heartbeat if the price and location was a good fit for my needs and pocket.

Okay, enough of that, so here’s the story: A twenty story white brick building was constructed at 220 Central Park South back in the early ‘60’s, a very prestigious address and only a few steps away from Columbus Circle, one of the new gold coasts in The City. Presently with The Time-Warner Complex, Trump International Hotel and Condos, formally The Gulf and Western Building, the fabled 15 Central Park West condo designed by Robert A. M. Stern, a spectacular \$1.4 billion edifice, and a totally redone

Columbus Circle centerpiece including a high powered spray wash for Mr. Columbus, the first since he adored the circle back in 1892. Bottom line, it's a major centerpiece of the *New New York*!

Related Properties, one of the largest players in the high stakes real estate game, succeeded in emptying the building, a residential rental structure. None of the occupants had rights to extend their leases therefore; when the last lease expired the building became nearly completely empty. The purpose of clearing out the building was to de-construct it. But, unlike the type of demolition that our dear departed Dr. Bartha brought down upon himself, literally. The difference was that Dr. Bartha didn't plan to kill himself in the process or provide his x-wife a big favor, as the property became worth more without the house. Related had all those white bricks carefully removed one by one and no one got scratched financially or physically.

Related's purpose was to de-construct the building in order to replace it with an ultra-high altitude new world world class edifice and market the property to Arab Sheiks, Russian Oligarchs and a slew of billionaire heavy rollers wherever to be found.

Surprisingly, the Related Property boys are far from stupid and they were well aware that there was still one big sized "mother" of a fly in the ointment.

You see, there was an underground parking garage in the building that was leased to another powerful real estate company, Extell. Therefore, when Related Properties de-constructed 220 Central Park South they left the garage intact because the garage lease, owned by Extell, was still in "full force and effect."

That's a big problem because Extell is about as smart as it gets too. Extell is not in the parking garage business, they're in real estate, big time. They're owners of the mega tower marketed as One 57, located at 157 West 57th Street, a 1006 foot tall building, shaped like a waterfall, located directly opposite Carnegie Hall, in addition to owning many prized properties throughout the City.

One 57 is the building whose construction crane collapsed during hurricane Sandy. That goliath of a building broke price records. One of the top floors was allegedly sold for just a smidge under \$100 million and don't hold your breath because those records are being broken all the time as time marches on and the real estate records in New York City is open for all to see.

Quite likely, Extell must have purchased that parking garage lease from the original lessee, which they must have had the right to do, naturally. Obviously, it must have been a measured maneuver to hold up Related from de-constructing the building, which Elite figured would quite likely happen down the road. Like minds think alike therefore, Extell, one jump ahead of Related sleuthed out that parking garage lease and put the kibosh on Related who was apparently asleep at the white brick! I'm guessing that the rights to assign, sell, transfer or convey clause of that garage lease failed to have proper legal language to protect Related Properties interests. No doubt, someone got yelled at for this, big time or they took their chances and may have foreseen the likely outcome and factored that into their equation. Let's get on with the story.

Extell and Related wound up in court. Surprise! Extell's position was; since their rent for the garage was being paid, complying with the all terms and conditions of their lease to the letter including keeping the place clean, operating the premises as required then they were conforming and in complete compliance of their lease.

Related sued Extell for eviction because, in their lawyer's opinion, according to the lease, at least 50% of the vehicles parked in the garage must be owned, leased and or operated by people living in 220 Central Park South, the building that was gone! Clearly, Elite was in violation of their lease, so Related's position was, "get out!"

But, Extell defended their position advising the court that it was impossible for them to comply with that condition because nobody is living in the building simply because the building no longer existed!

Related countered by pleading to the court that the lease does not require them to provide a building, although it is certainly implied.

The judge's ruling was that both sides must sit down and cut a deal. The court fully understood the reason why Extell purchased the lease and Related should have purchased it for themselves if they and their lawyers had their eye on the ball. But, maybe that opportunity never presented itself to them, who knows?

The key players and their lawyers cut a deal. Extell was paid \$67 million by Related to surrender their lease and Extell paid a \$600 fine for some absurd violation so that Related could walk away being "in

the right,” They all shook hands, wished each other good luck and went their separate ways.

The real fault lies with the attorney(s) who represented Related for failing to insist that their clients include proper language in the original garage lease. Had they inserted either one of the following sentences in the use clause that read the following then there would have been no litigation and surly Elite never would have snagged that lease:

If for any reason or no reason at all the building ceases to exist then the requirement that a percentage of the vehicles parked in the garage is null and void and has absolutely no force and effect.

Or

This lease is not assignable.

Keep in mind, then that lease may have been written it very well could have been when the building was built and the notion of demolishing it was the furthest thing from their minds.

As an interesting post-script Mr. & Mrs. William Griffith of Clearwater, FL are currently in contract to purchase the triplex penthouse, with outside space for the record-breaking price of \$250 million, the highest price ever paid in The United States for a home. It is also the highest private outside space in the country, at this point. The building is 953 feet high and is owned by Vornado Realty Trust.

Chapter II

My Playbook

1 in 8,300,000

While movin' and shakin' in the singles scene about twenty-five years ago, I had attended a singles party at Biff's Club on Lexington Avenue in midtown. Don't look for it. It's gone!

The party room was huge, packed, like an overstuffed wedding or house party such as a "classic six" coop on West End Avenue in a Woody Allan movie. It was so crowded that in order to take two steps you had to hold and lift your drink up over your head to avoid alcoholic collisions and spills. It was so packed that the FDNY sent inspectors to count heads because the occupancy limits had been exceeded. What a crowd! I wondered. Did they really have to count heads? If the place appeared to be too crowded, then it was, without the fire department counting heads!

"Oh, we had only 699 people not 700 like it said on the sign, your honor. Therefore, we didn't have the right to evacuate the place. If a fire had occurred we would have had an impossible task, your honor. We just could not save lives even though the place was legal, occupancy wise! Ah, sometimes head counts are incorrect, but at least we followed the book, your honor. Who comes up with these capacity crowd numbers anyway?

At that time, my divorce was moving forward, at the speed of a three-legged turtle, thanks to the lawyers and the politicians who enacted the divorce laws in The Empire State, truly a game, a self-serving "engine

for delay” for the benefit of the lawyers. I call it raising the “bar.”

My time out partying was just one means of distraction and attending was always amusing and fun.

At Biff’s that evening I spotted a very exotic looking woman. I approached her for a closer look. Raising my arm with glass in hand I inched toward her. She had beautiful bronze skin, not an ounce of fat anywhere, shades of beautiful grey and black long hair nicely coiffed, very pretty, lovely shape, wearing a broad smile and a short tight sexy skirt. She was mysterious and exotic, an extraordinary looking “piece of work.” She swayed so well to the music enhancing her sexuality and persona. She had me, captured,

“Said the spider to the fly.”

I, of course, played the role of the fly.

I introduced myself. She was a bit aloof but not impolite. I turned on the charm and we became engaged in conversation, pleasant but guarded. She recoiled, not quite admitting me into her space, not dismissive or impolite. She didn’t “blow me off” nor did she imply that I should move on.

Her name was Molly, from Trinidad, a descendent of “planters” who migrated from India, transported to the Caribbean by the British two generations ago. She had been raised in Trinidad and moved to New York City seeking a better life. She was employed by New York University as a clerical assistant and she lived in Jackson Heights, Queens. After several hours of conversation and dancing I was certain she had gained an interest in me as well.

Just before we left the party we had agreed to meet at a restaurant the following week even though she would not provide me with her phone number. That was due to the protective shield that she wore, a private and guarded nature. Molly accepted my phone number and she promised to use it on the day prior to our dinner date, to either confirm or opt out. I knew she had “issues” something from her past, most likely had caused her to distrust. Ah, “trust issues”! I’ve had a lifetime of experience with that “number”! I gladly accepted the arrangement and had confidence that she was comfortable that I would not invade “her space.” I knew my phone would ring as we had agreed. I had no doubt about that, none whatsoever.

Much to my chagrin, my phone did not ring the day before our date. I was extremely disappointed, devastated, in fact. How could she have rejected me? I’m a good judge of character. Had I imagined that we shared a fun evening together? We danced, laughed, engaged in continuous and amusing conversation and we’d clearly taken a robust interest in each other. There was an abundance of chemistry between us as well, wow! Ah, the singles scene. Shit!

Nevertheless, I showed up at the restaurant, hoping she’d forgotten our arrangement to call me, unlikely but perhaps the best given the situation. Or, perhaps she had lost my phone number and she’d show up anyway, just like I did. What did I have to gain by not showing up? Nothing!

I appeared at the restaurant. I took a shot. So, there I was, a company of one and she didn’t appear. I was very let down. I thought of Sinatra’s best torch songs,

“Quarter to three” “Everything Happens to me” and all that. Next stop, I’m the guy in Edward Hopper’s “Night Hawks”, nursing a lousy coffee at a diner off Lafayette Street in the East Village. It was so depressing for me. I was filled with melancholy and a sick and lonely feeling. Self-pity creeps in at moments like that. I’ll get over it I kept saying to myself. But you’ve got to get out there, or nothing good happens. Many inner voices speak to us and that one was the loudest. It’s like being a salesman who clings to the mantra; “every ‘no’ is one response closer to a ‘yes!’” Yeah, yeah, yeah!

I had refused to accept the incident as an intentional rejection. It was my belief that Molly had lost my phone number. That was the most plausible explanation I could think of. She must have failed to recall the name of the restaurant where we were supposed meet. She was unaccustomed to such places. I’d been rejected and my setback was real. Okay, so I’ll get over it. Move on.

But, that’s not me. I’m a very tenacious New Yorker. So now what? It was simple, place a classified ad in New York Magazine. Back in those days, before Internet social networking, New York Magazine had a large classified personal section that included a subsection known as “Assortments.” It featured miscellaneous categories of small classified ads for people seeking people, specific or generic, birthday wishes, apologies etc. I felt that I had nothing to lose except \$20 for the cost of the ad, certainly worth a shot.

**Molly! Pretty NYU Triny
Call Cliff you have my #**

New York Magazine, a weekly, hits mailboxes every Monday. The cover that particular week had featured "The Best Lawyers!" Great! Going through a divorce I had felt this was the copy I really needed! "Best Lawyers! Translation is most expensive lawyers. I thumbed through the back of the issue reaching that week's two page "Assortments" classified listings. Scanning the classifieds I found my two-line ad. Sure, fat chance, a city of over 8.3 million people, a two line ad will connect two people who met at a singles party, not in my dreams, not in this City! Honestly, though, I did have hope. This is a dynamic society and strange things do happen. I had omitted my phone number from the ad to stave off crank callers. Naturally, I had hoped Molly would see the ad or someone who she had told our story to would see it and contact her with an idea, perhaps to call New York Magazine and reach out, a very long-shot to me; sure, a huge stretch! Hey, you never know!

I returned to my studio apartment on West 57th Street that Friday at about 6 PM after another workday without a thought of Molly or my advertisement. By this time it was out of my head, a done deal. This was just not going to happen and it was off my radar screen.

I stepped up to my answering machine, pushed the message button, a routine I had gotten into when I entered my apartment. It was a technical act that took me about a week to master! I'm still at the high end of low tech just like the vast majority of baby boomers. That's what we all did in the early '90's, no cell phones, emails or text messages. We were all

tethered to the ol' Radio Shack answering machine and a Motorola pager aka "beeper."

Beep. "Hello Mr. Strome, this is Karen Stein from New York Magazine. Molly does not have your number but we have hers! If you would like to reach her please get back to me at 212-123-4567."

Whoooha! I couldn't believe it! I knew Molly had been sincere. She didn't "blow me off" after all. Unbelievable! In this City, a two line \$20 ad reconnected two people who had met once and knew nothing about each other except the chatter during a casual encounter at a jam-packed singles party. What a town? What a place? What a story?

I called Molly immediately and she was delighted to hear from me.

"How could you have lost my number?" I asked her. She laughed and laughed. I was thrilled and joined her laughter. We roared! That night we met at the restaurant where we had intended to meet the week before. What a night!! We were both blown away! Another New York City story in a town that's really not as big as we had thought. It takes a bit of imagination, tenacity and determination. Truly, it was incredible.

Molly and I had dated for about a year and traveled to Italy, Vermont and the Hamptons. We had lots of fun, and enjoyed so many wonderful occasions together. Then sadly we both felt that going forward into serious territory was not a good idea. We said our goodbyes and lost touch.

Thanks New York Magazine and the luck and good fortune of the New York City mindset. Go for success and don't give up! Never give up. Never!

"Friend of the House"

Do you like to wait "on line" or the "queue" as they say in other parts of the world? Of course you don't. Most New Yorkers desperately maneuver to avoid waiting "on line" or "the queue." But, when necessary, most generally do what they have to do. The most common reasons for waiting in line are, the Post Office, Department of Motor Vehicles, Social Security Offices, Unemployment Insurance Offices, voting, airport security, concert tickets, restaurants, Saturday Night Live, sporting events, night club shows, a new Apple product, a free designer "green" bag giveaway at Whole Foods, or eccentric bargain hunters who want to be the first to enter retail stores that "give away merchandise" even at the risk of life and limb!

As a New Yorker, I vehemently hate to wait "in line" and I've found a way to avoid it. Don't tell anyone! You'll ruin my secret and you may just find me behind you on a line. Trust me. That's not a good place for either of us if I catch you plying my trade!

Jazz clubs featuring the best performers often have very long lines, usually extending down the block and, at times, even around the corner. Many of those "on line" do not have reservations. They simply present themselves with some hope that perhaps those with reservations will not appear or they'll settle for a seat at the bar. Others are content to be admitted just to have a place to stand, as long as they are in ear shod of the music. They're satisfied and the wait therefore is worthwhile to them. Sometimes it's about bragging rights, "I was there!"

I've got a scheme that works quite well for me. I avoid the line completely and find the best seat in the house! Here's how:

For example, on one occasion, I appeared at The Blue Note, a very popular jazz club in Greenwich Village. I was, at that time, with my future former wife. We showed up without reservations. Tony Bennett was appearing for a one shot make-up performance. His fabulous scratchy voice had been a bit too scratchy, a touch of the flu I suppose, and hence it was the make-up gig.

The line was endless and to make matters worse, the rain was teeming. Most arrived without umbrellas, enhancing their disgust along with their waits. Brass stanchions with velvet ropes blocked gatecrashers and a very tall, stocky, grim, well-suited gent guarded the front door, assiduously.

Ah, I love a challenge! I removed a \$20 bill from my pocket, folded it in thirds, with the largest number 20 on the bill prominently visible. I pompously unhooked one side of the velvet ropes, disengaged it from the brass pole, extended my right hand with my thumb securely holding the bill, folded down to about one square inch, with the largest numerical "20" visible and I said enthusiastically,

"Hey, great to see you again!"

I looked down at the bill, encouraging him to do the same. He saw it, clasped my right hand, we shook hands firmly with solid eye contact and partial smiles, smirks. I leaned over and whispered in his ear,

"Friend of the house, Joe!"

He got it, the idea and the bill. We're in.

A few shouts and yells, "hey you" were heard up and down the line. "Hey, what's up here?" "Who the hell are they?" "I'm waiting in this freakin' line for over two hours, I'm getting soaked!"

Amazingly most New Yorkers still don't get it, incredible!

"Friend of the house!"

My newfound friend shouted back for all to hear as he let us in. Isn't that why he's there? To make money! He's not a cop! He needs the money! Duh! He whispered something to his cohort inside and we were seated front and center. He got a bill too, but not a twenty. Tony was terrific that night. It took a little "scratch," to hear that scratchy voice and it was well worth the money and the "trouble".

Do you remember that scene from "Goodfellas" when Ray Liotta escorted Barbara into the Copa Cabana through the kitchen? Well, one evening I took my soon to be second wife aka "my future present wife" to La Mela, a fun, high energy Italian restaurant on Mulberry Street in Little Italy. It was our first date. La Mela is very popular joint with the locals and tourists.

"There's a big line!" Aline exclaimed.

"Don't worry. It's not a problem." I replied.

I was wearing a black shirt, black suit, black leather trench coat, slick gelled hair and, of course, a toothpick in my mouth as well as a \$5 Times Square solid white tie, completing the image. Eh?

She was very elegant, nicely "painted" and quite the attractive lady. She was a perfect compliment for the con that was about to unfold. With hands tightly clasped together, we politely bucked the line with the mindset that we were "friends of the house" and

strolled in confidently directly to the rear of the restaurant on our way to the chaotic kitchen. Within five seconds all eyes were upon us. Everyone was thinking; who the hell are these people? Hey, you never know! I could have been a "made man" or some capo, a guy they wouldn't want to mess around with and she could have been a movie star! Know what I mean? "Badda bing!"

"Uho's in change 'ere?"

I asked, in a well-pronounced very demonstrative voice, deep and voluminous, as we stood inside the kitchen. Always leave out the h sound in "who's" and "here" or it's a dead giveaway that you're pulling a minor con.

The manager stepped up and smiled. He looked intently into my eyes, curiously, not knowing what to make of this.

"You got a table for the lady or do I have to make arrangement? Hey *piasan*, great to see you again!" I flashed a wide grin, an admission that this was just a game to impress.

With an abundance of self-confidence I shook his hand, complimented by a pat on his shoulder. Apparently he knew the drill and was pleased to let me play my game. Besides, he didn't want to take any chances, I guess. I believe he was amused and enjoyed my *sctick*. He admired my chutzpah so; he just went along with it, a real pro. He probably just wanted to impress my lady.

"It's all taken care of. Good to see you too. Follow me."

With a broad smile he escorted us to an empty table for four, the only table in the "house." As we got seated we noticed that the line had grown much

longer. Our waiter gently placed a bottle of red and white wine in front of us. I didn't feel sorry for those folks on line because "Friend of the House" is a rite of passage and if pulling it off is a thing you can do then you've earned the right. This time it didn't cost me a dime, not a freakin' dime! The bill wasn't necessary. "There's honor among men."

Are you a "friend of the house" kind of person? Try it, hey, you never know! Bing!

We left very well pleased with our "friend of the house" experience. We connected, had fun and felt a bit naughty and mischievous. I grabbed a cab and we were on our way to "One if by land, two if by sea" perhaps the most romantic restaurant in "The City."

It had been Aaron Burr's coach house on Barrow Street in The Village. There's no sign in front of the place, so you either know about it or you don't. The tuxedoed pianist was playing a torch song on the Knabe ebony baby grand piano. Crackling fires roared in both fireplaces and the bartender, familiar to me, was quite busy. Aline and I each grabbed a stool at the bar as I winked at Affie, the bartender, who had recognized my signal as, "Don't reveal that you know me. This is not the revolving doors at Macy's." She played her part.

"How can I help you?"

"Two campaigns please, French, of course!" I requested.

She turned around, poured our drinks and placed them on the bar in front of us. She lifted the twenty-dollar bill that I had placed on the bar, turned around facing the cash register. She spun back, faced us, and dropped two ten's directly in front of me, my change.

I slid one back to her. It was a perfectly choreographed ballet.

"Who are you?" Aline asked me.

"I'm in construction." I replied,

We both laughed our ass off, without spilling a drop of "liquid gold."

Singles “Seen”

Many of you may not find this “Slice” of The Big Apple funny! Why? This is a tale that is somewhat juvenile, serendipitous, whimsical, flamboyant, impulsive, very adolescent and just plain silly. But more importantly, it was lots of fun. I must admit that I’ve been lascivious, debauched, lecherous machine during the years I’ve spent floating through the “singles scene” or singles “seen” in the ‘90’s. It was very worthwhile therapy due to my mid-life crisis, something I had to get out of my system, work it though, explore my “issues”, learn life lessons, “sow my oats” and all of that crap. I was determined to have a blast, work it through and resolve my “issues” a brutally overused word, in the singles scene. “Oh, she has issues! She ‘acts out!’” “Here comes trouble!” Give me a break!

Living, working and playing in Manhattan, the world’s biggest and best “sandbox” for adults on earth makes the vulnerable a little crazy, especially if you have some jingle in your pockets, which I had at the time. I was determined to get “out there” and not risk missing a thing. There are endless opportunities in New York City for those who are crashing through a mid-life crisis. Finding the cure on this 23 square mile island, Manhattan, is a no brainer but can be a tricky trap that leads to many unhappy endings. Very silly! Childish shit, eh? Grown men on the hunt, prowling around looking for a connection using all the tools they can muster but most are very short on confidence and interesting conversation, that’s the reality. Most men, I have learned are very boring; it’s all about sports, money and conquests.

There's no need to leave Manhattan because the "B & T" crowd, bridge and tunnel, flock into Manhattan every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. The "regulars" and the visitors who dared to mix and mingle enter "the culture" that is the New York City singles scene, a mish-mash of "losers" for the most part, with a sprinkle of winners tossed in just passing through on their way to the next conquest. They all circulate like a trail mix assortment of nuts, cranberries, "wall-nuts" and raisins. Don't get me wrong. By "losers" I'm referring to those who appear time and time again at the same bars in the singles party circuit and remain totally clueless as to approaching, beginning or sustaining an amusing conversation with a complete stranger. They always leave the place alone or with a coveted phone number or at the very least the recollection of a good time.

There are plenty of books written on the subject and I have not read any of them. There's an art to it, but generally, either you have it or you don't.

It reminds me of the television classic "Wild Kingdom" depicting various breeds of animals, insects and even plants all equipped with a wide variety of built in apparatus for luring their mates into their lairs or "to put their lights out" after doing the "nasty" or as they used to say in the single scene, "the big thing" or "the nasty." Today the hipsters call it "hooking up or who knows what?"

Singles have studios, lofts, places to live and play, friend's apartments, single-use restrooms located in the back of restaurants and hotels. Those are great! There are dark alleyways, the office after business hours, cloak rooms, even well positioned trees, limos

with darkened windows blocking the view in the rear from the chauffeur, known as “divisions.” Or their own humble abodes stocked to the hilt with lots of liquid and perhaps, illegal goods. Spiders weave webs trapping their mates. Female spiders literally eat their significant others after the “deed” is done. Flowers emit scents that beckon bees be not to mate rather to do what has to be done spreading pollen around that enables flowers to propagate. Glad humans don’t pollenate that way, but bringing the lady flowers may move you closer to the batter’s “box.” Yes folks, the singles scene is truly The Wild Kingdom!

“Hey man! Got any pollen on ya?”

“Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!”

And finally, there’s the cruelest of the cruel, Venus Flytraps. They glue their prey inside and their horny, thorny leaves shut them in as they inject their enzymes emulsifying their captives. There’s no sex but they do “hook up” or “clue up.” CrazyGoo Wee!

That reminds me of a guy who was jamming in the singles scene that cheated on his gal. After foolin’ around while he was asleep she Crazy Glued his hand to his “member” and walked out of his apartment. He was rushed to the emergency room and he had to undergo a three-hour surgery to dislodge his fist from his joint. Good lessons don’t cum cheap, eh!

Most four legged animals claim and do defend their territory with their tools fending off competitors, with growls, claws, quills, poison, stink spray and fangs. Male peacocks spread their colorful feathers attracting their beaus capturing their hearts or whatever else they seek to capture. Why are they

called peacocks anyway? Others have been provided by nature with the means to howl, hoot, chirp or scratch their hind legs emitting sounds beckoning their partners.

And then there's us; perfume, makeup, luxurious fast cars, music, expensive watches, coifs, lipstick, nail treatments, money, thigh-highs, pantyhose, yachts, high-heels, big muscles, fake tans, body wash, expensive underwear, exotic trips, "six-packs", tinted contacts, pierced tongues, wigs, wine, restaurants, theatre tickets, Viagra, Cialis on the cheat, tan treatments, booze, lingerie, lace, jewelry as well as illegal substances. There's no end to the list, it's just too long to provide.

There are the ultra high-end lures such as Porsches, BMW's, Bentleys, Teslas, beach houses, private media rooms, yachts, hot tubs, ski houses, private jets, furs, swimming pools, helicopters, rubies, emeralds and diamonds, business cards with MD, PhD, Esq., LLC and CPA, CEO, CFO, COO, CIT, etc. etc. Luxury city condos or co-ops with outside space abound and toss in the best of all, inheritance, trusts and old money! Upppee! Viva Daddy Warbucks!

The best singles in the scene have other tools of the trade, fast wit, confidence, great appearance, class, good "threads" high-end shoes and jewelry all coordinated and well fitted and lots of effective connections. When it's plied well, over time, which should provide the desired success even without all the material goods mentioned above. There's no substitute for just good old "lookin' good" with a balanced, confident persona in the right dose. The race is on in the singles world. For what, "one never

knows, do one.” Do the right thing and be smart. Set your goals and you’re off and running and running and running.

Never forget that those who are impressed with stuff, things, etc. are not worth the effort. It doesn’t matter how gorgeous they are. Move on!

The first decision that a single “on the prowl” in New York City needs to make is to hit the right places at the right time. The first component of your decision should be to find your places of choice; those that attract the age group that you seek with the right amount of cerebral material. That’s a very subjective consideration for single men. You’ll know the class of patrons even before you walk into a bar. Just open your eyes, the look, the way the patrons are dressed, are they drinking Bud out of bottles or Martinis or wine? You’ll know otherwise, they go home!

For example, if they’ve got the goods then why not peruse women of virtually all ages? Seventeen is the “legal age” in New York State so be aware that “sixteen will get you twenty-five” as in years in the “clink” “joint” “big house” “lockup” “can” or “up the river” as in Sing-Sing on The Hudson.

A lot of smart guys favor women in their forties. Many sophisticated men in search of fun seek women who have had interesting and amusing life experiences. Mature ladies generally know, or should know, what they’re doing. They have “learned the ropes” as they say. Also, women in their forties should, by then, have interesting things to talk about and likely have acquired lots of wisdom, life stories and lessons that smart gentlemen generally find interesting and appealing, if they, the men, keep their mouths shut, sit

still and just listen to the ladies. Unlike the “babes” that just popped out of their shells, they provide far less opportunities to get you engaged in the conversation of life. So many young people really have nothing interesting to talk about. You be the exception and you’ll attract the best of ‘em.

Oh, that ubiquitous expression, “the brain is the sexiest organ in the human body” was always on the tip of everyone’s tongue back then in the singles scene. There’s some truth to that but, in my opinion, it was a worn out phrase like, “he’s got issues.” The saying about the brain was designed to offer safety to naïve and vulnerable prey that wish to convey the message that sex was not their highest priority. Most often that was just pure bullshit.

Some men are attracted to women more mature than forty because with or without “some work” women in their fifties are pretty nifty and even in their early sixties there are quite a few attractive ladies out there; “it’s the new forties.” I have seen many women in their early sixties that are beautiful, well kept, nicely dressed, equipped with a lifetime of experience and wisdom and typically are among the most interesting ladies around. They’ve got a lot to talk about while many young ladies often tend to chat about their jobs, former boyfriends, what they bought recently, their pain in the ass teen-aged daughters and their other “stuff.” They generally are not the most interesting ladies at the bar, but there are always exceptions. If you find one, hang on to her. That’s a double header, no pun intended. Youth, brains, wisdom, compassion, generous listener, passion, experience and fun spells, “keeper.” They’re

hard to find and harder to keep. You've got to have your act totally together.

Many men and women enjoy intimidating others and are, well, just not real. It's a sure sign of insecurity and there's no shortage of that to go around. Perhaps that's the best reason why there are so many unattached people roaming around plying the trade. So many people are afraid to make decisions and commitments. They don't want to take chances. They don't trust their intuition and are overwhelmed with fear of failure aka rejection. They stick and stay in their status quo safety zones! Be careful of accountants, doctors, dentists, pharmacists and those whose clothes reveal that they are cheap tightwads. Old watches and shoes are not a sign of lack of money, it's usually a sign of meager spending habits and that rarely spells poverty generally, most often cheap *putz*! Their mantra is:

"I'm not risking my money!" Go ahead, get buried with your money and let life pass you by.

Bye folks, life is passing you, "bye"! I've seen that happen time and time again and many of these creatures will be among the richest people in the cemetery because they have nobody to leave it to, give or share it with when they were above ground. Well, usually it's left to their nieces and nephews. This is it folks! The cemetery is a singles scene and it happens for the losers, tightwads and stiffs who tragically just can't commit themselves to sharing themselves and their money, things, etc. There is no guarantee of life after death, but hey maybe there is. But, no one knows for sure right? So, why take chances? Because, if there is no singles scene after

this life then those who are waiting for something better will not be disappointed because they'll be dead! Always remember, life is not a dress rehearsal. Many single men prefer to play the role of daddy, big daddy or sugar daddy, and seek soft pink pretty women who are "ripe for pickin'" as they'd say. They want to be seen with a "babe" or "trophy" as it props up their egos, which, I suppose, need proppin'!

A lady's age has never been a factor for me. However, in a practical sense, generally up to ten years younger was best because these ladies tend to like the confidence and experience that comes with a man who has gained "an edge" with a few more years of life experience beneath his belt.

But, there are ladies out there who want a younger man, their "trophy" thing. Some love to play big sister, momma "the boss" or all three. I suppose it's a "forbidden fruit" syndrome that turns them on too, including but not limited to a chiseled chest, bulging biceps, "six pack" abs and lots of hair, mainly on their heads. Most of those encounters don't last long, based on what I've seen. The guy gets thrown off balance and the lady ditches the male because he can't keep up with her wants and needs. Lucky him! Get off that trolley buster; see a shrink and get a reality check. "High maintenance" woman will bring you down fast. If it walks like a duck, well, you know.

After you've selected the places where you want to go, never seem too anxious or desperate, especially if you are. Be confident and be cool. Then, scan the place for the woman or women you find appealing, not only from a physical or sexuality perspective, but check out their body language and facial expressions.

Are they smiling? With whom are they talking? What are they talking about? Are they fidgeting, listening, obsessively looking at their watches, intently busy with their iPhones, looking at their mirrors often, texting, unaware of what's going on around them, aloof, etc.? Are they letting the other person(s) talk? Do they go to the bathroom too often especially with their friends for a quickie conference, refreshing their lipstick, makeup and hair? Big trouble, move on or move over! It's "high maintenance" and zero return on investment, hopefully only your time. If you're looking for a quickie, fine. But, you could get hooked and you'll wind up at the end of her line hooked like a fish, forever!

Look for the real ladies, secure and grounded. That's the best advice. Stay away from those gorgeous ladies especially if they are projecting too much self-interest. It's trouble and not worth it. Focus on what you really want and need in life. Someone who will make you happen and that can only happen if you can make her happy too. "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, it's a duck!"

Most inexperienced single men are scared to death to say something, the preverbal "pickup line."

"Haven't we met before?" "Are you from this part of town?" "What perfume are you wearing?"

These noir "lines" right out of the 1930's will either flop or if the lady has a sense of humor and the intro just may be perceived as a joke, then it could work. My advice is to try them, if you have nothing else in mind. If you think about it, the "pickup line" is the easiest thing because you have nothing to lose. Get over it and open your mouth. Since you don't even

know this woman, why should you care if she blows you off? So what? She's not the last woman on the island! Move on and say a prayer for the next dude. On second thought, skip the prayer, if he gets in too deep, it's just a little experience for him and that should have a lot of value, unless he gets hooked. A lady's reaction to your "pickup line" should tell you a lot about her. Pay attention! That first impression is often quite telling. So, if you don't like her reaction or feel uncomfortable then step on the gas and go. Move around buster! Ya better "shop around"! Ladies who are interested in making you feel off guard with your "pick up" line are jousting, looking to challenge you for one of two reasons. Either they're totally not interested in you and love to make schmucks out of men or they want to test your confidence, quick wit and skill to determine if you'll stay balanced under pressure.

There are literally thousands of pickup lines for all occasions. For example, here's a shocker:

"I'm looking for the perfect woman. Can you help me?" "I've noticed you from across the room and just wanted to get a closer look, I'm Cliff, and I'm . . ."

"I know I've seen you before, perhaps it was in a dream!"

If the lady "blows you off" for any of these openers then say, "nice meeting you" or "bye" or "sorry, must have confused you with someone else" and keep moving! Smile! Never expose any disappointment. Avoid "My name is" just say "I'm _." Don't be a dog or a square.

Other more traditional openers are:

“You have a terrific look” or “You put yourself together very well!”

Staring is not a good word, it’s too predatory. I’ve noticed you and I’d like to say hi. “Hi!”

“Hi, I’m Cliff. Where are you from?” or “You look terrific, you must have taken a very long vacation” or “My journey is over. So glad you’re here!”

A humorous approach provides a lot of clues about your choice lady. If they find you amusing, intelligent and not the obvious lecher who’s after one thing only then you’ll know, almost immediately. If they make a scornful face at you then remove yourself pronto. “Well, good luck!” and move on. Smile, you must always smile and project confidence. Confidence!

The one you are seeking is relaxed, drinking alcohol, not too much, smiling, listening and attentive.

Don’t be miffed if a lady tells you that she’s waiting for “someone.” That “someone” could be a girlfriend, even prettier than she! I’ve always replied,

“Oh, what’s her name? Maybe I know her!”

That gets a laugh, usually. If her friend turns out to be her boyfriend, then say good-bye to the lady. Don’t introduce yourself unless she introduces you to her boyfriend first. If she says, “this is my boyfriend” then you know. If she introduces him as “my friend” then there’s a crack, an opening, maybe.

That’s good protocol and reflects self-assurance, your secure posture. If the answer is “sure, you can hang here” then she’s either grounded and “in good space” and perhaps, not serious about the guy. She just may be attracted to you and she may want to include you in “the game.” She could also be using you to “break his balls.” Ask what she does and try to get her

business card if you can. You believe that she won't consider your request premature or intrusive. Never offer yours, give her your card only if she asks for it. Always.

Call her if you wish, but wait at least a week. Never be too anxious. Unfortunately, it's a game and never loose sight of that. Be real, deliberate and honest. Let ladies talk about themselves. Take an interest or stop wasting your time and move on.

The best thing you can say to a lady who you are attempting to get interested in you is simply, "Tell me more!" Let them talk. We have two ears and one mouth that we can shut. What does that tell you? "Tell me more." Ask questions, be sincerely interested and then they will, should, take an interest in you too. If they do not reciprocate then, most likely, they're too self-involved and or not interested in you. Move on.

There's no shortage of watering holes in this town and running from one to another can be a challenge, especially if you are the type that is intent not to leave any of them without some serious elbow bending.

It's not necessary because within a minute or two you'll know if the place has potential and if it doesn't have the goods then leave. If you can't evaluate a place in a few minutes then try another spot or go home and put a C note in your piggy bank. Back then it was a \$50 for piggy.

At that time, I had so much fun. The only way was to "work the prow!" but don't ever overdo the cups too giving others the impression that you can't you're your cups. Ladies are not attracted to big boozers except the occasional lady lush and that's a indication of trouble down the road. When you find one of those

hard drinking ladies, be careful, you can get crushed and hurt big time. New York City is the fastest lane aside from the Indy 500 so “lead, follow or get out of the way!”

One of These Glasses is Not Like the Other

Stealing cocktail glasses is one of the most fun things you can do while floating through the singles scene. Why? While “on the prowl” your mindset should be to think outside the box. Be unorthodox and dismiss much of what you have been told all your life. You’re on the hunt and not in pursuit of the conventional introduction from an aunt or parent. Rather, a side of your brain should shift into high gear and speak louder to you than the reams of advice, throughout the years, from your elders who may never have known how to “play the game”. To many people, wanting to please their parents and in doing so they marry the preverbal “girl next door” usually and it often turns out to be a disastrous choice, “ball and chain” guys. There are exceptions, let’s be fair but, they’re few and far between.

“Go get ‘em.” “Bring home the bacon.” or “My adrenalin, testosterone, serotonin and biological instincts are kickin’ in.” The same part of your brain tells you, “go ahead, and let’s try to get away with something, do something naughty, satisfy the devil in you and getting away with something rev’s your engine like a can of STP. Back in those days the concept fueled my behavior. Stealing cocktail glasses was the catalyst and that provided me with additional courage and confidence. I have no doubt that it enhanced my chances for success.

Every time got away with a stolen cocktail glass I was supercharged! Now, let’s go for the “real prize.” That was my mentality. It sounds childish because it actually is, true as it is. It’s brain chemistry; it’s power, enhances courage and creates a mechanism to

achieve your mission, serotonin at work successfully in an adult acting like an adolescent, silly, unusual and creative in a fun and very off-beat way. It's not true for us all, but if it doesn't fit your head then don't do it. Certainly, it's not for the weak and the meek or the Ivy League crowd that stands around talking about Sunday's football game or what the market is doing drinking beer from a bottle, Bud light, of course. These are the same guys who wear green corduroys with reindeer's on them. ☺

The best time to pull off this caper is in the winter, or at least when you are wearing a suit jacket. This was the drill:

If I had decided that the place was "86", time to split, I'd tuck my drink against my side beneath my jacket or coat, press my forearm against my jacket to steady the glass, never wanting to get myself wet. Once outside, I'd grasp the glass and take a sip. You didn't think that I would take an empty glass did you? One more glass for the pantry! The trip to that joint paid off, even if the drink and glass were my only company. Besides, glasses can only break. Women can break you and your poor aching heart.

One evening, I was out with a platonic girlfriend and we had agreed to go cocktail glass collecting. Even though we were each on our own hunt for relationships, we had made a declaration, a game of it. So, even if we each ended the evening without "pay dirt" we'd have something to show for the time, besides the fun, laughter and memories; glasses!

We must have hit about six bars that night and every time we left with our booty safely tucked beneath my "threads." She knew she was not as good at this as

me. Therefore, I had to insert two glasses per trip beneath my coat. She always got one. I never, ever wanted two of the same glasses in my apartment anyway. That would have been tacky. No Crate & Barrel, Bed, Bath and Beyond, Pottery Barn or Macy's for me. No matched set. Each glass was unique, a one of a kind.

That evening we stopped at a Duane Reade Drug Store to pick up a couple of shopping bags to carry our spoils. By two o'clock in the morning, both bags were totally filled and so were we, "knocked to the bone!"

We left a bar, a converted firehouse, on west 18th Street at about 3 AM. We sauntered across the street, with both shopping bags in hand, when suddenly I noticed bubble wrap! The trash was due to be picked up later that morning and on top of one of the trashcans was a mountain of bubble wrap, you know, the stuff that has air holes for wrapping gifts or dishes. Who doesn't love to snap and pop those little air holes? Then an idea hit my brain. I took the bubble wrap, spread it out on the hood of a parked car and started to remove the glasses, and I proceeded to roll 'em up, one by one, and recited some nonsense such as:

"Thank you for shopping with us today! Is there anything else I can do for you? Will that be cash, charge or debit, or 'did' you want to open a charge account and save an additional 10% on your purchase today? Did you find everything you were looking for?"

We howled, bent over, fell and crashed on top of the trash, chortling and shrieking in pain bursting from

our hysterical laughter. We couldn't stop! I was so glad we didn't have to pee! It was a damn good thing that we were sober enough to use the bubble wrap wisely, to protect our precious cargo. If not, we would have crunched all the air out of the little holes and forgotten about the glasses. That's the fun of bubble wrap; squish, snap, crackle and pop pop pop! Everyone loves that stuff. Screw the gift! Just give me bubble wrap, bubble wrap! I want bubble wrap! Yes! Yes!

The fun that you'll get out of the singles scene is up to you. Have a great time and don't let the "turkeys" get you down. You have to keep it light and keep yourself focused on your mission. Don't be over anxious. Allow yourself to get a little crazy! After all those years in that scene I claimed the most unusually stocked pantry in the city. In no time at all, I must have had about sixty cocktail glasses and they were all different and all mine or, in the least, in my possession. Who ever said that possession is 90% of the law? That's such crapola! I would have had over a hundred glasses but the attrition caused by leaving the apartment with a glass tucked tightly beneath my jacket or coat filled with libation on my way to another singles place always resulted in another donation for a corner trashcan. Some glasses never made it home, so sad ☹

Today I regret that I could have opened a cocktail glass store in Nolita, Alphabet City, Tribeca, Williamsburg or Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn and retired by now. But, what the hell? Providing private tours is a wonderful profession, a dream job, and lots

more fun than stealing bar glasses! Maybe I've grown up a bit? Nah!

The funniest thing about this was entire story is that I couldn't help removing the Sesame Street song from my brain "One of these things (glasses) is not like the other, one of these glasses isn't the same." The question is this. If Sesame Street were on television when I was a kid perhaps I would have grown up. I guess there's a little kid in all of us. Hope so. Be, confident; be intelligent, engaging, and secure. Listen and shut up, no anger and be on a confidence high and you'll sail through the journey. That's it!

A Tree Doesn't Grow in Central Park

Central Park is the most amazing place. I love it! New Yorkers have so much adoration for that park even though they don't know much about it. I'm there all the time, often on my own, walking my dog, or strolling with my wife Aline or hosting my tour guests. Perhaps it is the most gorgeous piece of ground designed, built and created by man in any urban environment on earth.

Enormous amounts of effort and money, public and private are needed to maintain the park. Millions of dollars have been donated to sustain and improve the park through events, fund-raisers, plaques adorning the benches at a cost of \$10,000 each, donations folks, and hundreds who donate their time, toil and sweat volunteering to plant, clean, weed, rake and sweep the park. Truly, it is a community effort. Countless numbers of people have made this 19th century masterpiece the most magnificent creation in New York City.

In 2013 John Paulson, a hedge fund manager with fond childhood memories donated \$100,000,000 to The Central Park Conservancy. The Central Park Conservancy, a quasi-public non-profit corporation chartered by "the City" pays 83% of the cost to maintain the park with a budget of nearly \$50 million annually. I too have fond memories of the park as a child however; I have postponed making a donation of similar proportions, for now. ☺

The Central Park Conservancy oversees the replacement of trees, bushes, shrubs, flowers, repairs damage from storms, re-paves paths, changes bulbs in the standing lamps, supervises the building and

repair of playgrounds, repairs walls, maintains the police stables located at the 86th Street transverse, plants and cuts the grass, restores ball fields and maintains monuments, and on and on.

Recently, I had noticed a replacement Weeping Willow tree that had been planted along the shoreline of "The Pool" a small lake in the park near 100th Street and Central Park West. The little weeper was not doing well. Actually, it was dying. These trees replace aging Weeping Willow trees that no doubt had been planted well over 100 years ago and have few years of remaining life. It's impressive, planting those trees alongside the aging ones. The park is an ongoing process, one of constant renewal. As a result park goes on to enjoy mature, and beautiful trees and they will for many years to come, extraordinary and gorgeous specimens!

Surely, that replacement Weeping Willow was diseased and in need of urgent attention or the end was surely near. I wrote a letter to the Director of The Central Park Conservancy mentioning what I had noticed, hoping for an answer, but not terribly optimistic that I would receive one. How could I reasonably expect an answer from a large quasi-public organization in a City this size? A letter about one tree in a park that has about 24,000 trees would surely go unanswered.

To my astonishment, three days after I had mailed that letter I received a phone call from the Director of Operations of The Central Park Conservancy acknowledging my letter.

“Hi Mr. Strome, thank you for your letter. We know about that tree and we’re keeping our eye on that tree.” Amazing!

The following week I passed by to take a look at “my tree” and noticed that it had been replaced! I was thrilled and gratified to say the least. There are still some people who do care and appreciate being notified by concerned citizens.

Now I know, through evidence that the park truly doesn’t exist by itself. It’s a labor of love and devotion that makes us so fortunate. Down to the detail of one little tree it’s nice to know that there are people who “have their eye on it.” Yes, “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn” and in Central Park too.

~~"I Got Interests on Both Sides"~~

That was the "welcome" I had received from the other end of the phone back in 1982 while working at my store located on the northeast corner of Lexington Avenue and 43rd Street.

What a location! The corner of 43rd Street and "Lex"! You couldn't get a better location than that! It's directly across the street from the Lexington Avenue entrance to Grand Central Terminal, the Graybar Building, once the largest office building in the world, and the Chrysler Building, located directly across the street to the south, once the world's tallest building! It wasn't actually a store, per se, but a concession in a Drug Store known as TJ Brothers Drug named for "two Jewish brothers". I, together with my partner, operated a sixteen-foot long film developing, film and passport photo counter in the front of the drug store. We opened the concession known as Films R Us in 1977.

We had a bona fide ten-year sub-lease with the Drug Store owners. It was a very profitable little business. It was fun to operate, marketed very aggressively, spearheaded with "flyers" handed out on the street. Our low pricing and promotional offers aimed directly at our high priced competitors. Their customers were directed directly to our door with our offers and we and drove our competitors nuts. We attracted herds of customers through our doors seeking bargains. They recognized the value of our services and pricing. Our competitors "sued" for peace and we created a way to live together, sort of. They stopped "bashing" us as a "Johnny come lately" labeling us as poor quality hacks and we in turn

stopped “shouting” about their high prices. It was great fun! We never gave up featuring crushing prices while making huge piles of cash for quite a few wonderful years. Cheap rent, 90% cash and no accounts receivable is a dream business. Very few used credit cards; we didn’t want to take them. There weren’t any electronic mechanisms to verify the veracity of credit cards in those days. Accepting credit cards was very chancy. Do you recall when retailers would receive tissue paper booklets with the current list of fraudulent credit card account numbers printed in 2-point type? They were totally useless, a device designed to cover “their Asses” the credit card companies.

I recall, at that time, the price of silver, a primary ingredient found in film emulsion, had soared in price. The Hunt family, oil barons, from Texas attempted to “corner” the silver market and drove the price of silver through the roof. Consequently we began purchasing huge quantities of film and we warehoused cases of film in my garage, virtually eliminating space for my car. Silver is a key component of film, the chemical, silver halide, captures the image on the film. So, we just sat back and waited for the price of film to continue to climb further and further and then we sold it at a penny above cost, that is, the newer higher current cost. As the price of film continued to rise we played the same game, over and over again. It provided us with impressive profits and substantial savings for our customers. That strategy drove our business sky-high because our customers had more film on hand than ever before and it stimulated the most profitable

segment of our business, film developing and printing. At times we had more customers at our little sixteen-foot counter than the rest of the entire drug store, which was about twenty-five times the size of our little concession. We projected ourselves as doing our customers a favor and our customers were very impressed with our generosity; we felt so sorry for them. Sure! It would be like a gas station giving gas away at a 40% discount compared to all their competition. Our customers loved us and we loved that!

My partner, the salt of the earth, but a bit of an obsessive “bean counter” knew every conceivable business statistic. He crunched them every way from “here to eternity.” He just loved knowing how many crunch, crunch, crunch we sold last year on the same month! Passport photos sold for the corresponding week during the prior year were compared with the current year. What were we going to do with that information? Have another shrimp at Palm Restaurant, our Friday afternoon ritual, yeah, pass the hot sauce! Nice guy, very hard worker. I used to buy him Crunch candy bars. He loved chocolate, but he never got the connection.

“Cliff, on line two Tony, he’s on hold for you!”

I didn’t know anyone named Tony, but I picked up the call anyway. I had a strange feeling that this was the call that I had been waiting for, the opportunity to cash in on a real estate assemblage.

“Hi, this is Cliff.”

“I want to talk to you about your film store.”

"Who's this?"

"Tony"

"Who sent you?" was my response to this uninvited mystery caller.

"I got interests on both sides!"

He replied in a deep confident and serious tone, peppered with that Benson Hurst, Brooklyn accent. There was no mistake. I was thinking fish now, not shrimp, as I was going to be a pu-pu platter at the bottom of The East River on top of a pair of concrete shoes. Me, I can imagine literally feeding the fish. I always hated salt water, oysh! It reminds me of Epsom Salts, bad for your blood pressure too, but only while you're alive. Concrete shoes, fuggetaboutit! I was still wearing Weejuns or Clark Wallabies back then. Where's the best deal for cement shoes anyway? Could it be Bergdorf, Saks, Jimmy Choo or Prada, eh? Nah! Try Vinnie's, Butch the Hat or Tony the Rat if you're looking for a pair of concrete shoes, eh?

"So where do we go from here? What can I do for you?" I asked with a touch of sarcasm.

"My shoe size is 9E; can you get me a pair, with a loose fit? I just hate tight fitting shoes. I like a bit of room to roam, know what I mean, Tony?" I've got a bunion just behind my big toe on my left foot that's already killing me!"

Sure, I said that! Right?

"I want to meet you at the Bayonne Diner. We gotta talk about your film store. You gotta get out a dere. I want to see you tomorra' at 1 o'clock and don't come heavy! Okay?"

He told me in a very demonstrative manner, very.

Don't come heavy meant armed as in "piece" a gun, lead!

"No need to make that request, I never came heavy in my life. Know what I mean?"

I had not a doubt that I was confronted by a pro. After wondering what movie I was in, I told him I'd be there. Immediately after I hung up the phone I ran upstairs to the bathroom, and got there just in time. I did "come heavy" to the bathroom, that is. Left a lot lighter too!

I showed up in Bayonne with my father, a short, portly grey bearded man who wore a tweed British style cap with a cheap cigar, Garcia & Vega, in place. He was the picture of a man in his late sixties who could just as well have been seated on the Grand Concourse in The Bronx in the late 1970's schmoozing with little caped first generation ol' guys sharing stories from the old country, the war and their hot secretaries who were, by then, drooling in their bibs and wearing diapers in "old age homes" as they were called back in those days. He looked like Yentel's father, in the movie featuring Barbra Streisand. He served as my protector, observer and advisor.

They walked in as a pair as well, Tony and Johnny. Johnny seemed to have come heavy. He either had a huge tumor or half of a dead chicken tucked beneath his suit jacket on his right side beneath his chest. Obviously, he was a hefty lefty. Since I didn't smell chicken and his color looked good so I figured that he must have came "packin'" aka "heavy."

I thought of the scene from "The Godfather" when Michael, you know, Al Pacino, snagged a gun from the

top of a toilet tank that he had used to “whack” the crooked police captain and the Tattaglia capo in the Italian restaurant on Arthur Avenue in The Bronx’s Little Italy. So, I fantasized, thinking that there’d be a “piece” planted in the men’s room for me!

The mind is an amazing thing; the tricks your head plays with you is a story in itself! Could it be that when my father entered the diner and had slipped into the men’s room to plant the “piece?” His purpose for the detour, assuming that I would have figured it out! Nah, my mind was racing and I have to admit, although I had a lot at stake, I found the experience very amusing and surreal.

It’s the “romance” of facing off with the Mafia. “I’m doin’ business with the Mafia! I got something they want!” Nah nah nah nah naaaaaaahhhh nahhh!!” Could it be? A “made man” had confronted me? No worries, I’m Jewish! Ha! “Vat are you bad boys doing? We are Jewish!” Ha ha! Murder Incorporated, that was us, a Jewish organization, can you believe that? That’s another thing that bothered me, oy! I was about to offer them some free film, as a gesture of good will but nah; they must have had all the film they could lift. Perhaps they might just become a great new supplier for us, eh? The price of silver could provide an opportunity for us all to make some cash with them, eh? They had more spare cash then I and perhaps they’ve gotten overloaded with too much “hot” film, eh?

I decided not to check the bathroom but I did make a necessary visit, second time I ever came “heavy” due to my fears. Sure beats X-Lax! Mafia brand laxatives, what a great idea to build drug store traffic! “Take

Mafia Brand X-Lax, or X-Lex, promoting our location, Lexington Avenue! Wherever you go and whenever you go!" Or how about, "Can't come heavy? Let Mafia X-Lex knock the crap out of you!" Nah, I ain't buyin'!

We ordered some coffee and Danishes, toast and other comfort food. As I recall, they ordered, "prostitute spaghetti." That's angel hair, extremely thin spaghetti that "hookers" often ordered because it took no time to cook enabling them to get back on the springs and not miss a "trick." This was going to be a short meeting, as there didn't seem to be any smiles, small talk or niceties. This was strictly serious business.

It had been apparent for quite a few months, prior to this "meet" that the block where our concession had been located was experiencing an assemblage by a real estate developer, Olympia & York, the Reichmann Family from Toronto, although we didn't know that at that time. I spoke with numerous other retailers who where doing business on the same block as us made we aware that they were "surrendering" their leases for payment. No doubt we would be approached with an offer and the notion of being "holdouts" to get us the best possible deal was a wonderful prospect, pure naivety and fiction, as it turned out. My partner and I relished the thought of getting a million dollars or more for our signatures. Our business was good but not that good. But, that didn't matter to the powers that be. The developer couldn't force us into a deal that we wouldn't want to accept or so we thought. It turned out that we were green, young and stupid to believe that. We were giddy and really dense. That

was who we were. With age comes wisdom. I never knew that. For openers:

A clause in our sub-lease stated that if any labor dispute, arising as a result of our business activity, such as picketing in front of the store, must be “cured” within three days or our sub-lease would be null and void, “having no force and effect.”

Years back, during the negotiations to obtain our lease we almost walked out, “grandstanding” as we referred to it. We knew that this was a deal breaker on the other side because we needed this deal a lot more than they did. Their benefit, aside from the collection of our rent, which was really insignificant, was that we provided the prospect that our store traffic would be very beneficial for their business. That was the lure. Every savvy retailer wants people who pass by their store to see it packed with shoppers. It stimulates others to come in and we did that very well for their benefit and ours. If they had an ounce of imagination they could have done it for themselves but they were both vacuous and very lazy. I never heard of an idea emerge from either of them.

About two weeks before I received that phone call from Tony, my partner and I were approached by one of them seeking to make a deal with us to “surrender” our sublease. We were offered \$10,000 and we laughed hysterically, right in his face. That was their opening shot! We practically pissed in our pants from laughter! We knew they couldn’t sell their master lease to the landlord until we had surrendered our sub-lease, to them, in writing. We felt that we had the upper hand and decided to chide their offer with remarks that we couldn’t take them seriously. It was

like "Get back to us with a real number and we'll talk." Certainly, that's what they had expected. That's the way the game is played. "Let the games begin!" Subsequently, there was no talk, just "hardball" tactics such as, them taking pictures of our employees standing behind the counter, waiting on customers and ringing up sales. We knew exactly what they were up to. They had the right, as provided under the terms of our sublease to review all of our "books and records" and take pictures of our employees was legal too, an information gathering ploy designed to scare us because another item that really concerned us, besides the picketing clause was the payroll. A number of our employees had been working "off the books" and the stupid boys knew it too. That was another Achilles' heel for us, besides the picketing clause in the lease.

We too were a pair of stupid kids frolicking in a sandbox filled with mousetraps. We were too giddy and inexperienced to realize that we were pawns in a real world multi-million dollar scenario orchestrated by a multi-national extremely wealthy and powerful Canadian family, The Reichmann's. They were the folks who later went on to build Canary Wharf in London and World Financial Center adjacent to The World Trade Center in New York City that they subsequently sold to Brookfield Properties by The World Trade Center in New York City. At that time, we didn't have a clue. Okay, it's the big league and we were minor league players. We had to find a way to save ourselves.

Naturally, Tony was prepared to cut a deal, keeping his client's interests uppermost in mind, of course. No

doubt he was well aware of our vulnerability. He had a job to do and I knew we were walking barefoot on hot coals. Cement shoes would have been perfect for hot coals, come to think of it! It didn't take long for me to realize who really had the upper hand.

At the diner, Tony had asked me how much I was looking for. I told him that I had expected him to put a number on the table. I came to the "meet" with no number in mind. I thought the right play for him was to "put his cards on the table." I'm here to listen with an open mind, not an open head. That was my thinking.

"Come on! You gotta have some kinda numba in your frekkin' brain! Put somethin' on the table and let's get it done, know what I mean, eh? I know that you could have some serious tax and labor problems too kid. You want those government wing tipped assholes creepin' up your ass?" Tony made his point, the threat.

The threat was delivered with my back against the wall. I knew that I couldn't afford to "fold my cards." It was time for me to stand up for our interests and deliver my message to Tony.

"Tony, I'm not an unreasonable guy. You and your people want us out and that's fine. We have absolutely no problem with that. My partner and I have families and we've got mouths to feed. We're young guys and we have five more years left on that lease. We're not walking away without a fair share of the action. Your people need us to get out and we don't want to stand in your way. We're not pigs!"

Like he gave a shit!

I told them “we’re just looking for a number that works for all of us, a fair deal. Our accountants and lawyers have told us we have nothing to worry about. All tax matters can be straightened out with the authorities as needed. My partner and I have been down that road before and we knew how to get past it. We’ve got great lawyers and accountants and they’ve proven to us time and time again that they knew their business. It didn’t frighten us, not a bit. I’ll get back to you after my partner and I talk it over. I’ll let you know in a day or two. He agreed and we shook hands and we all left the diner. No one slipped into the bathroom, the coast was clear. I never expected anything to “go down.” during that meeting. I was just fanaticizing, getting it off internally, a bit of self-aggrandizement; no doubt partially a defense mechanism too, I suppose.

Over the next few days my partner and I discussed the situation and arrived at \$500,000 as the right number for several reasons. First, we knew we were dealing with some very unsavory people who were backed up by some of the savviest businessmen on the planet with fat wallets. We had assumed that ultimately they were going to get their way by any means necessary. Responding to them with an inflated and unrealistic opening shot would have been stupid and dangerous. It would only have intensified their frustration and justified their means, in their minds, to cross the line and get tough with us. Second, we also knew that we could come up against other types with their own greedy self-interest such as our lawyers and accountants. They knew all about creating fees that mount quickly, especially, if they

got us the desirable results. That road would be paved with cancelled checks, ours. I didn't know who to fear more, the professionals, the government tax agencies or the "boys."

And finally, the best way to handle this was simply to make the best deal we could and move on, period, stay out of trouble and get it all behind us. We weren't looking for broken kneecaps or swimming with the fish or the prospect of prison, which was totally out of the question. Prison was to be avoided at all costs. The reality was, that was my greatest fear. Knowing that it was a real possibility scared the shit out of us. I was married with two young children and didn't need a new roommate for the next ten years or so. Not an option.

I called Tony the next day and tossed out the number, \$500,000. Not to my surprise his reply was,

"I can't help you kid."

I told Tony that there was a some wiggle room. He was unimpressed

Nah, let's just go about our separate ways and let the chips fall where they may. Got it kid?"

He was a real pro. This guy knew his business, the right messenger for the job.

The following week, the mailman appeared at our store with *four* certified letters. We "heard" from The City of New York Sales Tax Desk Audit Division, The New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, The City of New York Department of Labor and of course the good old Internal Revenue Service. Now that's power! These guys were heavies and they ran this right up the top of the pole. They had the connections to pull the right strings anywhere. They

created numerous potentially serious problems for us. We were squarely in enemy territory. These auditors must have gotten the word to put the squeeze on us until we folded and made the desired deal. Otherwise they would keep pouring on the pressure until we knuckled under. We knew we were squarely in the middle of a very precarious situation. At that point, we just wanted it all to go away and that's exactly what they were after, scaring the crap out of us. It was a deliberately well-orchestrated scenario one they must have had plenty of valuable experience behind them.

We've all seen similar scenarios in the movies, on television read about such encounters in novels, biographies and newspapers but now, we were in the spotlight and didn't like it one bit. It's fun to watch and read about, but hey, I was not a big player, just one of thousands of shopkeepers in the big City, practicing my trade. Suddenly, when opportunity knocked, we got slammed in the face. I didn't like the script and my partner wasn't too crazy about it either. I realized that behind every building, on every block there's a story, a history, a struggle in this dog eat dog City. Power is about struggles, winners and losers and the vast hordes of those in between. It rears its ugly head and crushes the meek. But, it's the driving force that builds cities, creates empires, enriches the wise, feels the creative gutsy troopers that drive the underworld forward reaping big bucks creating more power and moving "society" forward. It's Ted Turner's favorite expression, "lead, follow or get out of the way." We go about our business and they go about theirs. We dwell in two different worlds that,

from time to time, collide with a myriad of consequences, good, bad, tragic and all a fine-tuned means to play by the rules or the game will bounce you out!

The “big boys” defeat the weak, timid, inexperienced, and fearful. It’s the human spirit, the connectors with big brass balls against those who lack them. Balls, in such cases, measure every gain or loss when it comes down to “jungle justice” on the streets, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

It determines those who stay in the game and those who do not. Rules, what are they? Some play the game and adhere to “fair play” but we all know the mantra “nice guys finish last.” Isn’t it the truth! Thanks to Leo Durocher, player, manager and coach of the Brooklyn Dodgers. It’s just another ditty of wisdom straight from Brooklyn.

Certainly, my partner and I were not saints either however, even if we had played by the rules the outcome would not have changed by a nickel! Any government agency can give the straightest arrow a rough time. They’ll always find something to make you fry. The stakes are too high to overlook any opportunity to do what you’re told.

The day our mailman delivered those certified audit notices I drove up to Nyack Hospital. When I arrived I feigned that I was having chest pains. I was checked into the cardiac care unit where I happened to have a few “friends” who were doctors. I revealed, to them, the real reason why I had arrived and they admitted me. They performed basic non-invasive tests as a matter of “good medical practice.” I remained there for several days making the visit seem credible. One

of my doctor friends cranked out a letter that I could not participate in any depositions or tax audits for six months. Then my partner stepped in and did a darn good job of handling the accountants and lawyers.

Our opponents did not pursue the “picketing card.” Perhaps it wasn’t necessary or was too risky and injurious to their client’s drug store business during picketing perhaps. Maybe the union didn’t want to stick their necks out either and be a party to such action. Who knows?

Our opponents had revealed that they had some very powerful connections with government agencies and we had no way of knowing the consequences for us. We knew that the audits would not be a picnic. Cutting a deal with the agencies would take the pressure off us but no deals were on the table unless we caved in and “cut bait” with the boys. We wondered what their next card would be.

As for the doctor “friends” of mine they knew my family’s medical history; heart disease was in the gene pool, high cholesterol, years of smoking on my part and toss in my zany lifestyle added up to a walking time bomb. That was confirmed the following year when I had quadruple bypass surgery to prevent what certainly would have been a fatal heart attack.

One of my doctor “friends” had admitted to me, years later, that he had tried to convince his colleague that further testing would have been the right protocol.

In this instance, I suppose, the etiquette among some doctors was, and still is, to let the patient, a friend, die or have a heart attack rather than violate their “hypercritical” oath, the oath among doctors not to put a colleague in an embarrassing or ruinous

position! They proved to me that some doctors are strictly heartless mechanics who are in a profession whose priority is to save themselves more so than save their patients. I love how many doctors and other over paid professionals, in many and not all cases, pontificate about their success stories. It's all self-serving heroics and self-promotion. The other tales are not part of the legend. Those patients don't speak because they are "sleeping" in cemeteries. I wonder how many doctors have invested money in cemeteries and burial businesses. Most doctors are honest hard working professionals. Since that experience I've been fortunate and well, I'm still here! A number of months down the road, while in the midst of the audits, we settled for \$150,000, the best deal we felt we could get. After all the papers were signed we closed the store and bemoaned the cost of the fees, the taxes and the discontinuance of the income stream. We each wound up with very little because my partner convinced me that we should invest the remaining proceeds in NYSE Savings & Loan Bank stocks that, in the end, turned out to be a big mistake. Had we not been so greedy and stupid we could have walked away with much more. Good lessons don't come cheap.

What's the moral of the story? Had we played it straight it wouldn't have mattered in the end. The opposition had much bigger shoulders than us. They would have resorted to *any* means necessary to get what they wanted. Of that I have no doubt. They had the picketing card, friends in very high places and quite likely other friends with enormous power and influence as well. In addition, they had access to the

store, off hours, and surely they could have created enormous physical damage to our little business by trashing our customer's photos. That would have destroyed our business fast and we knew that they would have done anything to accomplish their objectives, anything!

We had a good run making very good money for five years, without breaking our asses and we had become weekly "fixtures" at the original Palm Restaurant. All in all, it was very worthwhile. The play with the stock market was a stupid risk, "youthful exuberance".

It was a brief encounter with power, revealing the way the real world works, how deals are made and how things get done in New York City and most places too. Yeah, we played hardball with the big boys and moved on because we were amateurs, novice kids who were forced to step up to the plate in the majors and we couldn't have been crushed.

It's a story of two guys who were pushed on the stage, front and center. Looking back on it all we both learned some very good lessons. Fortunately, there was patience on the other side. For how long, glad we never found out.

It's part of the history of a couple of New Yorkers who had become part of history as a result of finding ourselves in a precarious place, a place we were not looking to be. Hope it happens again because next time I'll have a "dose of brains" to fall back on and I'll cover my tracks and keep my nose clean.

Life, in New York City, is a *quid pro quo*. A major New York City real estate assemblage is a once in a lifetime opportunity and we blew it. It certainly was a fascinating ride but I'm so glad we got off that trolley.

I'll have another ticket, thank you, and I'll gladly take it wherever it leads me.

“Instant Funship”

Throughout the years, living in New York City, I have had innumerable opportunities to experience quality “alone time.” Solitude in New York City is unlike anywhere else because there are endless choices to turn unwanted alone moments into spontaneous social occasions. While I was in between both marriages, a period of about six years, I became the preverbal kid in a candy store. My choices were endless and I indulged in the opportunity with gusto. There were literally hundreds of opportunities to seek “instant funship.” I’ve always enjoyed the company of others, minus the occasional unbearable jerk that shows up. Living in the most densely populated environment in the country, and not always with a friend at hand, I have felt compelled, many times, to leave my midtown apartment and “ply the pavement” in search of a good restaurant, one with an interesting bar scene or other amusing venue in search of some “instant funship”.

An interesting bar scene with the potential of “instant funship” is typically one that consists of a few empty seats, numerous people, well dressed, seated at the bar, better with some standees too, adding to the level of energy, engaged in interesting conversation hopefully doused with good humor and not overdoing the cups. I’d peer into such a place, through the window, if possible, or open the door, enter and take a casual inspection and ask myself:

“Is there ‘instant funship’ here?”

I’d stroll in, look around and determine the best place for me, based on my assessment of their patrons, their appearances, their grouping arrangements,

body language and with a bit of luck and a dash of experience, I'd make my evaluation, order a drink and gauge the on-going chat-ability of the bartender as well. I'd ask him or her:

"So, what's uppah?" or "So what's shakin'?" Or my favorite, "Uho's in charge 'ere?"

Bartender's personalities are of major importance to detect "instant friendship" levels. Often they hold a lot of sway over the hype and variety of people frequenting the place. After ten minutes or so, I'd make an effort to attract interactive attention, make a short comment or two, overhear the conversations close by and gather my impressions of those engaged in conversation. Are they smart, interesting, boring and comfortable in their skin? Do I think they would interest me and would I interest them? Are their conversations stale and mundane peppered with phrases, such as "where did you shop today?" or "I can't stand that apartment it's a one bedroom!" and "I'm entitled!" or "My husband is so stupid and lazy. Why isn't he making more money?" and "Who won the hockey game last night?" and, my favorite, "I just traded in my one year old Porsche for a new one!"

What draws me in are discussions that are either somewhat esoteric, amusing, front page, section one, or most of all very humorous chatter with laughter buy not loud howling.

"Where is this City going? "How is this country going to get out of this mess?" or "What's going on in Washington, they're nuts. They just don't get anything done!" or "Think we'll invade Letsbombistan?" Politics can be good fodder for discussion, at times, but generally, I avoid it like the plague.

For me, all sports are out, unless I want to make believe that I know what I'm talking about and fooling the group. It's tons of fun for me. I just keep repeating, "Yeah, that was a fantastic play" or "He could have made that play?" And the most useful, "Yeah, yeah yeah, yup, yeh, that's right, yeah, yeah, so true, right." Amazing how those fans don't "get it."

I continue my evaluation the group. It takes only a minute or less. I don't plan my intro, or an opener, a line that would evoke a reaction, or some comment that would dovetail with the ongoing conversation. I just open my mouth and out it comes, easy. Truthfully, it's a momentary burst, a comment, a thought or a question directed toward the crowd or one particular individual, when there's a pause in the chatter. It's my perception as a connector, spontaneity, whatever works. I take my opening shot. What have I got to lose? It's fun. It's a game, so I go for it. I "work" with what I've got in front of me and just dive right in.

Getting good at this has given me a lot of pleasure. I've developed a near perfect record of meeting friendly and connective people who have welcomed me into their chatter and in a "New York minute." I have mastered the art of playing a role, of steering conversations into all sorts of directions connecting and creating lively exchanges. I fully believe that again and again the chatter was all good, fun, light, peppered with laughter and friendly engagement. That's my objective. At times its gotten a little heavy, you know, religion, politics, morality that sort of stuff but, it's always kept on the right side of civility. No barroom brawls, arguments or hard feelings, ever!

Perhaps there's an art to it, no need to glorify it. Some people are born with a seed that enables them to just open their mouths and create a connection, "a connector" one who truly likes people and is interested in them. That's me and New York City is a perfect place for an urban extrovert. What's wrong with that? "Don't get me started!"

But, it's not something you'd want to try anywhere, because I believe that most places that are socially opposed to intruders, those looking to casually break into conversations, join the crowd and get involved in even the most innocuous and unintrusive discussions. I've been "around the block a few times" and trust me; you cannot do this everywhere. New York City is the best place to be if you are an "instant funship" kind of person. Most people here are ready, willing and able to give you a shot. "What's this guy got to say?" "Okay, just maybe, this guy is interesting and will add to the conversation." Or in less frequent encounters, ladies will join a conversation too.

Body language is an important factor. Avoid being aggressive, sit or stand comfortably, take an interest in the conversation before you jump in, be agreeable, complimentary and listen to what they are talking about. By taking it in you are gathering points and as such they just may begin asking questions; "Do you live here?" "Visiting? Where are you from?" "What's the most fun you've ever had?" "Do you come here often?" "What do you do?" But, be careful! Then, after five to ten minutes of engagement, they dig deeper; "Who are you voting for?" Whether the conversation is deep or superficial, you'll know if they'll let you join in. It starts to flow, questions arise, give and take

starts to evolve, introductions are made, and you're in the game. Don't challenge anyone and don't put him or her on the defensive. Avoid jumping into conversations that are personal, relationship based, health issues, financial stuff, or heavy personal stuff, problems, "train wrecks" or depressing chatter. Know when to stay away.

If the conversation is light, show a reserved interest, listen with one ear, subtly, and start out by keeping your mouth shut. Wait until eye contact has been made, exchange cheerful expressions, then:

"Where you from?" "So you're here on business?" "How'd you know that I'm not a New Yorker?" "I didn't, I just guessed it!" "But how'd you know?"

"Ah, that's a good question. Do you really want to know?"

Don't try this in some parts of the rural south, Midwest, or just about anywhere in The United States, with a few exceptions. These and other places, most places, will not "let you in" if you don't look like, dress like, speak like and fit in, just like them. In most parts of this country there's a certain "back off" effect and they will turn you right off. Boston, a nice town, can be surprisingly stiff, starchy and closed-minded when it comes to intruders or strangers especially from other places. The Midwest generally has little or no interest in speaking with New Yorkers. Many of our friends from other parts of the country misperceive us as arrogant, know-it-alls, walking superiority complexes and successful, which, for the most part, many of us are, and that breeds contempt. Miami is the coldest city in the United States. It's a closed society that clings to its own types and that, in

part, depends on the language you speak, what you drive and the part of town where you happen to live, among others. Besides, it's actually the northern tip of South America and the southern tip of the United States; two places in one with cultural and ethnic borders all over the place that will never melt! I wish them good luck as they whiz by in their cars on the way to the mall, home, office, whatever. There's nobody walking, it's too hot!! Miami looks very impressive from the air but on the ground it's dead compared to New York City.

New York City, being the melting pot, and the cornerstone of liberalism, has made "instant funship" possible. I've been at the other end of the stick and been approached by others who have struck up conversations with me quite often. I'm only one of many. Perhaps I should start an organization and name it NYIFC, New York Instant Funship Club. Wanna become a member? "Sure, let me make you a member!" (Victor Maitlin, Beverly Hills Cop, remember that scene?)

These encounters serve a purpose in a city the size of New York City. Even a New Yorker with family, friends, and business relationships will find themselves in an occasional alone moment and "instant funship" is the perfect cure. I've had countless conversations with strangers, found in good places, all of which have interesting things to say about their lives, things we have in common and beliefs we share or do not share. We discuss everything in a civil, harmonious and enjoyable manner, complete strangers opening up to each other and sharing a moment, is all good, interesting and

often is intellectually challenging, and most often lots of fun.

“Instant funship” is sharing similar experiences, assessing outcomes and evaluating strategies taken; I woulda, coulda, shoulda, in each instance is shared and expressed. “If I only knew then what I know now!”

Sharing jokes is the top, the most fun. It’s like a ping pong game and if two or three are in it together then one joke brings on another and another and so on. You could literally sit for hours and howl the night away. It feeds on itself and once you get started it’s non-stop! So much great material is stuck in my head and I’ve worn it down to a pulp. But, most folks still get a lot of laughs especially from those who haven’t heard my material before.

In New York City people willingly express their thoughts, ideas and beliefs. They want to be heard and will shut their mouths to listen, even me! It’s truly something special about this town, the engagement, the sense of community, friendship and desire to know what’s inside of each other’s heads and even exploring what’s in your own. I love it. I can always venture out and find the right fit, satisfy my quest for “instant funship” like nowhere else on earth. “Hello New York! I’m Cliff. Where are you from? Want some “instant funship”? Glad you’re here! Hope you’re glad I’m here too.”

So . . . you’ve been living in Tribeca? For how long?”

The 47th St Diamond Dealer, Extraordinaire!

Who among us expects something for nothing? For the most part, life is a *quid pro quo*, and in New York City, nothing could be truer. No one gives away ice in the winter in New York City.

I had a business, a chain of one-hour photo stores and a commercial digital imaging lab in Manhattan that I was forced to shut down in 2003 due to technological changes in the industry. Film had become a dinosaur as the world had gone digital. Aline and I had gotten married in 1999 and we experienced a most generous and welcome gesture from a lifelong friend of mine. At that time, the business was tanking or “undeveloping” fast!

Michael L. Brown, of M L Brown, Inc. a diamond dealer located at 10 West 47th Street for nearly 47 years came through when I needed a friend. Friends had become scarce as my financial fortunes had plunged. Shouldn't it be the other way around? Friends should be there when you need them most not when your fortunes are flying high. But that's just not the way it works.

We all know the saying, “You'll find out who your friends are when you're “broke or sick.” Financially, the picture looked very bleak but I wasn't out of gas, yet. For me, the situation was just another opportunity to start over again and enjoy “the climb” certainly, not my first climb. Michael expressed his confidence in me by deed not merely with words. Sure, we all know that for him his was a business but this guy is all stars and stripes. He's a big “stand-up guy!”

Our first wedding anniversary was a home run out of the park, or should I say stadium? We had a blast. Just prior to our first anniversary I had asked Aline if she would like a “tennis bracelet” as an anniversary gift. Her answer,

“I don’t even know what it is!”

A woman from France, Parisian, dripping with class, verve, style, brains and presence, direct from the continent, Euro-style, she was the envy of American women. Many dare try to duplicate them but seldom succeed. She didn’t even know what a tennis bracelet was! To me, that was class.

Having decided to give her one, the size that would have been a perfect for a New City, New York sweet sixteen over indulged child. The bracelet was just the right size for an eager mollycoddled spoiled brat; an offering from parents who would have been so proud that their “generosity” provided their daughter with the largest tennis bracelet received by her peers in their over self-indulged community. It be a token, a symbol of affluence, success but not good judgment or of love. It’s all a stupid game and we all knew it, even the girls did.

God forbid your daughter’s tennis bracelet was among the smallest. You’d be in deep shit! What a shame.

Well, “my child” Aline, loved it and I was very pleased. A year had passed and my business fortunes continued to falter. The one-hour photo business floundered, and we were faced with our second wedding anniversary. How difficult and frustrating it would be for me to disappoint her. I wouldn’t let it

happen. My friend, Michael the jeweler just might be able to rescue me.

Aline had offered me comfort by suggesting, as for her second anniversary gift, that I should take the tennis bracelet back to Michael to remove the link whose stone had gone missing.

“Don’t replace the missing stone, but rather remove the link” she had suggested impishly.

She was never demanding or seeking gifts. She asked for nothing and encouraged me not to shed a dime. I wasn’t surprised but gratified and frustrated that she knew well that I was unable to provide what I wanted her to have, something appropriate and well deserved, a bracelet bigger than the sixteen year olds from New City, New York!

I took her “sweet sixteen New City tennis bracelet” to Michael. He was aware that I had filed Chapter 11 in bankruptcy court on behalf of my business and that I’d been in much better financial shape in the past. He was also confident that I would inevitably get back on my feet. He had gone down the same road a number of years before.

I appeared at his store to satisfy Aline’s unspoken wishes for our second anniversary. He was reminded that I had purchased a “starter” tennis bracelet for her the year before as had I removed it from my pocket and told him that she had wanted a link removed, the one that was missing a diamond.

“No! Don’t replace the diamond, eliminate the link!”

I had asked him.

Then I went on to say,

“Hey Michael, listen to me. I have a few bucks in my pocket. If I merge this money with the bracelet can I

move this Chevy up to a Buick, meaning something a bit larger?"

He opened his safe, removed a tennis bracelet and placed it on the black velvet pad on the counter in front of me. It had appeared to be a joke. It was huge, not a sweet sixteen piece, but one fit for a pretentious Parisian import or even a Princess.

"Whoooohaaaa! Michael! What? Are you kidding? This is a major piece! Don't feel sorry for me. We'll survive and I don't want you to consider me a charity or do me any unnecessary favors!"

"Cliff, I know what you're going through, been there, done that. I got through it and you will too. When you get back on your feet, just stop by and give me another \$2,000. I will never call you for the money. I know you'll come through, I have confidence in you."

I left 47th Street with a tennis bracelet that was so spectacular that I was walking on air! It was large, dazzling and impressive and I couldn't imagine the look I'll see on Aline's face when she'd see it! It would definitely blow her away.

I entered our apartment and got dressed for the evening. Aline was ready to go, painted nicely and scented like a rose bush. She was a doll, a living doll. As we got ready to make our departure I told her,

"Oh sweetie! Here I almost forgot to give you back your bracelet. Hold out your hand and let me pour it into your palm."

Out of the black velvet pouch that she had, a few hours earlier, inserted the "starter bracelet" and now I poured the gleaming replacement into her opened cupped hand.

The look on her face was pure magic. Her eyes widened and her expression was unspeakable.

"Where did you get that?"

"Michael!"

"Where'd you get the money from?"

"Eh, stop askin' questions. It's your Chapter 11 bracelet, *capisce!*"

It took about three years for me to finally get back on my feet. True to his word, Michael never called me for the money and I stayed away from 10 West 47th Street, as I was too embarrassed to make a cashless appearance. Aline loves the bracelet. Now she knows what a tennis bracelet is, ah "The Americanization of Aline!"

The payback day had arrived. I walked into Michael's store, and he looked the same; tan, tall, big and handsome. He smiled, smirking as if to say today's the day, Cliff finally has been able to come around and take care of business. I placed the cash on the counter. He looked at me, smiled and whispered in my ear,

"I never had a doubt." and he laid a sweet kiss on me cheek.

It Takes a Key For a "Village" a duh!

We were all tired, stressed, encapsulated in our own worlds and exhausted from the pressures of the day. Every one of us was enveloped within our inner cocoons. No one talked and we made no eye contact. The roar of the "C" train transported us uptown. We sped away from the pressures of our day, one collective mass of humanity, another workday in the big City, a herd of humanity longing to open their own front doors and enter the world of "home" where relaxation would be mixed with recollections of the day. We all anticipated slipping away and entering the world of relief, family, relative peace quiet.

Suddenly, the train came to an abrupt halt without warning between the 81st and 86th Street stations.

"Oh shit! What's going on?" At first, this was a reoccurring non-event for seasoned New York City "strap hangers." It was slightly startling but potentially very inconvenient. Then came the announcement, fortunately understandable.

"There is a medical emergency in the train ahead of us. We will remain stopped until this emergency is cleared. The first car of this train has entered the 86th Street station. Therefore, if you want to exit the train, please walk to the front car and you will be able to exit the train and you'll enter the 86th Street station and can leave the subway station," shouted the conductor.

Well, just about everyone, out of good sense and experience had decided to depart through the 86th Street station. New Yorkers are smart people, most of the time, that's why several hundred people walked forward, from car to car, toward the front car,

including me. When I reached the third car I had noticed that it was packed solid. Upon pushing my way up to the front of that car I realized that the logjam was due to the front door of the third car was locked!

Immediately, I worked my way back, through the crowd to the fifth car where the door conductor, who had made the announcement, could be found.

"Hey sir! The door at the front of the third car is locked!" I told him.

"Okay, let's go." he said.

Conductors have all the keys. That's a given.

Following closely behind the conductor, similar to what most of us do in vehicular traffic attempt to get right behind ambulances or emergency vehicles to beat everyone else. I weaved my way directly behind the conductor and passed through the mob and entered the third car still glued to the conductor's rear.

He inserted his key into the lock and opened the door. I was the first person through the portal. Those who had been in the first and second cars had been long gone. On to the second and out of the first car I entered the station and bolted up the stairs to the street into the open air leaving the chaotic scene behind me.

It was a cold blustery December day. I quickly wrapped my scarf around my neck, buttoned up my coat and put my gloves on. It was good to be outside and above the underworld, safely on the sidewalk.

"Hey! Whas uppa witch you? You hadda be the firs' one outta da train, man! Whas so special 'bout you man?" shouted a fellow passenger directly at me.

"Good for you guy. You got out, number one and aren't you somethin'?" yelled another.

Both comments rang through my ears as I was already buttoned up and off to my final destination, home, on foot. The shouts had confirmed exactly where I was, New York City!

"Well, thanks folks. Just to let you know, I'm the guy who got the conductor with the key to unlock the door so that we could get the hell out of there. That's why we're here and not down there! Merry Christmas!" I shouted.

"Hey, yeah! You too, sorry guy, Merry Christmas to you too!"

The other guy just walked away and disappeared into the crowd.

I was okay with the entire experience. It was just another day in the big City. I wouldn't trade it for all the tea in China.

“Going Postal”

“If it fits, it ships.” This mantra is brought to you by the U.S. Postal Dis-Service to promote its Priority Mail service. But, not all postal employees know that. Or, if they do, some of them just don’t “fit” the job, nasty critters! Here’s my mind-blowing story:

Recently, I have been using Priority Mail to send copies of my books and photographs to clients as my expression of appreciation as well as a means to promote Custom & Private New York Tours, Inc. The post office provides a standard envelope large enough to hold a book with very competitive fixed rates. If the package weights more than 13 ounces then the package must be handled “over the counter” in order for a postal clerk to “verify” that there are no dangerous liquids, radioactive materials, drugs, weapons, blood, alcohol, used “depends”, condoms, used or not, Q-tips, box cutters, razor blades or hand-grenades enclosed within the package. Surely it’s a Patriot Act requirement with a dose of bureaucratic abuse of power!

What I don’t understand is this: How will such a regulation prevent a terrorist from putting anything they want to in a mailbox? That’s like a bank putting up a sign that reads, “No guns or robbers, please!” Or a convenience store posting a notice, “Only unarmed robberies permitted!” Duh!

As a result of this regulation, rather than dropping my Priority Mail into mailboxes, I frequently have to wait in long slow moving lines and confront a clerk and answer the usual questions then wait for them to stamp the envelope with an official stamp indicating that this piece of mail has passed the muster of a

postal employee. Only then, does the article ship, maybe.

Normally, I can tolerate the slow moving lines and clerks, some who even do their jobs fairly well although, without a drop of enthusiasm, absent of any gesture of appreciation.

Recently, I went to four post offices, in a single day, to mail five priority envelopes. The first one had lines practically out the door; the second I shall expand on in a bit, the third also had endless lines and the fourth had enabled me to finally get the job done. Let's back up to case number two.

I was so happy when I entered the Columbus Circle branch of the U. S. Postal Dis-Service. There were no lines! Strange. Perhaps people had stopped using that branch for reasons that I was about to find out. So here's the equation: If a branch of the Postal Dis-Service has long lines then the service may be okay and if the lines are short than maybe the service sucks.

The clerk greeted me well enough. I responded in kind. I placed the five Priority Mail envelopes on the counter, all firmly closed, clearly addressed, proper postage affixed and the contents "fit" therefore; "it ships." Good to go! What could possibly go wrong?

She leaned down, beneath the counter and pulled out an 8 ½ x 11 white sheet of paper covered with an acetate sleeve. The acetate was well worn. Apparently this was not the first time she had snatched it from beneath the counter. It illustrated, in black ink, two Priority Mail envelopes; one was thick, stuffed, but sealed and the other was thin, also sealed. Along side

the illustration of the stuffed envelope it read "No" and along side the thin envelope it read "Yes."

"I don't understand. What does this mean?" I asked her.

She starred at me with a robotic numb expression and said nothing. I repeated myself.

"I don't understand. What does this mean?"

She continued to stare at me, speechless! She seemed to enjoy the power of her silence. This was her routine, her mission. To piss-off customers and get back at them, retribution for her assessment of her life, no doubt, as a miserable loser.

"It if it fits, it ships," I said.

"Are you going to answer my question? Or, are you just going to sit there and hold up that sheet?" I said.

By this time I was quite annoyed, an understatement. Then I let her have it.

"You're a waste! You intolerable, despicable and a rotten creep! You are here and overpaid to serve customers, not ply your arrogant and nasty stinking attitude. Who the hell do you think you are? I hope that you and the post office become things of the past and you get tossed on the street where you belong!"

Suddenly she shoved herself off her stool ran to the rear of the service area, presumably into the back office.

Not knowing whether or not there was a Postal Police Officer back there, not knowing whether she was having an affair with him, I decided to make tracks and get the hell out of there in a hurry taking my five priorities with me.

I could imagine her telling a Postal Police Officer that I had threatened her and the assumed officer may

have had the authority to cuff me, a show of machismo that would have surely impressed her and pay off dividends, in kind, for him.

I jumped into my waiting car and told the chauffeur to hit the gas and get us out of there.

Later that afternoon, our tour was completed, we pulled up at the Roosevelt Station Post Office on Third Avenue and that didn't work either, the lines were huge. The Rockefeller Station Post Office turned out to be the solution.

There were roving customer service postal workers who "worked" the lines at The Rockefeller Station Post Office providing polite assistance to customers who had questions about the services they were seeking. I asked one of them if there was a problem with my Priority envelopes as I showed them to her.

"No, why?" she inquired.

I told her the story and she shook her head in amazement.

I stepped up to the window, received polite and professional service and left the post office, accomplishing what I had tried to do throughout the day. The window clerk even fastened scotch tape upon the envelope seal to further insure "safe passage" to the designated recipients.

The Postal Service is filled with arrogant, angry and useless employees who abuse the public, think they have their jobs due to a birthright. A powerful union throws its weight around and a cushy "cradle to the grave" secure income mindset snarls the post office staff from providing good service.

I never heard an expression characterizing a person in a fit of anger as; "I'm going UPS!" or "I'm going

Federal Express?" No, it's "I'm going Postal." I know why and so do you.

Guess what postal "workers." Your golden "umbrella" is broken. That's because you and others just like you have been the best salesmen for Federal Express and UPS. You have driven hoards of people away from, what once was a good and valuable service. Now, it's a horror to go to the post office. You have become likened to the motor vehicle bureau, Social Security Administration, Taxi & Limousine Commission, City of New York Department of Consumer Affairs and all those government bureaucratic agencies that exist to do you a favor. They're not part of the private sector answering to stockholders and managers who report to higher ups and push hard to increase the bottom line. To you, the takers, the nasty flim-flamers who take your jobs for granted are biding your time and biting the hand that feeds you. Someday that hand will be out of reach and fade into the distant past. You needn't apply for a job at Fed-x or UPS. You're toast!

It is not impossible to turn this around, but it is quite unlikely that it will ever happen. I sincerely hope that the Postal Dis-Service will die and be replaced by a private company; perhaps UPS or Federal Express to take up the slack and hire people who value their jobs, work to increase customer satisfaction, improve service and generate profits for their stock holders. Is that really the American way? Oh yes, not all postal employees deserve this assessment. Quite a few are earning their money and we do salute them.

Congress! What's that? They don't have the backbone to close post offices in their districts or states. Way to go Senator. Each representative or Senator cares only

about their constituents and the entire country can go down the tubes and with that attitude it just might.

“Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night, stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” Perhaps this would be better:

“Neither kind nor efficient, but rude and crude, without haste with waste, a frown, blank stare and a pout are more aptly just what they’re all about.”

I can’t wait to see ‘em all on line applying for unemployment benefits and food stamps. If they get the benefits then good luck to them waiting for the U.S. Postal Dis-service to deliver their checks.

“Return to sender, address unknown.” Serves you right baby! Sad, so sad!

The Right Prescription at the Wrong Price

Every now and then we all experience unpleasant surprises on our bodies! It happens! From out of nowhere we may notice a rash, a bulge, a mysterious lump or a discoloration on our bodies. When that happens we all get that nauseous sense of dread knowing that, this time, something is wrong, maybe terribly wrong. Our worst fears “kick in” and we become anguished that this could be something bad, very bad. Oh no, not “The Big C” that’s our worst fear. Recently, I had acquired a “condition” of yellowing toenails and, as always, I ran to a doctor to provide proper care in order that my affliction will fade into the distant past. Over the years, I’ve learned it’s always best to take care of such things immediately and not push them under the rug.

I made an appointment with a dermatologist to address my newest mysterious, villainous uninvited invader. She, the doctor, was a “Board Certified Dermatologist.”

My first appearance at her impressive office, filled with all the latest issues of Vanity Fair, The Economist, Atlantic, The New Yorker and issues dated from the stone age The Dermatologists Review or other periodicals that are of no interest to patients. I would love to see a medical journal by the name of “Zitz Report” or “Mole Monthly” or “Pimple Monthly Press.” But nah, skin is serious stuff. We need good skin!!

After my examination had been completed she, my current dermatologist, had given me several tubes of topical gel to treat my toenail fungus. The medication was known as Xolegel containing an active ingredient,

ketoconazole, a Gel, 2% containing 2 grams of medication. The doctor wrote a prescription for me to obtain more of the same and her assistant called the local pharmacy to fill my to order what was needed.

After a few hours I received a phone call from the pharmacist telling me that the prescription would cost me \$500!

“What! Are you kidding? Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yep, that’s right. That’s why I called you. Do you want me to fill it?”

“I’ll get right back to you. Glad you called before you filled it.”

I got on the phone with the doctor and asked her if she was aware of the cost of the prescription. She claimed that she was not and that was pure 100% bullshit! Then, I asked her if there was anything else that she could suggest to remedy my ailment. She told me that there’s another form containing the active ingredient that I might want try instead. I asked her what the difference was and she told me the other form of medication was not gel based, rather it was cream based. She informed me that the gel would adhere to the effected area longer. That’s why she had prescribed that in the first place she had told me.

My question to her was: Couldn’t I apply the cream based formula on the effected area three times a day instead of twice to provide the same efficacy as the gel? She told me yes, absolutely. She called in the cream based formula to my pharmacy with a request to them that they call me before they filled it in order that I would be aware of the cost.

Shortly thereafter, I received a phone call from my pharmacist revealing that the cream based

prescription was free, paid in full by Medicare, up to 60 grams. The free sample of the gel that my doctor gave me at her office was 6 grams, a gesture of “kindness.”

Here’s the “real deal” and I have no doubt that you know what’s coming. Apparently, the pharmaceutical company that manufactures the gel, Aqua Pharmaceuticals of West Chester, PA 19380 must be providing those samples to dermatologists encouraging them, for exactly how much “consideration” aka \$\$\$ I do not know, to write prescriptions for their patients. Why? Because it is a business!

But, what kind of business is it? Is it a business that sells a product that is so terrific and superior that the “stupid public” their perspective, should fork over \$500 to get their healing miracle. Are they the only game in town? Are they aware that there is an alternative medication in the marketplace that would cost someone who is on Medicare, nothing? Do they care? Is it ethical? Is it legal? Where is our healthcare system that enables such scum to rip us off? I’ll tell you, as if you don’t know, they’re in Lobbyland living in Fatcity!

I was very pleased that Medicare does not subsidize such nonsense and I was driven to the free cream based product that probably costs Medicare practically nothing. And, why could, would, should a gel-based product cost \$500!

The most vicious and disappointing part of the entire episode is the doctor’s deliberate and intentional attempt to “screw” me through her participation in a scheme that is despicably dishonest! I’m her patient.

I'm her customer. She knew that her prescription would remove hundreds of dollars from my pocket and that didn't mean shit to her. She had apparently made her decision due to her benefit, whatever that might be, loyalty to the pharmaceutical company rather than her patient. At the very least shouldn't I have been advised of my choices? "The world is a whore!"

The health system in this country is a mess. These kinds of scams, and that's exactly what they are. If you have health insurance these abuses are built into the cost of your insurance premiums. If others who cannot afford insurance, those who pay nothing, their costs increase the cost of our health insurance. It's the drug companies, their marketing practices, your doctors and the pharmacists who all unite to pull your precious dollars out of all of our pockets via this well planned caper of what could be the greatest rip-off the American consumer has ever be victim of!

The Butterfly Cut

Have you ever driven back to “The City” from The Hamptons on a summer Sunday evening? If not, then you’re a most fortunate person, perhaps even very secure. I learned, in a short number of years, that trekking back and forth from Manhattan to the Hampton’s on weekends in the summer is a sadist’s lark because it’s a grueling way to spend your weekends. The hours in the traffic, the long waits at restaurants so that you can see and be seen, the same chatter week after week and the maddening cost to rent or own a home is just off the charts.

It’s shallow, immature and childish, right? Those who are impressed by your possessions are not worth impressing. Is that your brand? Is that who you are? Is that so important to you? If so, get off that trolley and figure out life. Get a real one buster. It’s playing it smart. Things don’t matter. If a woman is impressed by what you’re driving then you’re in for a bad ride buddy.

Perhaps, the longest caravan on earth is the weekend trek to and from New York City to The Hamptons every weekend from Memorial to Labor Day weekend. You could probably make it by car to Montreal faster! Most of these die-hard show-offs are renters of expensive homes or condos for the summer fun and sun season; those who slip into their Porsches, Lexus, Mercedes, BMW’s, Tesla’s and the other very showy brands aka “the exotics.” They ply their trek known as the LIE, The Long very long, Island Expressway, or Distressway to exit 70 or perhaps opt for the Northern or Southern State Parkway, “parking lots” a far better term to describe

those “motorways” and the experiences that they provide.

When you shut your motor off after a five-hour jaunt back to your Manhattan apartment and grasp a very tall drink to “chill out” then, the euphoric sense of relief you were seeking in The Glorious Hamptons may kick in as a distant blur. At least you were there! It’s like going to the gym. You feel great after you’ve left.

“I went to The Hamptons this weekend!”

Being seen by others who couldn’t care less if you were seen or not is the craziest game. It’s the “I don’t want to miss anything” syndrome. There’s the fear and panic that you may be seen in “The City” on a summer weekend and perceived by others that you’re a “looser.” What a bunch of shit that is! The losers are the ones that venture out there and the winners are those who remain in Manhattan. They have Manhattan all to themselves!

Years ago, on a Sunday evening, after a very long and stressful drive back to Manhattan with a lovely “lady friend” with who I had spent the weekend, in The Hamptons, agreed to enjoy what we had hoped would be a delightful dinner at Smith and Wollensky’s, an upscale steak and lobster restaurant, on 3rd Avenue in midtown. I’ve been there a number of times and the venue always had been terrific. The food, service and the standard steakhouse testosterone atmosphere topped off the setting.

We were starving! We hadn’t eaten since breakfast and skipped lunch because we didn’t want to eat the junk that’s sold along the highway, fast food “*crapola*”. Since we wanted to get back to “The City”

we stopped only for gas and bathrooms and we just kept moving along at a snail's pace until we pulled up at Smith and Wollensky's at 49th and 3rd.

The restaurant was extremely busy, as usual, like they were giving it away. After the customary and usual welcome we were seated and I ordered a bottle of red wine and a filet mignon, medium rare and a few sides. The wine was terrific and together with a warm welcome we fell into a state of relaxation and calm. We patiently waited for the arrival of our main attraction, a delicious steak with the perfect compliments.

Viola, the waiter arrived with our main course however something was very wrong! The filet had been butterfly cut, butterfly style. Butterfly cut means cutting the steak horizontally, rather than vertically in the kitchen it's broiled. This technique results in a steak that does not have a pink center but rather is prepared as medium to medium well done. The succulent juices and flavor are lost. That is not what we had ordered and if the chef was going to butterfly cut the steak, then he surely knew that it was impossible to prepare the steak medium rare. In addition, we should have been asked if we had wanted our steak butterfly cut. Even though we were going to share the filet it made no sense for the waiter to ask if we wanted the steak cut. The proper way to share a medium rare filet is to cut the meat in half, vertically, after it's broiled.

I told the waiter that this was not what I had ordered and I requested that he bring us another steak properly prepared. He went to get the "manager" and then the shit hit the fan.

"I ordered the filet medium rare and this clearly is not. The steak was butterfly cut in the kitchen and it's overcooked in accordance with our order. Please serve what was ordered and take this back!"

She told me that she would not replace the steak and that "is" what we had ordered!

"Look lady! I don't know what part of Podunk you're from or what your policy is but mine is that I get what I ordered. We will wait a reasonable period of time until we get what we ordered. If not, I will stand up and in an extremely loud voice, I shall tell all those who are here exactly what you're doing! I'm not kidding! Now, bring me what we ordered or the shit will assuredly hit the fan, got it?"

How stupid! What would have been the "BFD" to accommodate a customer with a most reasonable request? What would it have cost them? This was not Tony's Diner in the south Bronx! Even if it were, Tony would not have made that stupid mistake and if he had I would have gotten an apology and a medium rare filet!

Our table became encircled by a number of other staff members who were attempting to dial down my heightening anger and thwart my threat. They were trying to convince me to accept what they had put in front of us knowing, I'm sure, that it just wasn't going to work. My lady friend sat quietly and had expressed, to me in whispers, her amazement with the stupidity of the restaurant manager, who we had learned was on the job for about a week!

We continued to sip our wine and wait. The side dishes never arrived and neither did the steak. After waiting approximately twenty minutes it had become

apparent that the redo would never arrive. Therefore, I made good my threat.

I stood up, faced the center of the room and began my speech:

"May I please have your attention? I have not been served what we had ordered and we're been refused a replaced of an over-cooked filet mignon which they had stupidly butterfly cut. I requested a medium rare filet and they refused to rectify their mistake!"

Suddenly, a big guy, who worked for the restaurant grabbed my arm as if he was preparing to throw me out of the restaurant.

"Get your fucking hands off me! I'll have you arrested for assault you stupid fucking gorilla! Don't fuck with me, I'll have a cop put you in a cage until I come to rescue you, you fat piece of shit! You don't know who the fuck you're dealing with!"

He removed his grip on my arm and told me that he was going to call the cops.

"Call 'em you putz! You're the one they're going to arrest!" I shouted at him at the top of my lungs.

The room was totally silent. People in the restaurant were whispering about the incident one that certainly did not enhance the reputation of this "first class joint."

The manager and her war party departed from the room and most likely were planning their next move. We finished the bottle, stood up and walked out without paying. I left a twenty-dollar bill for the waiter.

The following day I called the restaurant's main office, and I explained the incident to an officer of the company who was in charge of "customer service."

After I had explained the entire incident she graciously offered to “buy me a drink” the next time I dined at one of their restaurants.

“That’s it?” I replied.

“Well sir, what do you expect?” she said.

“I can see that your management is clueless to say the least. You can be sure that every person I meet who has ever been to any of your restaurants or plans to go will hear about my experience. I have never experienced anything so incredibly stupid in a fine New York City restaurant. Have the free drink on me and take the glass when you’re done and stick it where the sun don’t shine!”

Stupidity is no stranger to New York City, it happens. I still, to this day, nearly twenty years since that incident find it incredibly hard to believe.

Looking for a great steak in New York City, Keen’s at 72 West 36th Street. That’s the place to go! Bon appetite! Teddy Roosevelt and Albert Einstein ate there and they were pretty smart. Einstein would have caused a thermal nuclear reaction and T.R. would have had a regiment of Rough Riders charge through the place! “Sound the charge!!”

Outa Sight and Outa Mind

She was one of my best customers, a wheel-chaired woman, legally blind and suffering from multiple sclerosis. Her name, Flo Wolf and she was dumb like a fox. This fortyish, thin, longhaired woman had an attractive face, a very offbeat sense of humor, a bit raunchy, but most of all she was a fantastic photographer. In a sense, seeing more than those with perfect vision. Yes, she was a photographer extraordinaire!

I was always glad to see Flo as she entered my flagship one-hour photo store on West 23rd Street back in the 1990's via a non-motorized wheel chair. We always laughed when I welcomed her, "See me when your life is on a roll!"

I used to tell her that, evoking laughter. She had a terrific sense of humor and was loved in our store and I was her most ardent fan.

Clicks, the largest one-hour photo store in the City, offered her everything that she had wanted. From Black & White one-hour photo services, the only service of the kind in the City, to specialty items, posters, tee-shirts, puzzles, laser copies and Photostats. She had become a "regular" always getting the "red carpet" treatment, excessive discounts and the most attentive service on the planet. She was treated like a queen and all my employees knew she was truly a special lady. At times she was a bit of a pain in the ass but who could blame her, poor gal.

When I launched New York City's only one-hour black and white service I had asked her if I could use

approximately fifteen of her black and white photos for promotional purposes. She had literally thousands of photographs that she had taken over the years on the streets of "The City." They were stored in her little apartment, a residence for the blind just a block from Clicks. I wanted to create a window display showing her work, black & white photographs depicting people working, playing, talking, walking and just engaging each other in "The City" each consisting of at least one black and one white person in every photograph. She agreed to participate and I was invited to go to her apartment to make my selections. Together we sorted through mountains of 8 x 10 black and white photographs searching for the best interracial shots. We unearthed dozens of suitable images and narrowed them down to about fifteen. I brought them back to Clicks and one of my printers copied and enlarged them. We produced an amusing and effective window display with the headline "New York is a Black & White Town." She was paid \$300 for her contribution, the price that she had requested. The new black & white one-hour service was a smashing success and her contribution was a big part of it. We both looked back on the experience as a wonderful joint venture and we continued to enjoy our wonderful relationship.

Flo continued to have her photographs exhibited all over the City with rave reviews. She saw things that most people never saw. She had an incredible creative twist. She combined objects in her photographs, expressing her sentiments through her lens and conceived of views and angles that departed from the ordinary. She was truly a genius and

spending time with her was always fun and exciting. What an inspiration!

On one subsequent occasion she came to Clicks to ask a favor of me. She had requested that I provide a contribution to help her fund the rental of a helicopter for an hour to photograph The Flatiron Building. She had conceived of a shot from above, approximately 700 feet above ground, to be taken from above the front of the building at about 20 degrees forward in order to capture the building with both sides. There is virtually no front of the building because it's triangular.

It was brilliant. To our knowledge this had never been done before and I wanted to participate. I offered to pay for the entire project and told her that I wanted to come along.

The day of the shoot we met at Clicks and together with her wheel chair we took two buses to The Hudson River Heliport. We boarded the chartered 'chopper, a tiny two-seater with a plastic bubble and no doors. She sat in the middle next to the pilot and the two of us were belted on the windowless edge of the seat. It was a very tight squeeze and I was practically hanging out of the whirlybird. My seat belt gave me the courage. This is definitely not for everyone!

Liftoff! We literally had a bird's eye view of "The City." With the noise and shakes of the 'chopper we topped The Empire State Building, The Pan Am Building, The Chrysler, Rockefeller Center and Midtown. We flew over Queens taking in spectacular views of Manhattan. Wow! It was truly phenomenal. Our pilot vectored the 'chopper in the direction of "The

Flatiron” and we arrived at the intended spot for the shoot.

One of Flo’s hands was atrophied and although she was able to steady her camera with her right hand she was unable to press the shutter with the left. On her command, I pressed the shutter button for her repeatedly. After her first roll of film had been taken she switched cameras and we completed the roll in her other camera. Then, I pointed my camera, took several shots and we returned to the heliport.

We got back to Clicks the same way, a long laborious trip. Our film was promptly developed and printed, with much anticipation. To my surprise, she had failed to capture the image that had she pined for, one showing both sides of the building in symmetry. But, I had gotten the shot myself. She was extremely disappointed that I clinched the shot and not she. I suspected that she would have been happier if neither of us succeeded. She was exceptionally distraught and I felt badly for her. How nice it would have been had she captured the image that she had conceived of. I suggested that we share the image and agree to an arrangement that would govern the “ownership” of the image.

She emphasized that it was her idea and therefore she had ownership rights. It was a bit shocking, selfish and overly aggressive. Sure, it was her idea but I had captured the image and paid for the ‘chopper. She had suggested that we register the image in Washington, D. C. and name the image “Flatiron ‘chopper 1” and that we further agree that if either of us make any money through the sale of the image then we would split it down the middle. I agreed. I

filled out the application for the registration that would provide stiff legal protection if someone would attempt to use it for sale or publication providing compensation for us both. She had all the forms with her! Together with my check for \$25 I send the application to Washington, D. C.

Several months later the documents were received and I called her. I put a copy of them in her hands and we co-owned the image. There was no intention, on my part, to make money off of this, as I was not in the business of selling my images. My business was developing and printing my customer's images.

Sometime shortly thereafter, I used the Flatiron image to feature a poster promotion. The promotion offered 20 x 30 inch color posters from your favorite negative, print or transparency at a reduced price. Customers were drawn to the Flatiron image and asked if they could buy a copy. I did not offer the image for sale. It was merely an attention getter and it helped promote my poster service. That was it.

Several weeks after the Flatiron poster had been on display at Clicks I received a letter, at home, from a law firm that was unknown to me. However, it was located on Madison Avenue and had a very prestigious address. I didn't have a clue as to what I should expect but I smelled trouble. Unsolicited letters from lawyers seldom bring happiness or good news especially if the envelope appears not to be part of a mass marketing mailing.

In effect, the letter "put me on notice" that I was in violation of a verbal agreement between Flo Wolf and me, "to wit" that I had used the image to display a service at Clicks, thereby, using it as a "tool, device

and/or asset” for “unjust enrichment.” Although I was not selling the image, the letter went on, that essentially, I was using the image, “co-owned by the parties” to make money and therefore, I was in violation of our verbal agreement. Flo was digging for money, pure and simple.

The lawyer’s letter put me on further notice that I was liable, under the law, for up to \$40,000 in damages. She knew that I had money, at the time, and I was in her line of fire.

Several days later I received another envelope in the mail, this time bearing her return address on the face of the envelope. My name and address were scrawled on the envelope, in a handwriting that could only have been written by a young child or an adult with motor movement challenges. Within, was her check for \$350 reimbursing me for the full cost of the helicopter rental fee.

Apparently, her lawyer had suggested that she reimburse me thereby removing my “consideration” in the project and nullifying any counter claim that I might have perused against her.

That was a cheap ploy engineered by a lawyer designed to mislead her into thinking that would enhance her position, if she had decided to take me to court. In the meantime, it’s “billable hours” for the lawyer. Knowing what she was attempting to accomplish I ripped the check into pieces. That took care of everything except two matters of significance. First, this entire episode resulted in the destruction of what had been a very long mutually beneficial relationship. This had caused me considerable anguish and disappointment.

Secondly, I banned her from entering my stores ever again.

There is no happy ending here. What amazes me is this:

Many people project good and valuable intentions that become exposed as purely money driven; “artists” are no exception. Never mind the friendship, the relationship and the benefit that two people bring to the table for each a table built other over a period of many years. It all came down to her trashing all of that to go for the bucks. Basically, she accepted my offer to pay for the entire project, sought to devise a way to obtain full ownership of the image, attempted to reap a pile of money due to her greed driven by her attorney’s action, fueled by her motives, while knowing that it would almost assuredly destroy our relationship. She bit the hand that fed her and it exposed her as the fraud she was. was devastated!

“Oh, Cliff! Thank you so much for paying for the helicopter, it’s so nice of you.”

Miss Wolf was definitely a fox!

Apparently, the value of our relationship was not as important to her as it had been to me. For me there was absolutely not one cent of financial gain in the equation, for me, I wasn’t interested in that and I fortunately was not in dire straights. If she honestly had believed that I was violating our agreement then why didn’t she just tell me and discuss it? We all know the answer. It wouldn’t have created a possibility of the pile of dollars that she had hoped for I have learned to forgive her and the entire episode saddens me to this day. “Good lessons don’t come cheap!

Eight Strokes of Luck

The Stage is Set

Loss of hope and self-pity were never part of what I had experienced between November 2006 and February 2007 having returned from Florida about six months before. Aline and I had returned to New York City from a fifteen-month stint in Miami, Florida because I had been advised to flee “The City” and “get out of town” by the bankruptcy attorney that I had hired to put my business, Clicks, through Chapter 11, due to the sudden death of the one-hour photo industry. I had accepted the reality that continuing to attempt to save the operation was just not going to succeed.

I had been in the one-hour photo business in Manhattan for many years and together with my digital imaging business I was advised that bankruptcy was the best way to put a dying business to rest. Sudden changes in technology had altered the way people captured images. Film had become a dinosaur and digital photography was the new rage. I had expected that the leap to excellent digital quality would take years and years and I was painfully wrong. The use of film to capture images fell like a rock!

Knowing that “the next big thing” was here, I had prepared myself and I was resigned that my photo labs, laden with huge monthly equipment lease payments, enormous rents and various other fixed obligations put the writing on the wall that what lay ahead was nothing less than a “the bitter end.” A

business that I had built over nearly a lifetime was shattering and my only choice was to orchestrate the best strategy that we could possibly devise.

All things come to an end. I followed my lawyer's advice. He had suggested that I sell my condo on West 57th Street and buy a place in Florida and register the "Homestead Act" on the property. That law enabled property owners to prevent a creditor from putting a lien on the property if you owed them money. Only the mortgage company or the local real estate tax authorities could do so and potentially put the property into foreclosure. I agreed with the concept but I insisted that the property on West 57th Street be sold to Aline thereby she would own the new home in Florida putting another "speed bump" in front of the creditors. The lawyer didn't like the idea because it was a new marriage. I trusted her and it was the right move.

We packed our bags, "ran" down to Miami anticipating that we would found a way to carve out our lives anew, or so we had thought.

Miami was not the solution for the future, but it was part of the solution that enabled us to dispose of the ruins of the past. My attorney worked his way through the Chapter 11, for the business, and finally, according to our plan, he got all of the players lined up. It was a brilliant and fascinating experience for me due to a strategy that my attorney and I formulated that turned the tide. It was a strategy that had the creditors pleading with us to execute our scenario one that would provide them with significant funds to settle the debt. We took control and prevailed.

While we were in Florida I sold health insurance, drove around in a leased Mercedes convertible and Aline made more money than I working for Nordstrom's selling high-end shoes for woman for commission.

Aline and I made all the necessary arrangements to return to New York City and we were ecstatic with the prospect of returning back "home." The only necessary arrangement to be done was to for us to find a way to earn a good living. We had no means of support when the wheels hit the runway in New York. How the hell were we were going to "make it." Nearly sixty years of age, my industry was dead and my head was spinning around in circles. What a disaster!

We made our new home in a small rental apartment on West 60th Street. Only the rent was large. Almost immediately upon our arrival, Aline got a job in retail sales, commission only. I started looking for a business one that we could afford, one that we could operate together and build a future. All the businesses we had found seemed attractive but ultimately they all had a fatal flaw. I was in denial. Why would someone sell a good business, one without a fatal flaw? People lie and omit. Our research proved this time and time again. "I'm selling due to family illness" or "I want to retire" or "I have other obligations or opportunities." It was all bullshit, time after time.

The final straw was the rejection of our application to purchase a gourmet coffee shop off Fifth Avenue on 19th Street.

Stroke of Luck #1

One twenty feet off the corner of Fifth Avenue and 19th Street was a coffee shop, News Bar, as it was called that provided excellent coffee, salads and related food varieties, bagels, muffins, soups and the like. It was well furnished, small but was well located and seemed to be a profitable operation. We sat down with the owner who had advertised that it was for sale and we took an interest. It had the potential for us to earn a good living but it would have been a real grind. Long hours for the two of us, nickel and dime transactions and all the problems that come with a retail service business can drive you up a wall!

The Coop Board of the building where the coffee shop had been located sent us packing. **Our application had been rejected.** For us, purchasing that business was now completely out of the question. We were devastated. I had invested months perusing this deal, working in the shop for weeks, learning the business and it was crushed. We were back in the abyss, terribly frightened and dismayed.

I stopped looking for a business and accepted an opportunity to sell mortgages in New Jersey working for a guy who was one hell of a terrific salesman and team builder. Jimmy showed me the ropes and trained me very well. I made some money with him until he disappointed Aline and me when we had sought his help for us to obtain a mortgage to purchase a condo in Manhattan. We had our backs to the wall, facing a rejection from the bank and a threat that the seller was prepared to retain our deposit if we had failed to obtain the mortgage even though that was not permissible according to the terms of

our contract! I had tried to reach Jimmy while he had gone fishing in Montana with his son. My calls went unanswered. Apparently, he didn't give a shit. Our real estate agent put me in touch with another mortgage broker who ultimately succeeded in getting us the mortgage and he saved us from losing our \$81,000 down payment.

We moved into the condo in August of 2006, a delightful little place on Central Park West. It was a terrific location and we were excited about living on fabled, Central Park West, even though it's not The San Remo it's a good building with a diverse bunch!

The condo purchase had dried up nearly all of our money but fortunately Aline was doing well in retail sales. I was out trying to figure out how to jump-start a new career. We look back now on our decision to purchase the condo as a real act of stupidity or just crazy because we really could have run out of money, literally. Mortgages were easy to get in those days and we knew that one way or another together we'd make it work. You can chalk that up to luck, pure and simple.

Stroke of Luck #2

I had accepted a job with the mortgage broker who succeeded for us. He sat me in front of a computer, put in a disc with the tutorial of how to use his software. I was spinning in circles and just couldn't embrace it nor did I understand how it worked. Alan had a short fuse and I considered him to be abusive and I didn't enjoy taking any shit from him.

After approximately six weeks, working for Alan, I showed up at the office one morning and it had been shut down, closed! There was just one secretary there to answer the phone; Alan was nowhere to be found. I called him several times after week and he didn't answer. It took about three weeks before I found out what the hell had happened. Alan surfaced and called me. He had revealed that **his partner was under investigation** for some white-collar crime. It was illegal kickbacks to obtain legal work and, as a result, their license to sell mortgages had been pulled by The State of New York. Kickbacks! That's Business 101, duh! The politicians up in Albany would never do that ☺ It's Political Science 101 boys and girls!

Alan had promised to provide me with one-third of his commission but he never came through! I took him to small claims court just to break his balls knowing that since I didn't have a New York State mortgage license the judge would never go along with my demand. This type of arrangement, "under the table" goes on all the time. It turned out that after our condo purchase this creep was tossed out of business by state authorities due his partners numerous kickback schemes. One day while walking down Columbus Avenue I saw him sitting outside a restaurant at a table with a couple of his friends and as I passed by, in a loud voice, I said to him, "How are you enjoying the climb?" The world is filled with creeps.

I was nowhere. Where do I go from here? The money that was going to be used to purchase a business had been spent on the condo's down payment. At least Aline was bringing in nearly enough money to keep

us going, that is, until the money that remained ran out.

Stroke of Luck #3

Shortly after my mortgage career came to a sudden death, Aline injured her foot. It didn't seem like luck at the time, the furthest thing from it! She had slipped on the crosstown bus on her way home from work. She hobbled home knowing that there was some damage but she did not suspect that it had been a break. I was out with a friend when her call came as she was hobbling home on one foot. She was devastated, not only because of the injury itself, but because she knew that she wouldn't be able to work and our only source of income, at the time, was about to come to a halt.

This drove her into a terrible state of depression. She became fearful that we would run out of money, default on the mortgage and be out in the street, plunged into poverty. She was a wreck and I didn't know what to do. I needed an idea. Aline found one but I didn't like it one bit.

Stroke of Luck #4

"Why don't you drive a black car? Get your chauffeur's license and look for a driving job. You never know what can come from that. At least, you'll bring in some money. Even if it's \$125 a day! At the end of every month it will pay some bills. "It's better than sitting around the house doing nothing!"

She was right. I had nothing better to do at the time and I couldn't think of a good reason why I shouldn't become a "wheel turner." It would be honest work and provide something for us and give me time to think and clear my head.

The day after Aline's accident I went to The Taxi & Limousine Commission in Long Island City, a part of Queens, and I began the arduous process of getting my TLC (Taxi & Limousine Commission) chauffeur's license. The process entailed changing my New York State Department of Motor Vehicle license to Class E, chauffeur, getting a copy of my Social Security card which I hadn't seen in thirty years, taking a safe driving course peeing in a cup for drug testing, getting fingerprinted, watching a twenty minute film about how to recognize prostitutes to avoid picking them up, filling out a myriad of forms, paying the fees and finally, within about a month, I finally received my coveted TLC license.

After a few weeks walking around Long Island City, where nearly all of the black car companies are located, I selected the best company I could find, or so I thought, and I became a black car driver, a certified wheel turner.

My day began at 4:30 AM six days a week; two subway trains got me to Queens and then a six block walk through the 'hood before sunrise. I reported to the company garage or "base" as they are called in the trade. I was provided with a Lincoln Town Car or an SUV, Suburban or Escalade and off I went to wait at JFK or The Marriott Marquis, their biggest account. I spent the next ten to twelve hours driving people back and forth to airports, New York hotels, meetings

and waiting for the next “job.” I parked in Manhattan and waited endlessly for the next job to drive into the persistent and insane traffic, running into airport terminals, holding signs bearing my passenger’s name, schlepping luggage in and out of car trunks and at day’s end I returned to the base and then the six block walk, two subway trains back home and \$100 to \$125 richer, including tips. Whoopee! This was my “bill of fare” for four long, tiring, cold and frustrating months.

One icy morning in January 2007 I was assigned to meet four big and tall people at 6AM at a midtown hotel with their luggage and transfer them to Newark Airport. The vehicle was overloaded with luggage too. The weight was far too much for a Lincoln Town car to handle. The luggage was blocking my view of the front seat passenger and my sightline out the right side window. There was no other place where we could have put that piece.

My passengers had told me that they had requested a van. Knowing that the dispatcher had willfully decided to assign the job to me, and as a result, he put us all in danger had me seething mad! It was apparent that this “best” company didn’t give a shit about my safety or the safety of their clients. Again, it was all about the money.

Stroke of Luck #5

While driving down the New Jersey Turnpike in the overloaded Lincoln Town Car, the left rear tire “blew out” and the car suddenly started to oscillate. The oscillation continued and intensified. The pavement

was wet and icy. Eighteen-wheelers and coach buses were whizzing past us dousing the windshield with bursts of water making it extremely difficult for me to see the road ahead and, as if that wasn't bad enough, the worn out wiper blades made a bad situation worse. There was no "shoulder" off the right side traffic lane. We were on the Eastern Spur of the New Jersey Turnpike, an elevated portion of the roadway with not an inch of space to get out of a traffic lane. Even if there were shoulders it would have been impossible for me to see them due to the luggage wedged to my right. I turned on the safety flashers immediately and gently reduced our speed and within a mile or so I was able to get the car off the traffic lane onto a patch of grass. The shredded tire had made it extremely difficult for me to control the vehicle off the pavement. I had five lives in my hands, literally.

I placed a call to a Newark van service told the dispatcher exactly where we were and what had happened and they sent a vehicle. It arrived quite promptly and my passengers were transferred with their luggage and off to Newark airport. These "beauties" failed to tip me for merely saving their lives and putting mine at risk to get them to the airport! The use of the wrong vehicle was not my doing! I wished them a safe trip, bit my lip and called the turnpike road service to change my tire. Then I headed directly back to the base.

My employer had refused to reimburse me \$35, the cost of the New Jersey Turnpike road service. My boss told me that I should have changed the tire myself! I replied that at nearly sixty years of age, in a freezing

rainstorm, it was not my responsibility to do so and that he should “kiss my ass.” I had rescued those creeps due to a situation the dispatcher had created. I had no doubt that his thinking was in accordance with his company’s culture or rather lack of it. Incredible!

I never returned to the “base” although I did get my \$35 back that day because I had threatened to “blow the whistle” on them regarding their illegal business practices. That company and many others in the limo business in New York City, charge their clients for tips that are never given to the chauffeurs. The customers think the tips are forwarded to the chauffeurs and most often they are not. That’s a wide spread practice in that industry and the TLC knows it. The chauffeurs get screwed and they are enriching themselves off the backs of hardworking men and woman and the city turns a blind eye. Why? Kickbacks! They’re on the business owner’s side, not the chauffeur’s. Blowing the whistle would have had less effect then blowing my nose.

Subsequently, they had deducted the cost of car washes from my paycheck and they withheld my security deposit of \$250 for their Motorola hand-held radiophone for six weeks even though when I had made my departure I had returned their radiophone on the spot. Bastards!

Stroke of Luck #6

I found another company and they were slightly better. Again, I had a near death experience. On one occasion I had met my customers on East 61st Street.

While putting their luggage into the trunk of the car I was struck in the back of the head and my ankle by a couple of steel beams that fell as a sidewalk scaffold was being dismantled. I was thrown, face down, onto the street. Fortunately, I was okay although my ankle became very swollen and I was in a lot of pain. That didn't prevent me from driving my customers, an elderly couple, to JFK.

They knew exactly what had happened to me and they didn't give a shit. Tip? Zero! I sued the scaffold company and got a few bucks and I turned out to be okay.

I continued to drive for company number two until I had decided that it was time to move on. Move on to what? I didn't have a clue. This driving thing was going nowhere but twice it had almost taken me straight to my grave. Had that happened I wondered if they would have provided their limos for my funeral *pro bono*. Nah.

"Friday is going to be my last day." I told Aline.

"This is not going anywhere. I've got to look for something else."

I knew that I'd find something because I've always found opportunities then I had a positive attitude. I knew this time would be different and much more challenging. There was no money left for us to buy a business. My industry, the photofinishing business, had morphed into oblivion, yeah, yeah, yeah. Everyone tells you, "you'll be fine!" But until it is, it's all words, just words. It was a long and lonely road and the end was nowhere in sight.

Aline agreed that moving on was a good idea. She was extremely supportive. Her advice and wisdom were

good and valuable. All the demons and fears were still nested in our guts, as we were plunging deeper a “zero sum game” meaning money near zero. An uncertain future lay ahead of us without prospects of any kind in view. I had heard that K Mart was seeking security guards for \$9 per hour! That’s an idea, eh?

Friday, my last day driving, was a day away. I felt that the entire experience was nearly a complete waste. Perhaps if I had spent the time looking for other options instead, perhaps I’d have found something worthwhile. At least Aline was back to work and I would become available once again to pursue other opportunities.

Stroke of Luck #7

The night before my last day of driving, I received a phone call from the dispatcher. He offered me a “job” for a mother and child, a ten-year-old boy named Matthew. My job was to provide a three-hour tour of Manhattan, something that I had never done before.

I was very excited about it. I knew the City quite well and was confident that I could express well for a ten year old who was about to tour New York City for the first time. I searched for ideas and sites to visit that would be of interest to him. My enthusiasm was building and I was looking forward to this experience enthusiastically, my last driving job was a tour. Little did I know?

We met at The Double Tree Hotel in Times Square at 10 AM. I found them waiting for me in front of the hotel and we greeted with smiles and anticipation. I remember the moment as if it was yesterday.

Matthew gladly accepted my offer to sit in the front seat. He was “bright eyed and bushy tailed” full of energy and enthusiasm. His mother was seated behind him and it was apparent that she was excited for him too. It was all good.

The tour turned out to be extended to eight hours! We all had a lot of fun, went for a ride on the subway, I drove them through Central Park, visited Grand Central Terminal, Dylan’s Candy Bar and much more. Matt’s mother bought him a toy at F.A.O. Schwarz and I clearly remember him showing me the toy. He told me that he was going to sell it when he grew up because by then it would be worth a lot of money. I remarked, “no, don’t sell it. Keep it as a memento of this wonderful day that your mother provided for you.”

I wish I had the same toy today too as an *aide-mémoire* of what turned out to be my very first tour.

Stroke of Luck #8

The following evening Aline and I had dinner with my son David and his wife, Melissa. I told them about the tour that I had conducted the day before and how much fun it had been for me.

He remarked:

“Dad, don’t you get it?”

“Don’t I get what?”

“Get your sightseeing license, create a brand, build a website, dig in and learn “the City” as if you built it yourself, design brochures, visit hotels and run with the ball!”

The following morning, with application papers and documents in hand, I went down to the City of New York Department of Consumer Affairs and applied for my Sightseeing Guide license. As part of the application process there is a 150-question exam that I hadn't even been aware of. The clerk told me that I would need to study because it was difficult. I took it anyway and succeeded to score so well that I earned a star along side my name on the New York City website, www.nyc.gov. The "City" grants stars for those who have achieved excellent scores. I walked out of 42 Broadway with a fervent sense of hope and determination. I was finally going to go back into business. Custom & Private New York Tours, Inc. was about to be born.

To summarize: If our application to purchase a gourmet coffee shop had been approved, if Aline hadn't broken her foot, if Aline had not suggested that I drive, if I didn't steer out of a possible fatal accident that caused me to work for another company whose dispatcher called me on the night before I was due to quit, that he chose me out of 60 chauffeurs, that the client didn't call a tour company but rather a limo company and that company on the day before I was due to quit, if the scaffold killed or injured me, if my last driving "job" had not been for a tour, the only tour driving "job" after a grueling four months was offered to me and if my son David hadn't put the idea of starting my own tour business on the table then I would not have found this wonderful way out of my career troubles and the joy of earning a good living for the Aline and I.

What's the moral of the story?

As Woody Allan has said, "95% of life is showing up." Get out there, try something, look for opportunities, listen to others with an open mind, don't feel sorry for yourself, don't reject a job that is far below your prior station in your career, never give up, be high-spirited, have an open mind, and find new ways to apply your talent, experience and abilities and give it all you've got. "Never surrender, never give up!"

Aline and I operate this tour business together. She too has acquired her sightseeing license and provides tours mainly in French and at times in English too. Unlike many others in life, for us it's not "all about the money." It's about passion, a love of New York City and a fervent desire to provide the most fun, memorable and informative tour experiences, targeting our client's interests that we can for all of our guests. No, it's not a job; it's a joy not only for us but also for all the licensed guides who are on our spectacular team.

In over ten years we have, together with our "partners" who speak over nine languages, have provided over 3,400 private tours, one at a time, each special and uniquely targeting the wishes of our clients.

Oh yes, and finally, you do need a little luck in life, but, you must get out there. When you find your bliss give it your heart, body, soul and sweat. Life! It's the best tour I've ever had.

“Life On a Roll” (s) Royce

“If I had a Rolls Royce, I’d never get it washed. I’d ride around attracting lots of attention because everybody would be so amused by the sight of a filthy grubby Rolls Royce dripping with mud and bird splatter. They would think that I must be so incredibly rich because I didn’t care if that \$30,000 (back in the 1960’s) beauty was rotting from acid rain and *schmutz!*”

At the age of thirteen I understood and appreciated my father’s Rolls Royce fantasy as stated above. To me it was classic dad. My father’s statement was so typical of him. He, my mentor, looked at life in so many obtuse ways, always drawing attention to himself through words, amusing stories, obtuse behavior, clever ways of solving problems, wit and deeds but never with cars, clothes, watches and material things.

He was not a materialistic guy, not a “clothes horse” never wore a watch or any jewelry except his wedding band. He had a collection of vintage shirts and slacks from the mid-forties and he wore them to death. He was not a “show-off guy” nor was he cheap. All the cars he bought had the least amount of chrome, the smallest hubcaps with black tires even when whitewalls were in vogue. His Buicks came with three portholes, not four and never with that optional two-tone paint job. He never owned a Roadmaster, Oldsmobile 98 or even a Super 88 or Pontiac Bonneville. For him, it was Catalina, bottom of the line or a Dynamic 88 Olds, ugly, flat vinyl seats, no soft cushion seating for us. Leather seats were out of the question. His choice was always manual roll up

and down windows and an AM radio without push button pre-set stations forcing us to dial to the number or near it to hit our favorite stations. His wheels always came with a heater because that was “standard equipment.” I do believe, at the time, he just couldn’t afford better but, if he wanted it, he’d have found a way to spring for it. It was about him, just not important a “who cares” attitude. He didn’t care what the neighbors thought, he rose above that crap, and it just never bothered him, secure as an anchor.

During my “middle ages” the years I had spent in between my two marriages, I drove Saab convertibles. It was the perfect car for me, sporty, somewhat impressive but not a “screamer” as in “look at me” and topless. Those Saabs were perfect for a single guy passing through a “midlife crisis” searching for the meaning of life ☺

On a Sunday morning, back in the mid-nineties I was flipping through The Sunday New York Times auto classified ads and spotted a used Rolls-Royce Corniche II convertible. It was “triple” black, meaning top, paint and leather, four years old with merely 11,000 miles and offered by the original owner. The ad featured the car as *concours*, as in pristine condition.

It was gorgeous beyond belief. There she stood on the showroom of Manhattan Motorcars on 11th Avenue and 27th Street. She was a gleaming masterpiece of classic English design, craftsmanship and elegance. The leather was mint, like butter and the wood, burled walnut, highly polished and impeccably matched and seamed. The carpets were plush, soft

and thick. Truly, it was a chariot of perfection, fit for a King, Sheik, Sultan, Squire, *mensh* or just a guy looking for a bit of fun and frolic.

This car was built to love. It came with two steering wheels; the standard factory ebony and a Nardi wooden racing wheel with the Rolls Royce emblem embossed into the hub of the steering wheel. One wheel, of course, was stored in the trunk. You didn't think that both wheels were in play at the same time, eh?

The salesman offered me the opportunity for a test drive. Seated behind the wheel of the black beauty and floating up 10th Avenue gave me a sense of exuberance, euphoria and complete satisfaction. Although she drove somewhat like a 1955 Buick Roadmaster, I knew that she had to be mine. I fell in love. Crazy! Isn't it?

All those voices, from the past, were in my head chiming in and speaking to me:

"What do you need it for?" "Go for it!" "Think of the fun you'll have!" "You've earned it." "You deserve it!" "You only live once!" "You can always get rid of it!"

By the end of the week we were one, a couple. I drove her home into the underground garage at 322 West 57th Street, my home. She was assigned a spot in the back of the garage, never to be moved by an attendant. She wore her black cape from head to toe and was parked along side my Saab. I knew we were destined to have a brief but purposeful life together just until I got this bit of flamboyant craziness out of my midlife crisis adolescent system.

The owner of a major catering hall located on the north shore of Long Island was her previous keeper.

He drove a short distance to work and kept her parked directly in front of his catering hall to impress passers by luring them as new clients. I never had any intention of doing the same in front of one of my one-hour photo stores adorned with a yellow sign; "Your rolls (of film) support my Rolls!" That would not have been good. It wouldn't have been smart! Eh?

The first order of business was to get vanity plates, custom license plates providing an expression, a catchy phrase to attract even more attention and generate more fun. After racking my brain I finally came up with an idea: I applied for and received: 4GTABTIT (Fuggetaboutit) I received lots of waives, high 5's, smiles, laughter, toots and honks! It was fun, just tons of fun.

The next step was to pick up a jar of Grey Poupon mustard, a needed *accouterment* for the glove compartment. I had so much fun blithely holding up that little yellow jar with my nose pointed high within sight of adjacent drivers and others aboard watching them howl at my gesture and the comment as I slowly turned my head in their direction and intoned:

"Grey Poupon?"

That was fun, time and again. Surely, you recall that commercial.

Then the *coup*! The Rolls needed a purpose. She was not just going to wait in the garage with the black veil upon her. She needed a life and therefore, I found a purpose for her.

I hired a chauffeur to drive me around on weekend evenings to watering holes, restaurants and clubs throughout Manhattan. Places such as, Windows of the World, The King Cole Bar at The St. Regis, The

Peninsula, Decade, One if by Land two if by Sea, 230 Fifth, the rooftop bar, Gotham Bar & Grill, Union Square Café, The Rainbow Room, Tribeca Bar & Grill, Keen's Steakhouse, etc. etc. The gig always started the same way.

My chauffeur brought my thermos filled with Absolut vodka; Tito's hadn't been invented yet. Plenty of plastic drinking glasses, napkins, a few mixers, ice and some snack foods were on board too. My 6'3" chauffeur; nicely coiffed and "clean cut" wore a black suit, black tie, white shirt and white cotton gloves. He was smartly capped with the standard chauffeur hat that complimented his first class appearance. Upon his arrival at the garage he removed the cover from the black beauty, dusted her off with a microfiber duster, applied the vacuum to the plush carpets added a bit of floral spray, not too much, providing the proper fragrance and we were off.

On one particular occasion, I had connected with a high school sweetheart, a woman that I had not seen nor heard from for over thirty years. Apparently she had gotten married, quite young, to an "older man" who was in his late twenties at that time. She had told me, way back then, that a more mature man who had embarked on a successful business career had lured her into marriage. Back then, after college, I was headed to Harlem to teach at a public junior high school. I suppose that I was not a terribly impressive choice for a pretty young lady who was seeking a man who could provide a comfortable lifestyle.

I located this lost love from my high school days due to a chance meeting with a bartender during a brief visit to Florida. The bartender had told me that she

earned extra money by locating people for her customers, upon request. I offered her an opportunity to find my long lost high school sweetheart, strictly out of curiosity. Certainly, that had been my intention at the time. I provided her with all the information I could about this woman and promised to send her fee, \$300, if she was able to provide my lost love's phone number and some updated relevant facts as to what was going on in her life presently. Remember, back then there was no Internet. The next day I arrived back in New York City and as I was placing my suitcase on the floor, in my apartment my phone rang. It was she, the bartender detective, and she provided me with the phone number and some other information mainly that she was still married to the same man who had thwarted my relationship with her approximately thirty years earlier. Even though that was disappointing information for me, I sent her a check, of course, *pronto!*

For nearly a year I carried the phone number in my wallet. I frequently showed it to women at singles bars asking them if they thought I should call her. I got every possible answer under the sun such as:

"Don't dial pain." "This is what she has been waiting for." "Move on." "What have you got to loose?" "Have a naughty affair and live it up!"

Several days before my fiftieth birthday, I dialed her number and left her a message.

"Hi this is Cliff Strome, you may remember me, and I'm looking for -- -- and I want to make some investments in the market. I've come into an inheritance." She had become a stockbroker after she had graduated from college and I assumed that she

was still plying the trade. I left my phone number and had hoped to hear from her.

A few days later my phone rang and I recognized her voice immediately. I told her that I had just turned fifty. I continued by suggesting that perhaps I was old enough now for us to spend some time together. We had a hardy laugh. Apparently, it had reminded her why she had ended our relationship many years before. To me, that was a sign of interest. We agreed to meet at the Lexington Avenue entrance to Grand Central Terminal within the coming week and we'd "take it from there."

The day arrived for the meet. The black beauty was parked directly in front of the Lexington exit of The Terminal. I was standing outside wearing an exquisite suit and leaning against the Rolls Royce grill, legs crossed holding a martini in broad daylight. Suddenly she appeared, wearing a nicely fitted dark blue business suit, briefcase in hand, adorned with long flowing hair and smooth well-tanned skin. When our eyes met we brandished broad smiles.

"When did this happen? A boy, the last time I saw you. And now, you're a handsome and impressive looking man!"

"You're 31 years, four months three days and fifteen minutes late." I scolded her. We roared with laughter and the chemistry fueled an immediate connection.

"Is that your car?"

"Yes, Alex will open the door for you."

It was a magical moment. One substantially amplified by the car, no doubt. It complimented the moment perfectly. Truthfully, the Rolls wasn't necessary but it was the big cherry on the cake. My placement of a

long stem white rose adorning her soft black leather seat was the crowning touch.

I must admit, all the overwhelming details, the presentation made the moment so much more fun for us. It was a scene out of a Richard Gere movie. It was the *raison d'être* for buying the car, fun, excitement and romance.

The evening was wonderful, reminiscent and bursting with engaging and magical conversation with a deep and abiding sense of romantic involvement. We continued to see each other for nearly a year until we went our separate ways. It was something we just had to do.

Turning the page, the best Rolls-Royce moment occurred with my stepfather Lou. Lou was a 73-year-old man, very successful who came with a great rap. He looked like an older version of Humphrey Bogart. He had told me that he had to rent a car because his current auto lease was about to expire and he had to wait about a month for his new car lease to kick in.

"Take the Rolls Lou! You'll have a blast!"

"I can't do that Cliff. Are you nuts?"

"Lou! Take it! You've done so much for mom all these years. I want you have it. Take it! Enjoy yourself. You'll create such fun for yourself. I insist!"

Several days later we met at a diner on West 57th Street, across the street from where the Rolls was "stabled." We had lunch with his son and my mother. He was excited like "a kid in a candy store" anticipating the month ahead driving that car around and pulling his *shticks*. (A *shtick* or *shticks* is a Yiddish word for jokes, one-liners or gags that amuse, trick or

entertain.) Most noted for those were entertainers and comedians such as Woody Allen, Henny Youngman, Rodney Dangerfield, Groucho Marks, Jack Benny and George Burns.

Lou was able to afford such a car even new but he never went for it. He had purchased, over the years, more Cadillac's than anyone I knew, including a turquoise '57 Coupe de Ville way back then. He loved the "flash" but a Rolls was way over the top to suit his way of thinking.

Before we left the diner to pickup the car I gave him a Rolls Royce letter opener, a Rolls Royce book and a Rolls Royce key fob.

After lunch, I drove the Rolls out of the garage and we met on the sidewalk. He climbed in, seating himself in the driver's seat. He noticed the gold metal plaque that I had ordered and placed on the glove box.

*This Rolls Royce crafted for
Louis G. Rosenstock*

Lou was "in heaven!" He drove off floating on air, sheer bliss. I was a thrilled as he, so pleased that I was able to do this for him.

The next time we saw each other he bombarded me with stories *sh_ticks* that had taken place since he had gotten behind the wheel of the Rolls. He told me about his first trip to a gas station.

"Hey, where'd you get that buster?" asked a gas jockey.

"I won it in Vegas. Some asshole tried to sucker me into a bet and I drove away with his wheels. Nice, eh? A putz!"

On another occasion a parking jockey at a snazzy restaurant asked Lou.

"What'd you pay for that chariot buster?"

"Nothin'! Some creep tried to "crush" me. Son of a bitch! I chased him down the alley and he begged me to take the car instead of whackin' him. I tossed him a break, lucky son of a bitch."

In a shopping mall a couple of fifteen-year-old boys asked him what he paid for the Rolls.

"Quarter of a mill, got three of 'em."

There were more encounters but honestly, I just can't remember them all.

I was amused by how this toy was fulfilling the mission, fun! You gotta love it!

My chauffeur and I were "hitting" the bar scene on Friday nights. He'd wait for me in the Rolls as I rambled through "the scene". I met quite a few ladies and left with a number of interesting and impressive looking woman lured by my rap and the prospect of having a memorable evening riding around town in style and hitting the best spots.

One evening in particular stands out. A very classy lady in her early forties, seated next to me at The King Cole Bar at The St. Regis Hotel accepted my offer to buy her a drink. We became engaged in a fun and interesting conversation. She was a great looking woman that I remember. She was very well dressed, smart, funny and up for a "joy ride".

“Hey, let’s “barfly” in my chauffeured Rolls? It’s parked outside with a thermos of ice-cold vodka, no shit! Let’s go!”

We spent the entire evening going from place to place, drinking, laughing and just having a terrific time, just like “the rich and famous.” People looked at us as we exited the car like we were some famous couple or royalty. Sorry paparazzi, no cigar.

We agreed to see each other the following weekend and meet at her apartment on the Upper Eastside. I was flattered that she had invited me in, that’s always a sign of trust and interest. We had a drink, some chitchat and left for a *redux* in the black chariot.

We climbed in and my chauffeur drove us down to Windows of the World, atop The World Trade Center. What a view, what a place, “the top of the world!”

We drank, laughed, danced and enjoying each other and left at about 3 AM. There was a long taxi line and all eyes were upon us as we got into the car. I recall that as she got in her mini skirt got much more mini, about twenty pairs of eyeballs were drawn to her inner thighs, mine included.

We were “smashed” but she was alert enough to notice that the steering wheel seemed different to her than the one that she had seen the last weekend.

“Hey Cliff, I remember that you had a black steering wheel. What’s up with this wooden wheel? Did you replace it?”

“No my dear, last week we were in the other Rolls!”

We each laughed our asses off!

The Rolls and I parted company after nearly a year. I played it out and it was time to put it behind me. I had my fun and I got it out of my system whatever “it” is.

The black beauty found a new home. I sold it to an NBA player and it seemed like a better fit. I do hope that they're both happy together. He paid a bit more than I did and certainly could have afforded it a lot more than me. Hopefully, he's having as much fun as I did.

At times some do silly, flamboyant, spontaneous and extravagant things. So what? Isn't that part of the journey? Have fun, enjoy and love the ride Life!

What a Main Break for You!

Working on Saturdays has always been a pleasure. Saturdays are more relaxing and less stressful than weekdays. Weekdays are fast paced, chaotic and much more traumatic. Operating five stores in Manhattan brings on an intensity that demands patience, spontaneous decisions, and frequent unexpected demands that often screw up a day, one day at a time.

Working on Saturdays is also an escape from family trips to the mall, babysitting, cleaning the garage or doing what “needs” to be done around the house. You know, “Honey do this, honey do that.”

The fast paced one-hour photo business in New York City, like most other businesses, is filled with unreasonable demands, employee whining and complaining, customers who just can not seem to be satisfied, accounts that don't pay as promised, landlords imposing unreasonable demands, tax auditors hounding, frightening and bleeding you, competitors launching attacks seeking to thwart your marketing strategies, unexpected deliveries that arrive at the worst possible time, equipment that fails to perform, inventory “shrinkage” and numerous other unanticipated events that creep up, in your face, threatening to put a halt to your fragile operation and your sanity. Then, there's the totally unexpected, the unthinkable.

According to a local reporter:

“On January 6, 1990 a water main burst under Fifth Avenue between 18th and 19th Street, spewing water with a force that gouged a block-long crater and wrought havoc among several production companies in the vicinity. At press time, it appeared

the production companies that had sustained the most significant damage were Rawi Sherman, at 8 West 19th Street, Spots Films Services, at 156 Fifth Avenue, and HIS, at 7 West 18th street.

The burst destroyed a brick sewer and flooded the basements of numerous buildings, knocking out gas, electricity and telephone service in neighboring buildings.

'It was a monster break.'"

While driving down the Westside Highway that morning I had overheard a news report on the radio that I just couldn't quite make out. There was something about a water main break in the City but I didn't hear it well. Did the announcer say Fifth or Sixth Avenue?

At the time, I had a terrific store located at 134 Fifth Avenue between 18th and 19th Street. The announcer had identified the location of the event, clearly between 18th and 19th streets but I was anxiously waiting for a replay of the story to clarify on which avenue the break had occurred. I knew that if it had occurred on Fifth Avenue then this was not going to be a typical Saturday, duh. The winter season was upon me. About a week after Christmas and New Years day, business takes a dive and cash flow slows down to a trickle. I wondered: Was it better that disasters occur at the slowest time of the year or the best time of the year, the summer? I decided that it sucked either way. Money in this business is made in the summer but the winters were tenuous and bills had to be paid. Either way, it would be a most unwelcomed event.

When I arrived at the parking lot on 23rd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenue I had just passed Sixth Avenue and I hadn't seen a sign of a commotion.

As I got out of my car I saw fire trucks and police cars up ahead at Fifth Avenue. Therefore, I expected the worst. I race-walked in the direction of the emergency vehicles. My heart was pounding. When I got there my worst fears were confirmed.

When I reached Fifth Avenue I saw a calamitous scene with a maze of roadblocks, emergency responders, police and fire vehicles and water was gushing all over the street, pouring into sewers. Numerous flashing lights, crowds gathering, a number of news vans and a chaotic scene was unfolding before my eyes.

As I walked down Fifth Avenue from 23rd Street the insanity intensified. The height of the water kept rising and the force of the stream continued increasing. A torrent of white caps likened to the rapids of The Colorado River was raging down Fifth Avenue. A cop at 21st Street stopped me to prevent me from entering the disaster zone. The area was cordoned off as an emergency zone and no one was permitted to enter that restricted area.

This was big. In fact, it was the most catastrophic water main break in the City's history, on New York City's premier boulevard, Fifth Avenue.

My store had been a gold mine. Six dedicated hard working employee operated this little store and provided substantial profit and succeeded to build a large following of loyal customers. They implemented every promotion flawlessly, organized themselves and embraced every customer enthusiastically. That little store had become a cash cow providing enormous benefit for my business.

This utopia had been slammed, stopped dead in its tracks. Only the rent and equipment payments survived. I was determined that the team would remain intact. I paid their salaries in full until I was able to reopen the store, many months later. I rotated them with employees who worked in my other stores by forcing them to take their vacations. I found “busy” work for an overstaffed crew during the slowest months of the year, not necessary but beneficially things for them to do. I was determined not to loose any of them. They were the “glue” that kept this store going. I was committed and determined to bear the cost, no doubt a very good investment.

On the following Monday, I was able to visit the store. My equipment was intact because they were installed on platforms above the floor. It was above the level of the water. The sidewalk had collapsed, the pedestrian traffic was zero, and the hole in the street was likened to a crater. The electrical system, water service, vital components of the film processing business, and telephone service in the building had been knocked out completely. Neighboring buildings were dark as well. Other stores were slammed shut and no doubt huge sums of money had been lost and some businesses were going to fail, no doubt.

Business interruption insurance was a joke. In order to collect, a business owner has to prove their losses by producing tax returns demonstrated irrefutable evidence that income comparable to prior years would not materialize due to the event. A business owner had to “show” or report their profits on their corporate tax returns to reap the benefits of their insurance policies if they can demonstrate that the

event was the direct cause of lost profits. It's called "the fine print" or "read between the lines" but seldom do inexperienced and naïve business owners read the fine print. That's the "hook" as insurance company salesman and lawyers know well. In addition, many policies are written to screw the business owner. For example, if a catastrophic event originated externally, outside the business premises, then there were, most often exclusions. Exclusion is defined as: "You ain't gettin' no money sucka!" I was determined that I would not be a victim of "The City", insurance companies or myself. I had to find a way.

Shop owners began chatting among themselves, trying to find out what others were going to do to handle their problems and losses. Most of them bantered about suing the City. I had no intention of doing so. That's a long and costly road and leads down the wrong path. Those who have had no experience with litigation are unaware of the costs and all the crap that comes with the court process. It's an "engine for delay." Most people are naïve regarding legal claims and litigation. It's a Pandora's box and often backfires. Fighting city hall is fraught with unknowns. They have weapons and strategies at their disposal such as tax audits and building violations inspectors and much deeper pockets, to name a few. Retailers come under very close scrutiny due to the nature of their business, cash. I avoided that trolley like the plague. No thanks buster!

I decided to take the high road, "P.R." public relations. A bright creative woman, who I had met at The Dale Carnegie Center of Excellence, had established a public relations firm and I told her about the water

main break. She offered me a program, a strategy in lieu of the legal route that others had been discussing. I was impressed and we agreed to implement a plan. She did a terrific job featuring my Fifth Avenue store on page one of the City Section of The Daily News, "The Real Victim of The Water Main Break." She clinched appearances for me on television and radio that evoked sympathy and attention from the public including many of my suppliers and customers. I often ran into people who expressed their regrets and concern for my business and my plight. Many who had learned about the disaster through the media had asked me when and if I was going to re-open Pro-Print One Hour Photo due to their sincere concern. Support and loyalty ran thick and deep. It was overwhelming and most heart warming.

JD Camera Shop, located across the street two blocks up Fifth Avenue had remained open during the entire crisis. The water main break never affected them adversely however they did take advantage of the situation by aggressively promoting their business by putting a "Kodak Color Watch System" stanchion with Bill Cosby's life size likeness standing on the sidewalk featuring film processing and film at "drop dead prices." You may remember Kodak's ad campaign, "We have The Color Watch System." It was pure wingtip upstate New York marketing bullshit, smoke and mirrors. I didn't hate JD Camera Shop's owner for it. He took advantage of an opportunity and hey, it's a business! I planned my strategy to take care of my business down the road and "fix his fat ass" big time! I was out for blood, why not?

Street repairs crept along very slowly. The work to be done was huge. A 48" water main needed to be replaced, electrical connections had to be repaired by Con Edison and the City had to replace all of the collapsed sidewalks. Building owners were responsible for repairing their electrical systems and businesses had to replace their damaged inventory and destroyed mechanical systems that were beneath the height of what the water level had been. The damage was huge and the cost was colossal.

Our mayor, David Dinkins was never present, didn't bother to show up once as a gesture of support. There was no expression of interest or sympathy. There were no ideas, no loans, no proposals, no nothing! He was absentia, 100%. Dear ol' "Do Something, Dave!" a nickname coined by the tabloids. After over five long months the sidewalk had finally been replaced. The electricity was restored at my location and the time to reopen was approaching. The street was still closed due to the construction process. I was anxious to pounce on my competitor and get back into action. I was licking my chops for action and planning my strategy!

Opening our doors with a splash, with "full steam ahead" enthusiasm and ideas that my staff and I enacted as if we were at war, a war to reacquire our business and more. I was out to take away what we lost from our main competitor and more, much more. I was determined to crush my competitor down the street. There was never anything personal, just business. He had his "day in the sun" and now it was my turn to have my fun. When the time came I was ready. This was going to be big!!

First, I hired four very attractive young ladies, models, to pass out flyers promoting the reopening of Pro-Print One Hour Photo. They were clad in tank tops and short shorts with roller skates. The summer had arrived! They skated up and down sidewalks handing out flyers offering free film and Fifth Avenue Candy Bars just for walking into my store. My supplier, Agfa Corporation, provided me with thousands of rolls of film, free! I bought thousands of Fifth Avenue candy bars from a friend who sold them to me at his wholesale price, 18 cents a piece. At the time they sold for 50 cents, retail.

I hired a number of men who were equipped with stencils that were made at a local print shop. Those guys spray-painted police scaffolds with red water based paint, "Pro-Print One Hour Photo is Open!" They sprayed buildings, sidewalks, store windows, subway entrances, and any place that would alert the public that we are back in action. Since I used water based paint the "damage" easily vanished after the first rainfall or a few swipes with a wet cloth. The cops who visited me knew that I was the "perp" behind the stenciling but they only requested that I cease and desist, nothing more. They were actually very sympathetic. I gave them some candy and film and subsequently they became, "hang a-rounds."

I named the promotion "What a Main Break for You!" It "blew" the doors off the store. People came in droves. They felt sorry for us, loved the free film and candy and they were happy to support a local business. No donations, no sacrifices, just show up, support us and get some booty in the process. That's a no brainer. Everyone loves free stuff.

A year after the rupture the street was still a mess! Incredible! I received a call from the TV station where I had appeared nearly a year earlier requesting a follow up interview. They edited most of my interview because I had expressed anger with the City, most of all with Mayor Dinkins. How could it be? A city with such resources had allowed a major commercial district, New York City's premier boulevard to be disrupted for an entire year. A year! We thrived. The team was back in action. The trade magazines and newspapers printed stories about this event, "Making Lemonade out of Lemons in The Big Apple" a story about my fight to get my business back on its feet and keep my employees on the payroll. JD Camera Shop closed their doors for good. They packed their bags and took an early retirement to Florida. Their mistake was sitting back and not reacting to my promotion. They should have gone on the offensive rather than gloating about their success that the water main break handed them, just in the moment.

In sum, when life hands you lemons, make lemonade. In New York City, as elsewhere, don't crawl into the corner and cry, "mommy." Put on your boots, grab a handful of guts, be positive and seize the lessons that your experience provides with determination and fervor. Create, fight and run with the ball. Run, run, run and don't look back. Be strong and push back the demons that haunt you and the fears that can destroy you. Play ball and play it hard.

That's the New York City that I love. Looking back, I'm glad there was a "water main break" on Fifth Avenue that cold January morning. It's the first time that I had

learned that everything somehow happens for a reason. "From bad there's always some good" But this time it was a homerun out of the park! Since then I love taking a bad situation and emerging from it better than before it happened. This is the best example I can think of and there have been many more that have followed. As a result, somehow I do feel sorry for those retailers over on Sixth Avenue because they'll never know the joy that lemons can bring. You won't see me in court guys! "Next, can I help you?"

Chapter III

Opinions & Perspectives

Take a Stroll in Greenwood

Have you ever considered going to a cemetery to take a walk, relax, enjoy nature and immerse yourself if it was a beautiful man made landscaped environment? Have you ever considered taking the time to visit a cemetery without searching for the monument of a departed native, friend or seek out a famous person's resting place?

Perhaps you would if you lived in a filthy, crowded and reeking urban environment rife with trash, filth and squalor. Imagine an environment lacking a decent park with gorgeous trees, walking paths, bodies of water and sound of chirping birds and the serenity of spectacular green space.

Sentiments, such as these, gave rise to the "rural" or "garden cemetery movement" in France and England in the early 19th century. Its purpose was to enhance the experience of cemetery visits, for the living, of course! The result was, to provide a respite for those seeking an escape from urban environments, and enjoy some solace and harmony by "inhaling" these splendid places before the creation of landscaped parks. Shortly thereafter, this movement reached The United States in New York City, a place we know as Central Park.

"Inspired by romantic perceptions of nature, art, national identity and the undermining of the melancholy themes of death" such cemeteries were

generally placed on the outskirts of large cities such as Boston, Cincinnati and New York City on high ground with excellent views of the cities. Naturally, the views were intended to provide a pleasing panorama for the visitors, to enhance the experience that put that place, a cemetery, a specific gravesite in unison with the city making it a part of city life and inspiring a spiritual experience.

Views are not intended for the departed, but strangely many plots are purchased for that reason. Huh? It's an old put-on that the departed have great views and people pay extra for such raised plots, as every plot salesman well knows.

American landscape design, pioneered by Andrew Jackson Downing, Calvert Vaux, Frederick Law Olmsted and Jacob Wrey Mould integrated their skills creating spacious and tranquil grounds in unison with nature. Applying their esthetic visions and the artful hand and mind of man resulted in lush and well-planned places of beauty and art. They created cemeteries, essentially park like grounds, providing an escape from the dirty, crowded and stench filled air of urban environments, a bucolic and natural setting that "spoke" of life and laid the departed to rest in an organic and peaceful place of beauty.

The pallets that these men created were environments with an abundance of hilly wooded places, vast open areas of thinned out trees, void of plants amidst broad vistas and varieties of natural looking bodies of water all co-existing harmoniously as if they were made by nature. Many plots were adjacent to magnificently carved bodies of water providing nearby benches for reflection and a

connection with nature granting solace and repose. These settings stimulated a sense of appreciation for nature and the continuity of life and death as a return to nature, an extension of existence, the next phase of eternity.

Leonard Bernstein is “resting” atop Battle Hill, the highest point in Brooklyn, over 200 feet above sea level in Greenwood Cemetery overlooking Manhattan. Trees planted beside a stone bench inscribed with his sir name, shade his monument. It is a spectacular site, a final place, evoking communion with the living, nature and eternal beauty.

A walk through Greenwood Cemetery, the resting place for over 600,000 people, many who were the “movers and shakers” of New York City for over one-hundred and fifty years is extremely inspiring. If you imagine this 478 acre landscaped ground, established in 1838, without the monuments, you cannot help but perceive that you are strolling through the most magnificent park on earth. Truly, it is a perfect extension of the glorious and creative lives of those who “reside” there.

After a two-hour leisurely walk through Greenwood, I did not leave with a gloomy sense of sadness but rather a peaceful and serene sensation of calm. This place provides the best possible opportunity for visitors and for those seeking consolation and the belief that existence itself is an endless journey. Surely, this cemetery and others like it are more for the living than the departed.

Among some of the most notable residents at Greenwood are: Henry Ward Beecher, preacher and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, DeWitt Clinton

former Mayor, Governor of New York, inspiration for the Erie Canal and the 1811 Street Grid in Manhattan, Horace Greeley, poet, publisher and advocate of Central Park, Samuel F. B. Morse, the genius behind the first Atlantic cable, Margaret Sanger, birth control pioneer and Lewis Comfort Tiffany, artist and of course the infamous Mayor William M. Tweed and many more. You'll also see stones bearing numerous names of Brooklyn streets that are familiar to many of us, a sure giveaway that they were important without us knowing why; Remsen, Joralemon, Montaque, Boerum, Henry and Hicks, street names found in Brooklyn. It's interesting to write the names of those that appear on the largest monuments on the highest ground and "Google them." You'd be surprised to "meet" whom you have visited!

Many of the monuments are quite impressive and original. Pyramids, sarcophagi of various sizes with incredible ornamentation are found everywhere. The names, dates and sentiments are a tour through New York's past. Richard Upjohn, architect of Trinity Church and Grace Church in Brooklyn Heights, designed the highly ornamental brownstone "gate" at the 5th Avenue entrance in the Sunset Park neighborhood where the cemetery is located. That alone is truly worth the trip. Go there, you'll be glad you did, but don't stay too long, please! Just a visit! Interestingly, before the construction of Central Park many Manhattanites crossed the East River by The Fulton Ferry line and walked up steep hills to Greenwood Cemetery to enjoy a day in the "park" a cemetery and precursor of perhaps the greatest park on earth and you know where that is!

One final note: The most popular tourist attraction in America throughout most of the 19th century was Niagara Falls. The second most popular tourist attraction was Greenwood Cemetery!

What's so Great About Central Park Anyway?

Watching people enjoying the park, walking hand in hand, and sitting on a bench reading a newspaper under a tree gazing at joggers taking another lap around the reservoir. Or observing adults showing off their ice skating skills at one of the park's two rinks, at times, annoys me. I dislike observing those who amble through the park to escape the City, enjoying a few precious moments of solace.

And what really irks me is observing young parents with a child tightly secured to a bicycle handlebar basket or rear seat peddling through the park, gliding along a footpath or meandering through the North Woods.

It reminds me of Mel Brooks' comment in the comedy sketch, "The Two Thousand Year Old Man" when asked something like, "What do you think of man's conquest of space and sending a man to the Moon?" His reply, "That was good!" Yeah Mel, Central Park is good too.

Central Park was our moon shot 150 years ago and most of those who enjoy the park haven't got a clue as to how it came to be! They take it for granted, never knowing that it was the first park to do what it does and provides. It is, together with the Brooklyn Bridge and St. Patrick's Cathedral, one of the three foremost monumental technological achievements of New York City in the 19th century. It is the culmination of the ideas and efforts of so many who had pushed for the concept, persuaded the City to pay for it, to purchase the land, through an act of eminent domain, and plan the world's first public landscaped park built for all, not just the wealthy and advantaged as was

customary in Europe, but created a park in an entirely new and spectacular way for all the people from all stations of life and class.

The Central Park, as it was first called, still is the number one destination for visitors to New York City boasting over 40 million people visitors annually. I am truly bothered by the vast majority of those who meander around and enjoy the beautiful variety of trees, expansive lawns, secluded forests, spectacular bridges, gorgeous man made bodies of water, landscapes and gardens that envelop the park void of any any interest as to how it all came to be.

Seriously though, in truth, I do take pride and pleasure watching people enjoying Central Park, but what puzzles me is that the vast majority of those who know nothing nor are they interested in learning anything about how the park was built, yes built; the why, how, when and at what cost. What did it take to create this first ever-landscaped urban park, paid for with public money, to be used by all of the people? It baffles me! This park was designed and built by the hand of man.

In the early 19th century "The Garden Cemetery" movement had taken hold enabling visitors to pay their respects to their forbearers in a bucolic and natural environment while experiencing spiritual solace, appreciation of life engaging in deep reflection, enjoying nature's beauty and observing visual natural evidence that death is a continuum, a component of living, it's nature's way.

The concept of landscaped parks grew out of this movement and provided the means to escape from the stresses of urban life during the dawn of the

industrial revolution. It continues to provide people a much-needed respite from the pressures of life in crowded, noisy, stinking, filthy and dangerous urban environments such as New York City had been.

Forward thinking leaders of New York City, such as William Cullen Bryant, Horace Greeley, Mayor Fernando Wood and Andrew Jackson Downing, America's leading landscape architect all clamored for such a park. By the mid 19th century the idea took hold and through an act of eminent domain passed by the state legislature in Albany 700 acres were set aside for "The Central Park," from 59th Street to 106th Street. Due to the extreme rock formations at 106th Street it had been decided to extend the park up to 110th Street thereby increasing the park size to 843 acres. The legislation was created in Albany because it was just too much of a hot button here in the City.

The Park Commissioner held a contest to design "The Central Park". Thirty-two entries were submitted and Fredrick Law Olmstead, an American park supervisor together with Calvert Vaux, a UK architect won the \$2,000 prize and the right to supervise the construction of their design known as The Greensward Plan. They hired 20,000 men who worked ten-hour days for the princely sum of \$1 per day over a period of fourteen years, tax-free to construct the park. More explosives were used then during The Battle of Gettysburg, the largest battle on the North American continent, soon to be. They hauled tens of thousands of cubic yards of soil barged across The Hudson River from New Jersey and transported to the park's location. They evicted between 800 to 1600 inhabitants from a place known

as Seneca Village in the west 80's section of the park. They planted 230,000 trees, bushes and scrubs, installed over 100 miles of water pipes beneath the surface to provide for water transfer and drainage connecting all the man made bodies of water. It is a very sophisticate water control system, the first on earth and over all these years not once has a body of water in the part overflowed or dried out! The technology applied for the transport water underground was visionary, feeding various man-made bodies of water and providing necessary drainage in the park, a man-made labyrinth of underground pipes that was years ahead of its time. The topography was carved out with slopes dug by hand with the use of explosive. They moved millions of tons of soil altering the topography, conceived and created four vehicular sublevel transverse roadways to avoid vehicular disturbances to park goers and eliminate the possibility of chaotic traffic snarls at both ends of the park north and south. Conceived in the mid-19th century and deep enough for today's city buses to clear the bridges the pass under! Enormous quantities of stone were cut and utilized to build walls, bridges, tunnels and support embankments. They laid six million bricks, designed and built equestrian, pedestrian and carriage paths generally non-intersecting via a three-tier system. They built 37 bridges and tunnels, all unique and many quite spectacular such as The Gapstow and The Bow Bridges among the favorites.

A distinctive and varied lush natural environment was created, one never before conceived ensconced within a six-mile stonewall built around the entire

perimeter of the park wrapping up this masterpiece, a gift to all who enter.

At the time of its completion in the 1870's, the park was too far north for most residents of Manhattan to enjoy as most folks lived below 14th Street. However, the visionaries got it right, because they knew that the City was growing north and, in time, it would be the ideal spot to be located, in the center of the expanding City.

They created names of each entrances to the park glorifying humankind, such as Ladies' Gate, Boys' Gate, Engineer's Gate, Scholar's Gate, Artist's Gate, etc., in opposition to numbered streets mandated in 1811 known as "The Grid Plan" that had laid out the street system and was rapidly becoming a reality.

The sheer brilliance of the park is to fool the eye, *trompe l'oeil*. The designers deliberately did not want those who enjoy the park to notice that it is a man made creation, and not to be noticed as such.

In effect, therefore, I should be pleased when I see people enjoying the park those without a care and completely clueless as to how it all came to be! That's the genius of the designers, the ultimate confirmation that their design was a decisive success; a man made park that appears to be nature's creation and as a result, the ultimate deception.

At a cost of over \$5,000,000 for the land, at a time when The United States government paid slightly more for the entire state of Alaska, one has to reflect that the commitment to provide this great City with a park equal in size to the two smallest countries on earth, Monaco and The Vatican combined, was quite a remarkable and unprecedented achievement. It was,

up until that time, the greatest investment made by this City for its people, a statement that we as a city were exceeding the efforts of other great cities of the world. It was another declaration that New York City was committed to become the primate City of the world, the capital of the world it has been said.

To those who lament the value of the property, the 843 acres that is Central Park, quibble that if those acres were instead developed into luxury housing of the best construction and design would have instead provided an impressive and enormous real estate tax grab. They ought to take note that had the park never existed the increased value of the surrounding properties, due to the existence of the park itself, is of far greater value than would have been had all of the park's acreage been "developed" by real estate barons. Tax-wise the City comes out far ahead in tax revenue due to the park's existence. Also, take into account the total estimated income that the park provides with all the activities, attractions, philanthropic donations and employment that the city derives in excess of one billion dollars. In fact, the City government contributes merely 17% of the total cost of the maintenance and operating budget of the park. Philanthropists as well as numerous donations provided by wealthiest and most generous of us fund the overwhelming majority of the cost to operate the park. Recently, a hedge fund CEO donated 100 million dollars because, as he stated, "Because I have fond memories of the park as a child!"

Enjoy Central Park! The more you learn about this unique and incredible centerpiece the more you will take pleasure and gain an enhanced sense of

appreciation. It is truly the 19th century American Artistic Masterpiece, a natural, organic piece of art that truly spells America, glorifying its valleys, rivers, streams and mountains. The designers have replicated nature, the Hudson River Valley, right here in the center of Manhattan, in the most magnificent, impressive and beneficial way.

We, as a young country, had no other palette to project our visual and artistic imagination. Unlike Europe we had no history of tapestry, furniture, mosaics, architecture, oil paintings, sculpture, costumes or jewelry. Nature was our palette and Olmstead and Vaux, together with Jacob Wrey Mould, created the park at a cost of \$7,000,000 plus the cost of the land.

As you walk through Central Park imagine as though you are passing by each scenic landscape, opening your eyes observing the varied and magnificent sites, likened to freshly painted landscapes. Imagine, as though you're walking through an art gallery and observing masterpieces in your mind's eye. That was the designers stated intent, taking park goers on a tour as if they were strolling through a museum and inviting them to savor every pictorial wonder unfolding before their eyes, in the third dimension made with real material and formed to appear natural yet created and designed by the head, heart and hand of man. That is the magic and art of Central Park. You are participating and experiencing an interactive journey through an 843-acre canvas of art created by man, a journey into the mind, heart and soul of the imagination of humankind.

Enjoy it even more, now that you know the history and purpose of this beautiful place. Perhaps now, you know that you didn't know anything about Central Park! Experience the park, perhaps the most beautiful man made place on the face of the earth, in the middle of "The Island at the center of the world."

Subways, Love or Hate

With approximately 5.7 million paid “rides” on an average weekday, the New York City subway, the fourth busiest on earth and by far the world’s largest, together with the largest hybrid electric bus fleet in the country saves The United States half of all the energy saved in The United States due to all the nation’s mass transit systems.

Ours is the only subway system on earth that was built with express tracks from the inception. Our subways do not have multiple fare schemes for distance traveled, at least not yet, and it is also the only subway and bus fleet that runs entirely on a 24/7 basis. We are truly “The City that Never Sleeps!” The genius of building the subways in New York City with express tracks from the very beginning is one of the most significant and innovative ideas that have enabled this City to grow and thrive. Imagine if we didn’t have express tracks! We never would have been able to handle such vast numbers of people and transport them so rapidly. The volume would overwhelm the system and the limits would have impeded the growth of the City. Travel time to and from Manhattan from the outer boroughs would have doubled or worse. Far-flung neighborhoods would not have become so dense and the sluggish inefficiency of local trains would have overwhelmed the subway system. We would have had impressive skylines in outer borough neighborhoods closer to Manhattan with more open spaces further out if our subway system were unable to handle the load with the efficiency of express tracks. The subways would not have penetrated those further away places because it

would have been impractical to extend the subways to such far-flung places to collect small numbers of people, a fiscally loosing proposition. Certainly, the underlying story as to where tracks were laid was all about alliances between the bureaucratic subway decision makers and the titans of real estate. One could write a history of such deals and relationships that ultimately determined where stations were to be built based on who owned what properties and who know whom; such affirmation and evidence must exist.

Recently, with the initial phase of the long awaited Second Avenue subway line some public officials were actually discussing a tax on property owners to share the expense of building that subway line because the value of their properties has spiked and currently the subway is in dire straights with antiquated equipment, switches, many fifty plus year old trains still saturate the lines, delays have spiked and the operating expenses far exceed the amount of revenue the fares provide. If the state, whose responsibility is to fund and maintain the subway, doesn't get serious about the deteriorating spiral then the City will fall into an abyss and harken back to the bleak days of the 1970's! Businesses will leave; new ones will not consider locating here and the tax-base will flee again. The crowding in the subways is out of control, as the ridership keeps climbing and the capacity keeps shrinking! It's a very frightening scenario. Property values will fall, crime will spike and New York City will loose its luster!

Express tracks have provided the opportunity for outlying real estate values to soar enabling residents

to enjoy quicker access to their jobs from places of greater distances from Manhattan thus making their lives more enjoyable, increasing their work and leisure time immeasurably.

“Honey, I’m home!”

“So soon, you should have taken the local, and whose lipstick is on your collar?”

Express tracks make it possible to leave home later and get home earlier and that makes it possible to argue with your spouse longer than those who ride the local rails to and fro! Could it be that express tracks have resulted in larger sized families and higher divorce rates? More time with your spouse may have spun your life and marriage one way or the other, a larger family or a broken marriage! Maybe both, eh? Express tracks! Save money, have a smaller family and spend more time in the subway and less time at home! Funny? Sure, but, no doubt it’s true!

When you enter the subway you venture into a completely different world. Rich in its own cultural mores and codes of conduct written by The MTA (Metropolitan Transit Authority) and those codes authored, but not written, literally, by the ridership or “straphangers” as riders were known years ago whose rulebook governs “street smart” behavior on the rails below ground.

Just about everyone who rides the subway has a love hate relationship with the system. It gets you where you want to go inexpensively, safely and quickly but, it’s noisy, often crowded, with long waits, especially at off hours and weekends, in sum, it’s a challenge, but still tolerable and marginally acceptable, but going in the wrong direction.

The love argument goes like this:

It is by far the fastest way to get around the City. It's statistically the safest way to travel compared with taxis, driving, biking taking a bus or walking. It is reasonably dependable, more than any other means. Without it, this City simply could not exist! Even though Manhattan has more vehicles entering and leaving daily than any other city in The United States, we rely on our subways to transport the overwhelming majority of people who travel in and out. There simply is no other way.

Those who travel in opposite directions of the voluminous flow enjoy many benefits: space, comfort and seating, less noise and a little peace. It was the subways, initially the L's (elevated trains) that enabled people to increase the distances between home and work, expanding the city and making it possible for people to live in larger homes abandoning their tiny tenement dwellings, making room for newcomers, the next wave of immigrants who enjoyed more space, the ultimate luxury in New York City. Subways are the arteries of the city, its lifeline, cheap, fast, safe and air-conditioned. Kill it and the City will die!

The hate argument goes like this:

It's unfit for humans, there's too much trash, dirt, bottles, newspapers and many people are filthy. There are not enough people on staff to keep the system clean, it's "disgusting"!

Recently, I picked up a newspaper off a seat and thought the news that I had read two weeks ago had reoccurred, that's how old the paper was! The trains are extremely noisy; the express trains roar through

stations compelling many to stick their fingers in their ears. You could go deaf! The trains are, at times, far too crowded and the wait is often much too long. Many people are often literally unable to squeeze in or they just refuse to try and they extend their waits, I do too at times. Most often I simply wait for the next train because they're usually nearly empty and that's well worth the wait.

The worst thing about the subway is the crowd during rush hour. We are at times packed, crushed up against people who are in your face, pushing, leaning against each other, and all the unpleasant smells and shouts of those among us who are arrogant, selfish and inconsiderate. Backpackers swing around forgetting or not caring that their packs are crashing into others. It doesn't have to be that way, does it? At least we don't have "pushers" people hired by the transit system in Tokyo who push and jam people into trains to maximize capacity! I can't imagine that happening in New York City. That would be the most dangerous job on the planet, even as nice as most New Yorkers happen to be!

The MTA's code of conduct is something that we all could have written in five minutes, no spitting, littering or radios! Radios? That's a timely notice! People listen to their music via iPhone, iPads and with earphones. Radios? Don't hold the doors, step back when a train is entering the station, etc. etc. The unwritten rules are far subtler. Why do people spit? Some do so every twenty seconds or so. What does that accomplish? I guess it makes them feel tough, just like those who wear their pants down to their

mid-ass level. To me, both make them look stupid and that's what they are!

People tend to sit or stand at the greatest distance possible between each other. You'll never see two strangers take adjacent seats if there are numerous empty seats available throughout the car. Providing the greatest distance between each other is rule one. If you put yourself next to someone and had the option to sit with space around you then you'd get a look that would kill. Everyone cherishes his or her own space, especially in the subway.

Many riders peer into the windows of a train as it enters the station looking for unsavory riders within each car as the train slows down enabling them to find avoidance from crying babies, boisterous loud and unruly children or cars filled with herds of disruptive school children who perform acrobatics on the steel bars and poles, and those who appear to be scary, threatening, hostile, insane and unpredictable. Something should be done to stop it. They're in your face and they're a loud herd of pains in the ass! And, they ride for free with school passes, ungrateful brats! Don't get me wrong, some are well behaved!

"Strap hangers" generally opt to enter an adjacent car if they so desire, eying a sleeper, a person with an abundance of black plastic bags, a cart or evidence of "persons of interest" who are not mainstream. I never enter an empty car because I believe they are less safe. Eyeballs reduce crime so you should "hang" where there are the most people.

Riders generally do not move to the center of cars, the space that is the greatest distance from the three or four sets of exit doors, depending on the subway line

that you are riding. This results in more overcrowding near the doors; more jamming and squeezing than necessary. People tend to be lazy and hate to do what they should. It's like an ant colony crawling all over a lump of sugar. Stand back, you'll get your turn.

Conductors frequently make announcements during rush hour; most riders comply with their requests, albeit unenthusiastically. What's in it for them? Space! Many push to leave the train blocked by those seeking entry fearing that the doors will shut in their faces and leave them standing on the platform. It is customary to let people leave the train before allowing those who seek entry. But, that doesn't include everybody. How dumb! Let's all get in and then let the others out. Duh!

"Stand clear of the closing doors," announced prior to the closing of the doors by the conductor or the Public Address system on the newer trains. Some riders cram an arm inside and hold the doors for a friend very aggressively. Or, they force doors open to gain entry. This is dangerous stuff and it will never end! But it could, if the City wanted it to! Just hire some plainclothes enforcers and issue summonses en masse. Isn't that a primary cause and effect of society? It's the failure to provide reasonable and deliberate enforcement and if that doesn't work then get nasty. Don't we know enough about reducing crime? Why are we so tolerant and accepting of unacceptable behavior? Let's get with the program. We have demonstrated, as a City, that we've done that better than any other. It's called pushing for "voluntary compliance." What's the problem?

We have more than our share of obesity in New York City and I could swear that the seats keep getting smaller. Manhattan is the thinnest county in the United States, not thin geographically but rather demographically; average body weight. Often people who are seated on a bench seat are suddenly joined, literally joined, by an overweight rider who consumes a seat and a half! I have even seen some consume two seats, entirely!

As for me, I quickly rise from my seat if a real super sized “hefty bag” parks her butt next, or on top of mine! I choose to stand for the duration of my trip if I fail to find another entire seat. I glue my eyes on them and “drill” holes through them with my fixed glare. Many others remain seated and endure the big squeeze. Perhaps the MTA will create a surcharge for seat and a-half-riders as some airlines have done. Forget the calorie counts that require posting in chain restaurants to thwart huge caloric in-takers and the attempt to ban supersized sugared drinks. The people who need that information the most, read those caloric counts the least. The MTA should consider a surcharge for those who are “weight challenged.” What a shame. I really feel sorry for those people and hope they can get the help they need, namely from themselves. Button up those lips Marge ☺

Seriously, this is an enormous problem and needs immediate attention not just for fellow strap hangers but for those challenged by excessive weight most of all. Perhaps we should be standing on a scale as we swipe our cards and if your weight exceeds x then an additional swipe would be required to gain entry, or an extra half a swipe, a surcharge. For many, that’d be

a good thing, longer, healthier lives and more seating for others. In fact, there is an MTA law that states, those who inconvenience other riders, and that includes occupying more than one seat must rise and provide fellow riders the benefit of both seats. I do believe however, that some folks are so huge that standing for their entire ride may be a grueling physical challenge and may be life threatening as they could fall on top of someone and crush them to death! Recently, I took the annual vintage subway ride sponsored by the MTA. The train that I rode was a model that had been in use during the 1930's-1950's, equipped with wicker seats, tungsten light bulbs, porcelain handles and void of air conditioning. The print ads featured cigarettes, the ones that most doctors preferred. Brands such as Luckys, Camel, Raleigh and good old Chesterfield, all non-filtered cigs were featured. That really took me back, way back. What made the biggest impression on me was the size of those seats. Most people today would not have had adequate space and today's large Marge's wouldn't have the space for half their butts. Tiny seats that seemed so normal back then today look like seating for fifth graders, but not all of today's fifth graders by any means could fit in those seats either! Many stations are now equipped with elevators and escalators and far too often many of them are out of service. They were paid for at great expense, just about a billion dollars or so according to what I've read. So fix 'em or get that money back. No can do? Bet there's inadequate language in the purchase orders and agreements that the MTA signed with the contractors, giving them the right to foot drag or play

dead. If not, who's minding the store? I'll bet all the elevators and escalators in Bloomberg's are working just fine. It's amazing! If the MTA were a private company competing in "the real world" then the elevators and escalators would be working under threat of well-written contracts that include penalties crafted by attorneys who knew a thing or two about contract law. No competition or stockholders equals unreliable elevators and escalators. MTA, the proof is in the pudding! Overall for \$2.75 per ride you are doing lousy job ("Brownie") so there's a lot of room for improvement, and that doesn't include another "annual" increase above \$2.75 in the very near future. The best way to prove that you are "giving away the shop" is to launch some of your union employees the hell out of there and watch what happens. They'll die of starvation. It's about votes? Yeah! Perhaps, anyone who has anything to do with keeping their mouth shut or supporting those increases won't get my vote. How about yours? When lines for applicants seeking MTA jobs approaches zero, then you know you're offering the right deal. This is not Walmart! We don't want to see people squashed lining up for a toy or electronic gizmo for half price. We want enough qualified people to run the system and earn a fair wage, not a balloon giveaway or a handout. Some of those who work for the MTA cannot make an announcement that is understandable. Some are walking around in a haze, or daze. Others are taking up space. If this was run like a business and we straightened out the unions, enforced the Taylor Law that forbids public employees to strike, such as Regan's strategy that busted the FAA air traffic

controllers union, then we'd be able to create a system that is the envy of the world. What are we afraid of? Another strike? Let the National Guard run the subways or cut their pay for every day they decide to hold this City hostage. Hallelujah! How about releasing all those in prison for non-violent small size marijuana busts and offer them jobs to run the subways, eh? That is a real money saver!

Isn't it amusing that the MTA has implemented an audio system that advises us when we should expect specific trains to arrive at the station?

The unions are far too powerful and the salaries, work rules are insanely generous. I've seen repair crews consisting of 20-30 men standing around on tracks and as the train I'm riding in slowly passes I scratch my head in amazement like what the hell are they doing? With the holiday bonuses factored in, their haul works out to \$920 for the day, or \$230 an hour working just four hours. Incredible!!

"Ladies and gentlemen, there is a Brooklyn bound train arriving on the local track." Or, "There is a Queens bound train two stations away."

How often I have stood on the platform and waited for the "arriving" train that confirms with that the announcement was pure fiction. At times, I've entered the station and seen the Brooklyn bound local pull out of the station while the announcement is blearing that it's one station away! Soon it will be, but moving away from the station, not toward it. I've heard two announcements simultaneously canceling each other out! Try that in the real world folks. It would be beneficial if the announcement cited which local train

the announcement is referring to: The C and the B trains both travel to Brooklyn or uptown! Let us know which of the two is coming. What would be the big deal? Ah! It's forty-five year old technology. Oy, come on folks. Wake up. It exists! Do you?

The customary and usual unwritten code, for escalators, is to stand to the right and allow walkers to walk up, or down, on the left. Many riders prefer to walk up escalators rather than wait and stand on a step. Unfortunately, many stand on the left and pretend that they don't hear you from behind, "Excuse me please!" They block you from moving and take pride in the acquisition of this little piece of temporary real estate. They know very well that people may be behind those who would like to save a bit of time and get a little exercise and walk up the escalator but they continue to just stand still. They're angry people. This too will never go away. This creates more anger and frustration on both sides. Some people love to express their anger in public places especially in the subways, an excellent place to push those buttons. Get up, grow up and get over it, you childish creeps! Stand right and pass left, got it? Hey MTA, why not post signs, such as: Please stand right and walk left with an illustration that anyone will understand. They probably figured out that no one would read or understand them. I don't agree.

Those who wait for trains on the platforms generally are gathered at the center of the platforms and will therefore enter a mid-range car. There are ten cars per train. The obvious result is that the center cars are the most crowded and the end cars are sparse, by comparison. People want to be in the center of the

platform in off hours, there's safety in numbers. During rush hour it makes little sense. More sophisticated riders opt for the first and last three cars putting themselves at their desired station upon their arrival. Our subway trains are 644 feet long. That's longer than two football fields! Doesn't it make sense to enter a less crowded car and enable your diaphragm; the one nature gave you, not your doctor, to do its job?

Backpacks are another major challenge for subway riders. Imagine being in a crowded subway train with a person who is standing next to you who decides to take an about-face! Whissssh! You just got smacked with a 180 degree "about face" with a 20-pound backpack across your face as they are 9 inches taller than you. It has literally become a part of human anatomy without consciousness. People forget that they are wearing them! This new marvel of modern life is a terrific convenience for many however; they should be sold with instructions, you think? Nah, people wouldn't follow them anyway, not in the subway. Will they ever go away? Time will tell! Keep them off the subways and let the back-packers head for the hills; like "take a hike" up a mountain! They're new, backpacks on subways. Let's add shovels, picks, ropes and portable gas stoves too! It's like people have become turtles or camels. They've grown storage space on their backs! Front packs would be better; at least "frontpackers" would see what's going on in front of them. Yes, front-packs! It is inevitable that someday they'll be prohibited no doubt by Homeland Security. With all the time, effort and money spent to ensure subway safety, backpacks are

the Achilles heel in the equation. One backpack can carry a lot of bad stuff! I don't want to go there! Homeland Security will outlaw them one day but guns, that'll be okay, second amendment, you know. You'll never know when an American Indian or a grizzly will break into your apartment. Hey! What happened to the American Militia?

In truth the book publishers haven't learned yet how to make money with e-books. That way kids and grownups alike will have all their books stored in ipad devices, nooks, etc. and that should diminish the loads substantially. When it comes down to it, isn't it all about money? Where is Chuck Schumer, a do nothing Senator, who knows how to get on the side of the mindless not controversial issues? Have you heard what he said about railroad safety? He's in favor of it? Have you heard what he said about abolishing luggage surcharges for heavy carryon luggage at airports? He wants to eliminate it? Have you heard what he said about Putin's last provocation? No! Why? He said nothing because the issues were too controversial for Chucky boy?

How about those suitcases and duffle bags on the A train out to JFK? I shudder at the thought what could be inside them too. One day we may just find out!

At times entering a subway station and passing through the turnstile can be like a medieval jousting match. Often some people, about to swipe their metro cards, are faced suddenly with someone coming from the opposite direction racing toward them seeking to exit the station. You wait, they crunch through and you attempt to swipe again and perhaps this time you get in. It's most discourteous of course, but it is

outrageous when you are about to pay for your ride and someone, knowing that, blithely exiting pushes the turnstile in the opposite direction and it could void your fare. What train do they have to catch, The Twentieth Century Limited? I guess we're all in a hurry and "my time is more valuable than yours." It just doesn't mean a rat's ass to me" is that kind of logic. Those people are truly exceptional. We still can learn a thing or two from Parisians whose subway system provides separate places to enter and exit. Huh huh huh, *Viva la France!* Rubber rimmed wheels too on subway trains in Lyon, nice and quiet!

Recently, I see people jumping over the turnstiles to avoid paying their fare. That's something that I haven't seen in years! Some pull the mechanical barrier bar toward them half way and create enough space for them to squeeze their thighs through. Others duck beneath the barrier to gain entry and others, the very tall, simply step over the barrier bar like giraffes. Lately, I've seen two teens, normally thin get through together and pay one fare. If they can be that smart then why can't they get past Algebra 1a? We can do a better job of reducing this. If you see this happen, be smart and keep your mouth shut. They all should be arrested every single one of them, without exception, including adults and the elderly too. If we let them all get away with it then you can expect rising crime rates and that's the real problem folks! It all starts with the petty crimes that are unenforced and they graduate to purse snatching and armed robbery.

Recently, I did react when I saw a tall woman, about thirty-five years old, well dressed, step over the

turnstile and proceed to walk downstairs to catch a downtown local. I shouted,

“Officer, she’s gone to the downtown level.”

I walked quickly, a safe distance behind her and as I got to the lower level and I saw her walking hurriedly weaving through the crowd.

I shouted. “Right here officer, that’s her!”

She quickened her pace and darted out of the station from the other end and disappeared. There was no officer! I wanted her to think twice about doing that again. Dam gutter urchin!

As a citizen of this great City I want to do all I can to thwart those who forage off this community. These “gate-crashers” are vermin the losers that threaten our lives, feed off us and must to be punished for their offensive behavior.

Just about the most annoying thing is arriving on an express train into a station as the local train across the platform, the train you need to board to complete your trip, is stopped with the doors open. As soon as the express train stops, and its doors open, the local’s doors close and pulls out of the station with hundreds of people who have just emerged from the express left standing on the platform and forced to wait for the next local.

The conductors who do this use those opportunities to express their anger and control and as a result they detain thousands of straphangers. It’s a “power for power” thing. They are paid very well for what they do but that is not part of the job description. It’s called passive aggressive behavior. Why take it out on the riding public? Who else do they have to take it out on? With all the benefits they receive to perform their

jobs they must cut out that mistreatment. Such *chutzpah*! Who's monitoring that? Guess!

And if not, why not? If we're doing such a great job monitoring terrorism, it seems to me, then why not thi? To me, this is a form of terrorism. It's real and occurs thousands of times daily! Does the MTA have a system that monitors the amount of time commuters wait and if so do they attempt to fine-tune performance standards to reduce waiting time? Do they tabulate the average waiting time for "straphangers"? Are there goals set as targets that they strive to achieve? Why can't and why won't the MTA use a little imagination, authority and concern, union or no union? Just shut up and take care of it? I'm going subway about this! (Not postal this time.)

And finally, on a "good note" the vast majority of riders and MTA employees are polite, respectful and considerate. It doesn't take more than a few to make a safe, inexpensive and fast ride an unpleasant experience.

There simply are better ways to move the volume of people faster, cheaper and more pleasantly.

It's the huge numbers of people that make the subway exciting, as long as it doesn't get too cozy. The glass is half "full" because looking at everyone, wondering what they're thinking, each encapsulated within their own consciousness, daily lives, connected in time and space, vastly different, from so many cultures speaking so many languages, different dress and attire, all coming together, in the moment, enriching each other's experience as we "fly" beneath the ground, under the streets of the greatest City on earth. This will always be a thrill for me. I must admit

that I like it I really do. There's a certain sense of connectivity, being alive in The City and traveling with the herd. Not everyone gets it. Do you?

You don't agree? Ok! Leave New York City, go to Miami for one year and when you return you'll yearn for the sound of the subways, "Stand clear of the closing doors." It'll be the best sound you've ever heard. If you do not agree then look for an apartment in Homestead, Florida or Main Street in Podunk, Iowa and die of boredom. Well, it's not that bad out there is it? For the true New Yorker, we'd rather live in 780 square feet of space then give up our beloved City. Wouldn't you? Eh, it's certainly not for everybody.

Of the two choices, love and hate of the subway, I'm among those who love it, despite the fact that the hate side of the equation does creep under my skin a bit now and then. The benefits far outweigh the inconveniences. What matters most is attitude, which is true of most imperfect things that we all experience in life. It's not a perfect world and providing 5.7 million rides on an average weekday is a very tall order, especially for a government agency. Taken with a grain of salt, a ride on the subway in New York City is not a bad thing! Try it sometime. You just may find yourself on the love side of the equation.

You'll get to where you are going faster, cheaper and safer then any other way to transport yourself in The City of New York. You can't beat it with a stick and hold this thought: How much gasoline would the "straphangers" burn if they drove like the rest of the country, polluting the atmosphere, wasting time, sending money to The Middle East, and becoming

fatter? Ride on New York City! Ride on and please
“Stand clear of the closing doors!”

Take Back a Piece of New York City In Your Heart

Everyone who comes here for the first time arrives with preconceived notions of New York City. No two people have identical templates of New York City.

It's all a composite of their experiences; media dribble, misinformation shot straight to us from a distance; CSI, Special Victims Unit, The Taking of Pelham 123, Fort Apache, American Gangster, Goodfellas, Taxi Driver, our inner selves that misperceive, rearranging the blitz, our fears, and notions of all the fictions that bombard us masking the reality that is the true essence of New York City, its past, present and predictors of the future.

For those who have never been here before, it's a pure abstraction, a kaleidoscope, and abstraction of imaginary "experiences" that constantly assault our lives from afar. The New York City they "know" is built upon images, of what they have read, seen on television, heard from strangers, friends and family, filtered by their own values, fictitious expectations and specious fears, dreams and notions.

Reruns that never end such as "Sex and the City", noir movies such as "Miracle on 34th Street", "New York", "Goodfellas" "Once Upon a Time in America", "The Gangs of New York", Breakfast at Tiffany's", "The Godfather", "The French Connection" and countless other sources providing the essential backdrop conjuring up distorted views of New York City, the old New York City and the new fiction that newbies buy into by the quart.

We are new and improved unlike any other city that has reinvented itself like not has ever before. The real

New York City is unknowable unless you experience it for yourself over a lifetime.

The music of New York City provides "sound images" that ring in our ears and conveys our own New York City that's locked in our heads. Who hasn't seen The Rockettes, The Empire State Building, The Lady in the Harbor, and those ubiquitous street scenes of thousands moving through traffic struggling to reach their destinations from distant places before entering "The Promised Land"?

New York City is the broadest, widest and tallest and deepest stage on earth. Those who arrive catalogue all those places, images and characters with great expectations and have sought them out putting them together, struggling to reconcile all those forms of reality with their imagination and preconceived notions gathered near and far.

There's romance, nostalgia, mystery and pause. We look at street images from afar; the taxicabs constant and incessant needless stupid honking reveals elements of anger, road rage blended with the backdrop of people shouting at one another. We observe quiet and seemingly lonely souls reading on park benches, children romping in million dollar plus playgrounds, subways roaring past stations while many plug an endless variety of devices into their ears cancelling out the sounds of the City while still clinging to the energy of the City as they continue to dwell in its presence, a choice that millions have chosen to make. Commuters run to catch a bus and bicycle messengers dart through traffic competing against themselves to complete their rounds to "make a buck" while putting thousands in harm's way

without caring as if they're weaving through a handheld digital game without considering the consequences of their recklessness.

More people, cars, trucks and trains enter Manhattan on a typical weekday, than in any other city in The United States, much more. With only twenty-three square miles of terrain, Manhattan works and plays at a fast and furious pace. This segment of the City, only seven percent of the total land area of the entire City, together with its enormous structural verticality, is the center of energy, creativity and innovation on earth.

Consider this: Where else is so much happening in every field of human endeavor, in such a relatively small place, layered with abundant diversity, all with an abundance of harmony? No doubt, many visitors fail to put that notion out front and they are forced to redefine their misperceptions of New York City in countless new ways. It's more about the volume of everything that overwhelms the tourist and the enormous choices that one has here. It's everything from "A to Z" and more of it than anywhere else. It's the volume of life that engulfs the newbies and many of the rest of us at times. It's a give and take that requires personal management, introspection, reflection, self-searching and meaning. The sum of it all is this: New York City offers more choices and easier access to get to those choices than any other place on earth. That's the *summa magnifica* of New York City, access and choices. (Don't bother looking up the Latin italics. I made it up ☺)

Most visitors cannot imagine if a New York City resident moves merely one block down the street or

even to the other side of the same block that their dry cleaner will fear that they'll lose their business. Every block has a dry cleaner or perhaps two and the enhanced convenience of a short move might be the deciding factor resulting in the trashing of one vendor vs. another.

Take Duane Reade Drugs for example; they've got a drug store on practically every third block and they wouldn't be putting them there if they didn't expect to make money doing so. The population density is incredible. Just consider all of the people who live in the neighborhood, those who happen to work here, and others who just happen to be on their way to some place else, it's a beehive of humanity! If you've got something to sell and know how to sell it then you'll make money here, more than anywhere else. Just residents alone number 71,000 per square mile in Manhattan and if you discount all the parks, none residential zoned areas, schools, etc. then the residential areas are more dense then 71,000 residents. Add tourists, people who just work here and those who are here for other various reasons.

I just love those who complain that retail rents are too high! People are paying them and like everything in nature not all survive. So, for who are the rents too high? Simple. The rents are too high for those who rent stores and don't know what they're doing or plagued with unforeseeable events that unfold and foil their plan. Finding the highest justifiable rent is the best place to open a store, right? Who wants to be on 10th Avenue, off the beaten path, waiting for trade that will never come? But, lately parts of 10th Avenue are not so terrible for retail, hum? It'll only get better

and better. Just look up! All those people who live in the sky must come down to earth for a quart of milk or a bottle of shampoo. It's simple, here's the deal; Let's say you open a bar and across the street from two sixty story residential buildings and down the block are three 35 story buildings within four square blocks with approximately 9,000 additional residents. That's like having a "watering hole across the street from a total of 17,500 people! So, what should the rent be? As high as the can pay and make the venture worthwhile for themselves. That creates the equation that would justify a monthly rent of approximately \$60,000 a month or more! That's a real pleasure for a smart operator, justifiably high rent will yield big bucks but only for the smart operators.

Frequently, I have asked visitors, who are about to take a tour, what their pre-conceived notions of New York City are, especially those who have never been here before.

How much will *your* New York City change by end of your tour?" I ask a few questions and people respond.

"I came here thinking that it would be dirty, mismanaged, rude, crowded and unsafe."

My job is to provide an entertaining and engaging tour experience, one that enables my guests to view New York City through a different lens and reformulate their pre-conceived notions in order that they take back a much more accurate New York City than the one they brought with them. That's what a Custom & Private New York tour experience is all about for newbies.

New York City is a favorite place for producers to portray urban ghettos, crime, mafia, violence, police

corruption, terrorism, disasters and tragedies, King Kong, runaway subway trains, burning skyscrapers, street gangs, schoolyard knife fights, shootouts, car chases beneath elevated subway trains, multiple vehicular collisions, bank heists and chases that result in gun fire and death. These are the “themes” that producers love to film here. It’s a business and that’s what sells!

When tourists see Central Park they comment about crime. Harlem still strikes fear in many and the sound of police sirens creates puffed-up anxiety. Films and many television series filmed and themed in New York City are laced with scenes of violence and that is the overwhelming genre of choice. It’s the takeaway that Hollywood knows draws people to the theatre.

Sitcoms projecting New York City life in Seinfeld, King of Queens, Will and Grace, Sex and The City, Friends, The Jefferson’s and the classic All in the Family have the power to dominate the “tube” or the silver screen as the action and violence of the crime dramas, sex themes that are trashy and vacuous always get “top billing.” Although there are valuable messages among some of those mentioned above, you too know what they are. Hence, those people who come here carry the images that are projected by “Hollywood” and, at times, that’s not always what is taken home.

Regardless of where my clients want to go, tours are peppered with many themes. Why do so many people continue to come here over and over again? Why do so many people come here to visit or stay to carve out their lives? Do they find what they are looking for? How did New York City succeed in reducing the crime rate so dramatically? Essentially, what have been the

thematic forces that have driven this city in the past and what themes are driving it now? What does the future hold?

What path are we going down now? What's the real quality of public education, the numbers that define the real disparities of wealth, the extent of the problem of the underclass, opportunities, job equality, health care, housing, the transportation infrastructure and more? What are the limits of vertical growth in Manhattan? How will New York City solve the ever-increasing traffic problem? What will be the future of the enormous building construction boom? Will it die or explode even more? Who drives the outcome and who can put the brakes on? In the customary and usual course of life how and why will it come to an end or burst forth in more impressive and imaginative ways? What's going on now is incredible! There's construction everywhere and the height of buildings is breaking records all the time.

Innovation, ideas drive success, a non-judgmental liberal culture, ubiquitous kindness, un-dogmatic thinking pervades, enormous pride in the City, cooperation abounds, hard work, mutual respect, goal driven people from every walk of life and most of all "reaching for the sky" literally and figuratively is what we do and what we're about.

We're forever making it bigger and better and taking bold steps, always reaching for the future and, in many respects, not clinging to the past as, in most instances, our European friends had been doing for century after century, however now this have begun to change and impressive progress in being made.

Our skyline is the greatest visual symbol of this City. It's our most impressive signature defining our greatness. Our "temples" provide the graphic archive of our past, present and future in the making. If New York City were to stop growing it wouldn't be a high-speed train speeding off a cliff. Meaning, change is part of the present because change is imbedded in our DNA. Noticing change, a constant, is part of every experience. Change, is the only thing that stays the same in New York City. The energy and culture demand it. It's who we are, pure and simple.

Whenever it's possible, I point out the who, where, when, why and how of places and that adds a great deal to people's understanding of what New York City is all about. For example; we can research on our own, the height of the Empire State Building, how long it took to construct, the number of windows and amount of steel needed to support it but, that's not the real story because it fails to deliver the human factor, the drama and the reason for its very existence.

Folks want to know about the forces that came together resulting in the creation of bridges, monumental buildings and other impressive monuments and "temples" that define this town. Who decided to build them? Why? What were the driving forces? Who were the players, the movers and shakers, the losers and winners, the game changers and powerbrokers?

We can discover how Wall Street acquired its name and certainly, any guidebook will reveal the size of Central Park. In fact, you need not come here to accomplish that. Knowing why Central Park was built,

how the idea to construct the world's first landscaped park emerged, and what makes it so magnificent? What did it cost and why is it considered a technologically innovative landscaped park unlike any other before? What makes it so special is certainly an enthralling story.

Discovering many of the characters who have played vital roles in shaping this City over the last 400 years is another element that not only provides fodder for rearranging the New York City that's in your head, but it adds drama and excitement seldom found in guidebooks or heard on public bus tours.

No doubt, tourists who visit many large urban centers throughout the world have their preconceived notions redefined after they've been here. New York City is a City that I have discovered is either loved or hated almost without exception. Rarely have I meet someone who has expressed that they "like" New York City. People express passionate opinions about this City and vocalize their reasons justifying their hardened opinions with demonstrative intensity. In recent times, our City has taken on quite a few more devotees than in the past, that's why there are no "I Like N Y" tee shirts.

Our efforts to clean up our "act" and create a welcoming environment provide more of what people want and less of what they don't then ever before. We have, for good reason become the world's number one destination for those seeking just about anything they want to do; shop, see, eat, experience, meet, learn, drink and enjoy!

For those who come here for the first time, or have not been here for over fifteen years, I say:

“Save some room in your hearts because you’re going to need a place for New York City. It will dwell deep inside you, right where you tick!”

If you are the type of person who looks, not just sees, who listens, not just hears, who critics not merely imbibes, then the heartbeat of New York City will grab you and you’ll fall in love with this town. Grasp the greatness of New York City, as the producer of so much that is beautiful and admirable, created by its people and given to the world and you will acquire an advantage, one that will provide immeasurable pleasure, excitement and experiences during your visit that are due to remain with you forever.

People who find it difficult to “inhale” the huge volume of people, traffic, noise and energy ought to cast aside any negative emotions. Absorb the City with an open mind. Don’t let it daunt you as if you were standing in front of a spectacular buffet and haven’t eaten in two days. Take small bites and move on to the next entrée.

Those who do not welcome the City in their minds and hearts remain encapsulated within them and deny the benefits of experiencing this City. They forfeit the opportunity to comprehend its many wonders. Perhaps that’s a consequence of small town life, monolithic cultures of sameness, a lack of exposure to other cultures and values that tend to, at times, thwart acceptance and trust of those who have different ideas, beliefs and customs that may prevent them from opening their minds and hearts. Many are skeptical and do not accept any our values, politics and lifestyles. In truth this is more common with fellow Americans who are from the heartland, the

south, rural places and parts of the mid-west. Europeans, Asians, Australians, South Americans and Africans tend to embrace New York City more openly and express wonder and excitement not often seen by numerous American visitors.

What creates this suspicion? Surprisingly, many visitors from The United States actually believe that New Yorkers are less patriotic than our fellow countrymen even though we happen to be “the melting pot” City, a part of the United States that welcomed more immigrants then any other place. We are as proud as they are to be American. Our contributions to this country are incomparable in nearly every field of human endeavor. Certainly, some have resentment and contempt that is borne out of jealousy and envy by those who are truly unhappy with their lives. “Success breeds contempt and envy is one of the “deadly sins.”

Our “free-wheeling” ways produce greater expression with less dogmatic mores and inflexibility. Most New Yorkers do not have passionately strong compliance to religious observances. New York City is the ideal place to live if you are half of a mixed couple whether it’s gay or interracial or of different religious beliefs. This troubles others from places known to have more conservative and evangelical values. Why? We have the right to live our lives the way we want to just as anyone else! Who you love and who loves you is no one else’s business. We do not impose our lifestyles on anyone. Why are many people so harsh and critical of our liberalism and ideals? Far too many truly believe that we are sinners because we have too much fun. Let us go about our lives and we will

continue to accept all Americans without judgment, criticism or scorn. This is America and the diversity of our people is part of what has made this country the best on earth. Why do so many not understand this? Unless you're ancestors were Native American Indians then you blood arrived at these shores seeking opportunity and acceptance.

If you want to see America, don't come to New York City. If you want to see the world, come and please bring an open mind and heart. Welcome and enjoy!

~~Eastside, Westside, Beside?~~

It's sort of like that universal schoolyard incantation?
"Na-na-na-na NAH!" Remember that?

"You live on the Eastside? I enjoy the Westside. That's where I choose to live. So, what about it?"

How many times have we all heard one version or another of that ubiquitous flim-flam, that goes back and forth with residents extolling the benefits, praises and justifications for choosing to live on one side of "town" or on the other? We are, of course, referring to the "Upper" of each, not the Lower East Side, aka LES, and don't bother looking for the lower Westside, there isn't any and there's no "Middle East" either in New York City.

Although the distinction is discussed in good humor, most often, the Upper Eastside has traditionally been known to be more moneyed, "old money" that's been derived from smokestack industries, coal, and steel, shipping, aluminum, bananas, pineapples, coffee, glass, railroads, iron, copper, etc. People involved in finance, banking, insurance, the "well-heeled" have settled into the wealthiest zip codes in the United States such as on the Upper Eastside, the fabled zip code 10022. I had the "joy" of mailing alimony checks to that zip code for years. Still trying to get it out of my mind, 10022 or is it 10002, eh? Presently, the wealthiest zip code in The United States is in Tribeca, 10013.

Fifth Avenue, long referred to as the "gold coast" contains co-op apartments that run into tens of millions of dollars most with very unreasonable and demanding coop boards that scrutinize the wealthy in every way imaginable. In many cases, they require

the buyer to have a net worth many times the selling price and it must be invested in high-grade “liquid” form such as T-bills, U. S. notes, triple A corporate bonds, etc. No mortgage please either, cash deals only!

East of Fifth Avenue Madison Avenue is the Rodeo Drive of New York City, currently home of upscale global clothing purveyors, art galleries and top-notch accessory stores that sell less for more. The Eastside is a wider terrain then the Westside stretching from Fifth Avenue to East End Avenue, at certain points, putting many residents further away from Central Park, and their one subway line, located on Lexington Avenue until the long awaited “Q Tip” as we call it has been put into limited action connecting the most northern stop which was 63rd and Lex. Now with four added stops on 2nd Ave at 72nd 77th 86th and 96th Street some long over due relief has come to the Upper Eastside. Four stops and nine years later at a cost of \$4.5 billion and it’s completion, don’t hold your breath, to 125th St will add \$12.5 billion more. East River Park is a pinch park compared with Riverside Park, much wider by far on the Westside extends nearly the entire length of the Upper Westside, another Olmstead and Vaux masterpiece.

Take a look at Fifth Avenue, a one-Way Street until 1966 and much narrower then Central Park West, which is a wide four lane two way street with subway stations nicely spaced up and down the entire fifty-one block stretch and imbued with far more humanity and canines then you’ll see on fabled Fifth Avenue. Sure there are lots of dog walkers, doctor’s patients, domestics, building employees, people on

their way to and from work and the usual flock of museum goers on Fifth. The neighborhood does not have the energy, bounce, spark, diversity, soul and feel of Central Park West. Frankly, it's a bit stiff. Nice people, I suppose, who pay a lot of taxes, just the right amount, right? Hum! Many of the owners of those opulent co-ops are absentia as in London, The *cote d'azure*, Dubai or The Hamptons.

Did you know that, historically cities tend to settle on the eastside of town first because the westerly direction of the morning commute puts the sun behind them and on the trip back home at day's end sun is behind them as well. This has been the case even before the advent of automobiles. Horses and donkeys hate sun glare too.

"White, bright and polite" a phrase that has characterized the Upper Eastside, tongue and cheek, has much truth. It is far less diverse than the Upper Westside and more inclined to be snobbish, dotted with brash neighborhood restaurants, boutiques, banks and shops.

A recent article in The New York Times revealed that only two-percent of its residents are Latino and African-American women who are seen lunching in the neighborhood are assumed to be nannies, domestics or laundresses. Bloomingdales, several Ralph Lauren stores with \$1,500 alligator belts, art galleries, Dean & DeLuca's, Dylan's Candy Bar, Serendipities and all the rest, have given this neighborhood less of what New York City is really all about; liberal leaning politics and diversity. It seems to have more of the Republican, Tea Party spin with the Fox twirl, Rush Limbaugh hoopla and Bill

O'Reilly's "spin" and that's out of synch with 90% of New York City. Remember him? Poor guy, one of the founding father's of the #metoo movement. Poor Bill, how's your "no spin" life spinning now buster? ☺

Still, it is a well-liked, not so loved, part of town, not nearly as much as before. New and trendy neighborhoods have emerged that compete with The Upper Eastside for the dollars of the gilded .01%. Still, it's a safe haven for new comers and those whose parents or trusts are footing the bill, for sure. "You're not living on the Westside, it's not safe!" What a myth! The Westside packs the most creative energy, actors, musicians, composers, producers, writers, choreographers, designers, artists and more of those who think outside the box, except when it comes to politics, which is generally loaded with liberal and Democratic Party devotees. There are far more parks and cultural attractions out west. It tends to be younger, I do believe. Broadway bisects the Upper Westside and it has it all, wide open and adorned with lush plantings, benches in center medians, more subway lines, red, blue and orange, theatres in abundance, Columbus Circle, The Time Warner Center, Lincoln Center, Julliard School of Music, The Museum of Natural History, The Rose Space Museum, Columbia University, CCNY, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Grant's Tomb, Washington's HQ, Alexander Hamilton's home, Pomander Walk, better and less costly food stores and the best Jewish Delis, Zabar's, Barney Greenglass, and no shortage of fine dining, more multi-plex movie theatres and great housing stock, which is, cost wise, just about parallel with most of the Upper Eastside nowadays, all other

things being equal. Its diversity, creativity, open-mindedness and less pretentious culture are its primary distinctions compared with The Upper Eastside.

There's more friendliness and acceptance of every ethnic group. Ever since the construction of Lincoln Center and the gentrification of Lincoln Square, the Westside began to shed its stigma as a less affluent, perilous and hostile environment. Those days are over, unless and until change comes and in New York City hey anything can happen but, a downward spiral is very unlikely in the foreseeable future unless the subway don't achieve some noticeable improvement.

Truthfully, I am not claiming that one side is better than the other. They're different and depending on who and what you are, either one is a better fit, your choice and your wish. It's your choice entirely, unless someone pays the rent with a bit of financial control over you. Certainly, many Eastside residents would find the Westside a better fit for them but preconceived notions, advice, fear, closed minds, listening to their mother or friends who have their own thoughts, at times, push their priorities or a sense of prestige and snobbery upon their dependents, "it's safer" and that may have driven them east.

Just because someone lives on either side doesn't mean they fit those commonly believed stereotypes. The Upper Westside is more a bastion of liberal wealth, one of the few left in the country. If that suits you better then "go west young man" or woman.

So if you love burgers, banks, bars, candy and tobacco, card shops, drug stores, nail places, Chinese

takeout, dry cleaners, hardware stores and baby strollers then east might be best for you.

The west is for the rest. Oh yes, and if you decide to sit down on a bench in the median on Broadway you'll notice a lot of interesting characters to talk to. On Park Ave, you can do the same thing except please keep in mind that the flowers don't talk but some have been known to listen.

New Yawk Tawk

Living in New York City is dwelling in an ever-changing environment and a significant part of that change is how we "tawk." In most places language changes gradually, but not so in New York City. We have a brisk, always changing vernacular.

The use of foreign worn out expressions and phrases and uncommon syntax have been replaced with a new means of expression. New words seep into our lingo. Words spoken in English, quite often, carry phrases imported from every speaker's native tongues, such as:

"You need do me that!" "Let me bring you out." "You need not go back ways." "I was standing on my clock an hour." In the order listed above, those phrases in Yiddish mean: "Don't do that to me." "Let me explain." "Don't go behind my back" and "I was kept waiting for an hour."

Expressions that meant one thing years ago acquire new meanings today. Many words or expressions used today on a regular basis were unheard of in the not too distant past or had meanings that are no longer valid. Let's start with "diner-speak."

Waiters and waitresses often chant their orders in a language that most people do not comprehend, for example:

"Burn the British" "Give me a radio, whisky down", "high and dry", "stretch a pair", and on and on. Translation, in order listed is, toasted English muffin, radio is tuna, "tune-a", "whiskey" is rye bread as in rye and "down" is toasted. "High and dry" is no butter, stretch a pair is two Cokes, and "stretch," relates to the soda coming out of an old fashioned soda

fountain, or stretching. We also hear "deluxe" for burger deluxe and that includes the burger on a bun, French fries, lettuce, a piece of pickle, a slice of raw onion and tomato, which is also known as "the works" and that tiny paper cup with one cubic inch of coleslaw is always included. It's the same paper cup that dentists use for the abrasive cleaning mix.

BLT is an obvious favorite, also the name of a high-end restaurant chain that bears the initials of the founder, Bistro Laurent Tourondel. Don't leave out "hold the" for leave it out, and the forever popular "86" for cancel which was derived from Chumley's, a bar, located at 86 Bedford Street in the West Village when it had been a speakeasy. The owners had an "inside" arrangement with some of the local police who would call ahead alerting Chumley's (est. 1926 during prohibition) patrons of an impending police raid. The shout "86" would clear the place. It's still the only bar in the City that doesn't have a sign. It after the completion of its recent renovation but the local "community" board kept the brakes on because locals didn't want to return of the loud and rowdy establishment close to home. I think that's a gross exaggeration cooked up by the snobbish neighbors who own 10 million dollar plus townhouses nearby.

I was in an elevator recently with my daughter, who was in her mid-thirties at the time. We were accompanied by a few other baby boomers, folks in their sixties and older. A conversation began and I take the blame for that using an old expression in the context of that brief chat, "you're darn tootin'." My daughter looked at me quizzically, and asked, "What does that mean?"

“You don’t know what that means? You’ve never heard that expression?”

I was astonished that she had never heard it before.

“No!” she exclaimed. The baby boomers on board were all surprised too! That expression vanished from the vernacular and none of us even knew that! For those of you who don’t know, it means, you’re correct.

Another phrase that has vanished from the lexicon is “after all is said and done.” But this one has been replaced by the ubiquitous, “at the end of the day” a phrase that has been beaten to death by every standup comic, broadcast journalist and suited office worker during endless and useless meetings be it school, military, school faculties or Wall Street types. I hate that expression almost as much as that stupid expression “phone tag” another worn out phrase.

“I’m either on the phone or away from my desk” is another brainchild brought to us by the program imbedded in an answering machine. I just love the “either” in the previous example as if those are the only possible explanations for the recipient of the ringing phone not answering. There are quite a few people who do not answer their phones who are not either on their phone nor away from their desks. Many do not have a desk, or are not on the phone either. Maybe the phone isn’t being answered because of “caller ID”, another term that has entered the lexicon not too long ago. Toss in “call waiting” “call forwarding” skype, whatsapp and a “phone card” just a few more the nuances that have joined the muddle of our ever-changing language.

What could the executive and secretary have been doing besides being “either on the phone or away from their desk”? Just once I’d love to hear the voice mail:

“I’m either hidden in my closet with my arms wrapped around my twenty-four year old secretary or my secretary has joined me for a “dirty” martini at the bar around the corner.”

Perhaps the most annoying phrases are the automated digitally driven menu dribble such as:

“This call may be monitored for quality assurance or training purposes.” Wouldn’t it be better to have trained your employees before a client confronts them? I’m not being paid to train their employees wasting my time to have to hear that recording and my voice being used subsequently to train or monitor their personnel!

To me the most annoying recorded message is: “We are experiencing longer than normal wait times. Please be patient and the next available operator will be with you shortly. Your call is very important to us.” But, it’s not as important as being short-staffed because that saves you money and they don’t give a rat’s ass if you have to wait. Truth be told, your call is obviously not as important to them as watching their expenses, right! Repeat message every 30 seconds, beep!

We all know why this automated system is in play. It’s a means to prevent some ill-trained or underpaid live person from irritating the shit out of a customer or client, driven by their priorities, cutting costs. That’s what’s most important to them. Who do they think they’re kidding?

"Hail a cab" is never used, now it's "grab a taxi" or "get a taxi" or cab. Have you ever asked a taxi driver to, "Follow that cab?" That's old noir from those black and white Jimmy Stewart, Edward G. Robinson or Humphrey Bogart movies.

What newsstand vendor shouts? "Extra, extra! Read all about it" Do you ever hear, "Brother can you spare me a dime?" the classic from the Great Depression. Today it is either, "change please" or "can you spare some change?" Or, listen to a monotonic diatribe dribble from a slouch they that starts their pitch by asking God to bless you and preach that they don't want to disturb you in their quest for your pocket change but they ARE! I do feel sorrier for them then for us having a momentary interruption. Ever notice how many beggars are veterans? Where do are those corrugated cardboard signs sold? Humm, poor souls.

There's a panhandler in my 'hood who never heard the word, "change." He asks for a "dollar!" Perhaps he's got an MBA from Harvard. No one would waste his or her time asking for a dime even in these difficult times, you would think? But those folks standing next to folding tables with huge empty water bottles pleading for donations for the homeless and ask for pennies! President Obama's mantra has been "change" and that inspired me to suggest to a number of panhandlers to alter or change their pitch too. "It's time for change" or similar words to that effect. Some have actually applied the idea with good results! I know because they've told me, amazing. It's not what you say or ask for, it's how you ask: Sales or Panhandling 101.

“Twenty-three skidoo.” Where did that come from? New York City! The Flatiron building located at the intersection of 5th Avenue and Broadway at 23rd Street, a 1902 triangular steel frame wonder that causes wind to cascade and swirl down 23rd Street lifting ladies dresses up revealing peeks above their ankles. Way back then ladies dresses touched the pavement and men sat eagerly sitting on benches across the street from The Flatiron, in Madison Square Park waiting for those propitious moments, rising dresses! The cops chased them away with the chant,

“Twenty-three skidoo! Get out of here!”

Most people under the age of forty never heard of that expression. Gone, as one generation is doomed to the passage of time.

At that time, The Flatiron Building, completed in 1902, was the first place where “Edison Actualities” were viewed in stores through kinescopes that featured New York City street scenes. They filmed horse drawn wagons, omnibuses, pedestrians, and women’s dresses rising as swirling wind currents around the Flatiron Building initiated the desired effect. “Actualities”, a word no longer in use, has been replaced by the word movies. Could it be that those “actualities” were the first porn flicks? Google, Edison Actualities and you’ll see them. Behave yourself!

The most significant change in language is that people simply do not speak, “face to face”, or even “on the phone” as much as they used to. When was the last time you were in an elevator with no one wearing ear buds or using on their smart phone or reading their

Kindle or Nook, texting or playing an electronic game. Yes, Steve Jobs and others has changed the world!

On many occasions, I've been in an elevator where every person was "connected" to a device including, but not limited to, reviewing their incoming calls on their "cell" using some electronic marvel that did not exist several years ago. Such as "Texting" a new word in today's lingo, checking the weather, making a reservation for dinner or finding the best route to wherever they're driving today or searching a GPS, another set of initials that everyone knows instantly but ten years ago, a duh! "There's an App for that." "Do you like Waze or Google for traffic?" Five years ago that meant nothing! Instagram, Snapchat that to me! Did you get my message on Facebook? Today, if you ask someone about the weather, or acknowledge someone with a polite "hello" or "good morning" then you're out of luck!

Oh, and don't forget the kids! They're wearing out their thumbs with electronic "games" by maneuvering robots between the twelfth floor and lobby during my elevator ride or they're trying to figure out how to steal cars, "Grand Theft Auto II." And for those who are not electronically inclined there's always Sudoku, KenKen, crossword puzzles and other means to keep them quiet. At least they can be done with paper and a pencil, not just with the aid of a handheld device. Now that's progress. "Bridge", Canasta, gin, chess, checkers, scrabble or solitaire anyone?" "What are those?" Oh yes, there's an app for each of them. Sure there are, how stupid of me!

I have watched New Yorkers crossing the street while emailing with handheld device while the driver who

they should have been consciously attempting to avoid was talking illegally on a cell phone while “running” a red light, and perhaps steering with their knees while texting their daughter trying to find out where she is. That’s if she doesn’t have a GPS tethered to her necklace while he’s trying to balance his cup of hot coffee, black, on his crotch! Hope it spills on the family jewels!

Are we moving in the wrong direction? I think so! Take me back to the days of the busy signal, or an unanswered ringing phone. 411, remember that? “What number do you wish please?” “Operator, can I help you?”

Unfortunately, all those great pranks now live in history. I remember my mother yelling, “Are you fooling around with the phone?”

“No mom, of course not!” as I watched a car with a sign Lincoln Park Pizza pull up in front of Mrs. Cooper’s house bearing four large pizzas with anchovies! Why anchovies? Because nobody orders that! At times, after about fifteen minutes after I had placed my order, knowing that the anchovies were blistering on the pizza in the oven, I’d call the pizza place and tell them to cancel the order. They shouted, “Whadda you mean, eh? Whad I’m a goina do wit four anchovy pizzas?”

I told him, “Why not use them as hubcaps on your pizza delivery car or strap them on your flying saucer, eh!” So nasty of me, just a twelve year old kid having fun and trying to get past that craziness that comes with being young.

What fun! Now gone forever due to caller ID. What a shame. What a crying shame! Amazing that most of us

grow up some day. What mischief are kids doing today? All Internet based, no doubt.

We have become a disconnected society thanks to our modern day technological revolution. We've morphed into a society mired with devices that have become the centerpieces of our very existence. Although they are intended to increase our connectivity they impede it. Personal face-to-face contact as we stand two feet from one another has vanished.

Email me, text me, fax me, tweet me, go to my facebook page, but don't call me! We seem to consider a phone call the closest form of engagement when people about one hundred years ago must have been saying similarly, "I never get to speak with blabla face to face! He just calls me and that's crazy! I haven't seen him in months!" People who express a desire to connect through the web on sites such as classmates.com, Facebook, EHarmony, Match, JDate, Christian Mingle, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. reach out but do not call; no talk, no speak, no see, no close up. It amuses me that I receive countless emails from people requesting that we become contacted on Linked-in. Most of those requests come from people I don't recall ever knowing, meeting, seeing or speaking to. I crush those requests with a click. Social media, it's our way of life. Self-serving strangers encroaching on me without a hint of "How are you?" That's social networking? Please! Go away if you don't have enough sense to ask, "How are you?" Why would they want to be Linked-in with me? It's transparent! Want me to be your buddy, then give me a call and let's find out why

or at least send me an email. Eh, I know that won't work.

It's all about money because Linked-in is a site created to enhance your "social network" on the Internet creating traction to make Linked-in money by providing opportunities for their members. Ka-Ching!

Recently, I received a Linked-in request from the chef concierge of a five star hotel in New York City to be connected with me. I used to stop by many times seeking business for Custom & Private. I left her gifts, brochures and other various items to create a business connection and she never gave me a thing except a phony smile. That's okay. You can't win them all! But, why then does she request that we connect on Linked-in? I responded to her request with a message asking, "Why?" I never heard from her so, crawl back under your desk and get out of my cyberspace baby!

In this electronic world, even in New York City, many people have lost their ability to have a conversation, write a letter, let alone have a postage stamp. What's a postage stamp? Are we raising children who perceive communication as a lesson in typing? Some school districts in this country have discontinued teaching cursive writing! *Unbelievable!*

The film camera has gone the way of the trash heap, so has the movie camera, cassette tape recorder, typewriter, and next it will be the spiral bound lined notebook and plain old book, pen, pencil, alarm clock, telephone book, etc. Boo who ☹

Those who have created these devices may have known all along that this would be the effect on direct

person-to-person communication; in fact, they wished it. But, for corporate icons or titans it didn't hurt their bottom lines, bonuses, stock options or perks. I believe that inventors and geeks are out to change the world for the better and indeed they have given us the Internet, the iPod, iPad, the PC, imac, Dell, cell phone, smart phone, iphone and the ability to move business and life much more quickly, but we are paying a very high price.

Here's a short list: CNN, CDR, DVR, ATM, RPG, DWI, TSA, NSA, GPS, spam, .com, .net, .org, the web, "goggle that", Metrocard, ip address, browser, "call or click us", tweet, debit card, Square, flat screen, global warming, drones, dirty bomb, text me, yahoo, twitter, apple TV, Amazon, Echo, Alexa, Netflix, Facebook, iPad, Angie's List, browser, link, Greg's List, Backpage, Kindle, Nook, Uber, TripAdvisor (I like that one) and on and on. Who knows a 13 year old who won't pay a price to wear out their thumbs instead of their tongue?

"Walkman" was a new thing introduced by Sony in 1979 and WOW! We could listen to our favorite cassette tape in our pockets. That was big, very big. Now, there are devices that you wear on your wrist that stores over 2,500 songs, digitally and it's they're available with the touch of your finger! That's good, real good but don't talk to me because "I'm in the zone, man!"

Are the basic communication skills of our next generation up to par with their predecessors? Have they tumbled back into the Stone Age? Have their face-to-face conversational skills fallen into the abyss and has confidence in interviews hit rock bottom?

Perhaps the class of 2020 will be interviewed via email or Facebook. Sure, it happens everyday! I wouldn't be surprised if that's going on right now in an interview "chat room"! Sure, of course it is! College degrees are attainable on the Internet and that's nothing new. That reminds me of the MAD magazine spook years ago, "Brain Surgery self-taught" via U.S. mail.

Whatever happened to "The 3 R's" as in good ol' reading, writing and 'rithmetic? What change would the song "I'm Gonna Sit Right down and Write Myself a Letter" have today? Oh, make that an email or text and thanks very much.com! "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and text my babe a text." Not good, not good at all!

We use tools invented by geniuses but at what price? Press one for English, press two for Spanish and some day it will be press 6 for Portuguese and 12 for Russian. How are people ever going to learn how to speak their new local language? There's a device that enables you to point it to a sign, with a menu in virtually any language and it will display the translation you wish for on your devices screen. An audible version of the translation is available as well. It can also translate words spoken and instantly provide the audible translation in the language of your choice. This is amazing stuff!

If you want to speak to an agent say "agent" or "representative." Does that annoy you? I want to speak to a person right from the get go and all the way to the end! What is this world coming to?

“Okay, let’s get started. Let me pull up your records. Okay, I see you have an account with us. Is that correct?” Ouch!

We have become a disconnected society immersed in a world of technology that has reared its ugly technology. Myriads of inventions have come forth, intended to enhance our lives have encapsulated us, even in a City as dense as New York City. With 71,000 people per square mile in Manhattan, the densest county in The United States, is there anyone to talk with? Sure, lots, just get unplugged.

New York City is a place where direct communication will never die because we’re so densely packed and it’s still growing. I fear that other places with greater distances between people will fall and fail to hold on to the graces and benefits of direct eye contact, body language and the nuances of traditional modes of communication. So much is lost and misunderstood via emails and texts; the emotion, raised eyebrows, frowns, wrinkled foreheads and the intent that language alone fails to convey, as only facial expressions and voice inflections can do. Electronic devices disrupt and distort communication, causing irreparable harm to relationships, lost business deals and opportunities gone by despite the benefits that electronic superhighways provide. It will never happen for us, as a race, to revert back to pen and paper, the busy signal, ask a neighbor what the weather forecast is and ask if we can borrow their newspaper and “brother can your spare me a stamp.” Somehow, I just don’t get the same “kick” out of an email as receiving a handwritten letter, especially with a lipstick smack on the back doused with a

splash of perfume and the initials, S.W.A.K., sealed with a kiss. Mr. Gates, Mr. Dell and Mr. Dorsey, Mr. Ellis, Mr. Zuckerberg will never improve that.

I'll take my chances here in New York City as the best place to ride out those changes and know that I can always find opportunities to communicate the old fashioned way which is: up close and personal. By the way, "Please text me, email me, be my friend on Facebook, tweet me how you are and what's new with you?" But don't call me. I just may not know what to say, or how to say it! Is that my phone ringing?

Starbucks

Most active and energetic New Yorkers crave a few cups of “Joe” throughout the morning, afternoon hours and evenings too. In other words, when they’re awake they want to be more awake! Granted, coffee is on the low end of “the speed spectrum” but it provides that extra lift that, for many, is very addicting, the basis of Starbucks’ success. Know what I mean? Are you listening? Awake? Have a latte, schmattie, espresso whipped cream double!

I’ve never understood the “draw” of Starbucks. Sure, it was a new concept, a “coffee emporium” with its endless variety of coffee preparations, cappuccino, espresso, latte, “tall”, which incidentally, means short or small. Don’t you love the genius of marketing Starbucks way? Add whipped cream, cinnamon sprinkles, sugared caramel syrup, almonds, marshmallows, green mint slime and all of that and you’ve got a caloric mountain in the palm of your hands all for only \$8.99.

Then came the peripherals because the rents are so high, that a cup of coffee for about \$3.25 isn’t going to “cut” the rent. Along comes the high priced sodas, biscotti, health food bars, salads, sandwiches, and music to go, coffee by the pound, mugs, gift cards, books and music DVD’s provided for those standing in long lines waiting for their brew to help Starbucks pay their rent! Cookies, cake, food, sandwiches and health food bars, newspapers and such round out the venue to pay the rent. Imagine. Standing in line, in New York City, for overpriced bitter coffee . . . no sir!

My alienation from Starbucks extends to all the bland American chain stores, such as Dunkin’ Donuts, Pappa

John's Pizza, McDonald's, "Crapplebee's", The Gap, Subway, Banana Republic and Duane Reade, now owned by the behemoth middle American Walgreen's, owned by people who know a lot less than they thought they knew about New York City and man, does it show. "Your drugstore, your City." their tagline featured in Duane Reade's display windows. Yeah, it is our City, not yours and if they did it right they'd own it too. It amazes me that such a successful enterprise can be so off the mark. They're creations of Middle America, they're imports and void of our local culture, history, politics and way of life. Now present in Manhattan we have a piece of Texas too, nothing wrong with that but, brought to you by The Southland Corporation, Seven-Eleven!

Recently, as I was handed my change and receipt, about a foot long, at a Duane Reade drug store, the cashier said to me,

"Have a great day and feel good."

The following day another cashier said,

"Hope you have a nice day and nice to see you."

I asked her if she had been instructed by the store manager to say two nice things to each customer when they completed their transaction. I knew that must be true, obvious to me that some foreigner marketing genius put that one down. She replied, "Oh, yes, that's true!" For me it was insulting my intelligence, nothing personal. Programing people to be nice, in an obvious way, is an out of town ploy and it's not working. Trickle down manners from management to a cashier directly to you is a crock! They couldn't trust the concept of just asking their cashiers to be nice, smile and show an interest in the

customer. But no, it had to be specific; two pleasant things must be said. OMG! Yes sir, SIR!

Where are we, in “the mall” or a drive up strip mall in a little village in some out of the way place? A walk through New York City reveals that we’re moving in that direction, in a place that has, or had, its own identity, the melting pot, a multiplicity of cultures, small businesses, a different venue on every block, the characters, soul, personality. Those chain operations do not have the unique and distinct persona of the local owners of retail stores here without a New York City flair, culture and persona. New York City the “real deal.” That panache, the personality of New York City is evaporating like a cup of stale coffee. It’s called suburbanization. I have a better name for it, Middle America or Mall-O-Maniacs. When I walk into a Starbucks it’s always for one reason. I need a brown paper napkin to blow my nose, wipe my eyes, or my forehead in hot humid weather. I enter, grab a few of those industrial strength brown paper napkins, just blow or wipe and leave them there, in the proper receptacle, of course. Walking in to use the restroom is frequently a waste of nothing but my time. By law, food purveyors whose establishments have seating for twenty or more patrons, in New York City, are required to provide bathrooms for their customers. Ever notice how many places have nineteen seats? Look around! Starbucks consistently has more than twenty however their bathrooms, in my experience, are most often “out of order” more than any other chain operation in the City. Why is that folks? I never heard of one of their coffee machines needing a royal flush,

hum? Recently, there was an article in the New York Times that cited Starbuck's "barristers" aka coffee pourers, as deliberately locking bathroom doors and posting "Out of order" signs. Breakin' the law you upstanding down right wrong coffee pourers. Barristers! Would someone please tell Howard Schultz, born and bread in New York City, that barristers are mistreating citizens of the city and breaking the law! I'll bet the toilets work just fine for you Howard. There's an old Japanese saying that "the fish stinks from the head." Step aside Howard; I have to pee!

Years ago, I'd dare not enter Starbuck's with my six pound Yorkshire even for a napkin because I've been told by more than one coffee pourer to leave because dogs are not allowed in food establishments in New York City, even though I'm holding that little canine, it's still not allowed. Okay, so ask me to leave but don't bark at me. Even my pooch doesn't do that! Being nice is a part of New York City's culture.

Jackie Mason had a terrific "routine" about Starbucks in one of his wonderful one-man shows on Broadway. He put the nail right on the head. He characterized the high prices, lack of adequate seating, the attitude and the taste of the coffee as plaaahhh; "so what's the bargain? What's so terrific? I have to pay \$8.95", an exaggeration, but true if you go for the fancy stuff.

"I can get a cup of coffee anywhere for about a \$1.50 on the street! And, hey, it's very good coffee! Fancy schmancy! Who needs it?"

Italian guy, approximately sixty to sixty-five years old, wearing a white tank top undershirt, aka a "wife beater" and a newsboy cap, had a variety of videos

available on his website, and YouTube, just for the clicking, he does a “number” on Starbucks, something to this effect.

“I gotta be nuts ta go ta Starbucks, eh? I go ta Tony’s on Atlantic Avenue and get two eggs, toast, bacon, sausage, and coffee wit refills, a large OJ all fa \$5.95, an a coffee ta go! Ya can’t beat dat wit a stick. If I go ta Starbucks I get a Latte wit notin’ else fa \$5.95! What am I a freakin’ jerk or what, eh? Gi me a freakin’ break! Know what I’m sayin’? Fagettaboutit!”

Hey folks, if you love or even like Starbucks and there must be thousands of you so you must love the taste, service, locations and atmosphere and I’m happy for you. But do you know that you’re contributing to ripping the melting pot apart? Every one of the hundreds, yes hundreds, of Starbucks that litter the City deprives us of the opportunity to sit down at Mary’s or 64th Street Coffee Stop or Harry’s Coffee, all fictitious, never to exist establishments. Or, perhaps the candy stores, private card shops, unique places with a New York City flair that could have provided and compete as New Yorkers are intended to do but sadly it’s too late for that.

We’re not a strip mall or a piece of middle America! Sure, it’s a free country and Starbucks has the money and the power as well as all the connections to invade Manhattan and the outer boroughs with the highest priced coffee, “suburbanizing” the melting pot putting their footprint on our precious soil and robbing New Yorkers of opportunities, choices and the neighborhood look and feel. To me this is a not a good thing!

Drink up New York City but remember the City that you are drinking to may not be there when you smell the coffee! Try the street vendors because for \$1.50 you'll get a real New York bargain and help a New Yorker support their family, not stockholders and fat cat landlords.

Chapter IV

"Gotcha Last!"

6'5" vs. 5'6"

It was bad enough that the check for \$1,846 had bounced twice and from a man who stood very tall, 6'5"! I didn't expect to see that money or him ever again. I had placed "that bouncer" in my desk drawer as a daily reminder that I shouldn't be too trusting. It remained in my drawer for over a year. Totally unexpectedly, he surfaced at my store. It had been as if he had vanished from the planet and then, out of nowhere he suddenly he appeared.

He used to be a terrific customer, usually paying in cash; he had never been a problem until that bouncer. Yes indeed, Dave was a very good customer was he, Dave. I was always glad to see him, especially this time.

I had made every attempt, I could think of, to find him. Evening the score has been a way of life for me. As my father used to say, "Chase 'em down the alley." That was dear ol' dad's high-spirited "m.o." to get his money. That's what I had learned from "the old man" and it rang loud and clear in my brain.

I had sent my two largest and gruesome looking employees to his home, hoping that he'd be there to greet them two sweet guys, late twenties, black twins, 240lbs and about 6'3". But Dave was "scarce" and despite my best efforts he was nowhere to be found.

Alas! Dinosaur Dave suddenly appeared! He walked into my one-hour photo store on West 23rd Street, Clicks One Hour Photo, as if nothing was ever "afoot."

I greeted Dave with raised arms and a pat on the back, lower portion of course, with a big broad devilish smile and a "How great you look Dave! How the hell are you?"

"Cliff, you look great too!"

Don't you love the bullshit especially when there's one purpose completely self-serving purpose behind it? I knew Dave walked into my store for a reason and I was relishing the chatter trying to anticipate what mission he was cooking up for me.

After the small talk, I asked Dave how I could help him, with no mention of the bounced check, duh! It turned out that he needed hundreds of

Canon color laser copies of various teddy bears, little stuffed animals, "plush toys" that apparently he had been selling. He sold them, by the hundreds to corporate accounts with their logos custom imprinted on those fluffy little creatures. He solicited orders from banks, insurance companies, car dealers and real estate brokers and of course, hey, why not one-hour photo stores too? I'd be the first. Sure, why not? Ha ha ha! This was an opportunity that I perceived and it couldn't be missed. Goody! After the customary and usual chitchat I had asked Dave if I could take a peek at his catalogue.

"Sure, why not?" his wide-eyed reply.

He eagerly and unwittingly, handed a catalogue to me to peruse. I asked him, with my mascot right beside me, Gizmo, my five-pound Yorkshire terrier, if he could customize a job for me with Gizmo's picture on the stuffed toys together with my company logo.

"No big deal, how many do you need?"

"What do they cost Dave? I would like about 300."

The price was approximately \$2,600.00. Perfecto! I made my selection, gave Dave a signed purchase order and anticipated my shipment's arrival due in about four weeks.

The copies Dave had ordered that afternoon were paid for in full in cash with crisp hundred dollar bills. Discussion of the "bouncer" never came up. What for? Perhaps, he had forgotten all about it. You never know. Some folks drop bad checks all over town and simply loose track of them. Like bears, they leave tracks but they can't possibly retrace all the hits they create. Hey, it was fun waiting for the teddies to arrive especially if it helps someone learn a good lesson on top of the justice that was due. I love teaching. What a lesson plan for Dinosaur Dave. I knew he'd get an A. Way to go Dave, Honor Roll Dave! It was so nice to see him, even if I had to strain my neck a bit, just like the schmucks in the "glass is falling from the sky" story in this book! See Slice "New Yorkers Are Not So Smart."

Four weeks flew by and Dave made his appearance with a helper and together they schlepped about twenty cartons into the store filled with 300 teddies. "Houston, the teddies have landed!"

"Hey Dave, it's great to see you again! Can you guys put them downstairs? Let me show you where I want them." I requested.

We went down to the warehouse. Dave and his assistant stacked them up very neatly. The bears were silent, sleeping in the darkness, waiting for their purposeful debut.

Dave prepared an invoice for me. He was better at creating invoices than preparing checks! I went to my

office, removed the \$1,846 rubber check from my desk drawer, still in great condition, stapled to the insufficient funds advices that I had received from the bank with the service fees attached. Hey, banks have to eat too, right!

I couldn't help imagining that Dave was thinking about the \$2,600 check that was coming his way. Boy o boy, some nice payday for the big guy. Uh huh, nothing doin'!

Little did he know that I had previously attempted to ply a trick that my father had plied many years before that actually made a bad check payable. He had accepted a \$500 check that had bounced twice. He went to the bank, asked the teller how much was needed to make the check good. He was advised that \$120 would satisfy the deficiency. He removed the necessary cash from his pocket and made the required deposit. In those days anyone could deposit cash into anyone's account. Today, I'm not so sure with all that Patriot Act stuff that's out there, rules and "regs", eh? The teller certified the check for him, as he had requested, and his loss was reduced from \$500 to \$120, not too bad. I couldn't have accomplished the same thing with Dave's check because what was needed to make that rubber check good was about \$1,700! Not an attractive plan.

I returned from my office with Dave's rubber check and I handed it to him,

"Dave, here's your money!" I said.

It took some balls on my part. My big guys surrounded me, just in case. I waited for his reaction, with a bit of a grin, and it didn't take too long! I knew that he would be pissed off but I wasn't afraid that he

would launch me out the front plate glass window. He actually was a sweet guy, many conmen are. Not all thieves are total shitheads. He was only a partial shithead, a guy with his head up his ass and up above the clouds.

"Hey, that's not fair, this is a \$2,600 invoice, and I want the rest of the money, about \$750. I only screwed you for about \$1,800. Come on Cliff!"

At this point he had admitted that the pointed end of the screw was pointed in his direction; that he would he got his "comeuppance." He was out of gas and knew it!

"Dave, the price you charged me, for the teddies, was not your cost! Had it been I'd have paid you're the \$750 but there's no logic to you selling me 42,600 worth of teddies at your cost. I'm not stupid my friend. You stood to make approximately \$750 profit on the transaction as I see it, that's my guess. Therefore, I believe that your rubber check of \$1,846 covers your cost, *capise*! That's why I upped the order to \$2,600!"

Yeah, he *capised*.

He left, not too happy, but we did shake hands. How could Dave have been such a schmuck? Greed and stupidity are the only reasons I can think of. Perhaps he learned a valuable lesson, I do hope so. It's a shame because Dave had plenty of talent and he could have been earning a good living by going straight.

Now, what was I going to do with 300 teddies? All of my employees were pleading with me for one. Christmas was just around the corner. They were all over my ass with that. "I want a teddy, I want a teddy." So childish! Incredible!

“What are you going to do with them? What are you going to use them for?” I was asked over and over again. Why are people so needy for a stupid little toy? They could have purchased similar items for \$5.99 back in those days. They just had to hammer the boss incessantly! To me, it was amusing that they had such great jobs with me; these well paid hard working adults acting like such juvenile pinheads.

I knew I’d think of something to do with the teddies. I didn’t want to sell them there’s no logic to that. I’m not in the toy business. Selling merchandise with your company logo is so tacky and diminishes your brand. It provides no benefit whatsoever.

After my teddies spent about two months “sleeping” in the warehouse it was time for them to awaken and make their debut. On a day of lousy weather I revealed my plan to my employees and we went into action. The teddies were brought upstairs into the store. I sent a messenger to the hardware store to purchase about ten pounds of Velcro. We stuck the teddies every place we could, tacking them up all over the store. We stuck them on top of printing machines, copiers, shelves, walls, ceilings, window ledges, racks, etc. Customers who came in wanted to know how they could get one. “How much are they?” “I need two!” A lot of buzz was afoot! “I WANT ONE!!!”

I had a flyer printed and we inserted one into every shopping bag of photos, film, batteries, albums, etc. and we handed the flyers out on the street, pasted them on buildings, traffic light poles and offered every customer the opportunity to walk out with a free teddy on the day after the Christmas and New Year holiday weekend. All that was required of them

was to drop off one roll of film for processing. Nothing else!

It turned out to be the best day we ever had! We opened the store early and ran our processing equipment all night in order to accommodate all the business.

I do not recall exactly how much business this promotion provided but it did have an enormous impact and it was tons of fun. Most of my customers worked in the neighborhood and for years thereafter they told me,

“I still have my teddy on my desk.”

Ah, that’s New York City. Taking a bounced check and turning it into an opportunity was a blast. I wish I had one of the teddies left over for myself, as a memento of a David and Goliath story especially because I was the Goliath and David was the loser. Actually, perhaps we both came away as winners because if Dave learned his lesson it would have been, in an obtuse way, a priceless gift and life lesson for him.

“I’ll keep all the bounced checks I can get until I find a way to “chase ‘em down the alley” just like dear ol’ dad said. Thanks Dad, you taught me well!

From Lease to Leashes

The tale you're about to read is totally true but to the vast majority of New Yorkers, such events are so remote totally off their radar. For those not involved in small business ownership, "on the street" such stuff happens only on other planets or in the movies. It's like "A Tale of Two Cities", one half has no idea what the other half is doing and visa versa. "Let 'em eat cake" a line for the ages.

Once upon a time, I had met a woman who was to become my second wife, Aline, a woman from France. She came to New York City to find adventure, fun, work, romance and opportunities. Together, we found them all! She arrived with a work visa in hand and plied her trade, retail clothing sales on fashionable Madison Avenue, New York City's Rodeo Drive. It was a commission only job and she did very well.

Shortly after our relationship began to bloom she received threatening signals from her employer, who had signed off on her work visa every year had decided not to sign off for Aline's visa when Aline made her most recent request. For Aline's employer, it was out of the question.

Aline never had any intention of leaving her job. Aline's employer knew that Aline and I were off to the Hamptons every summer weekend in my Mercedes convertible and that had created the notion, in her bosses' little head, that Aline would inevitably toss her job away and live off the income of her new beau, *moi*. Therefore, her boss acted very stupidly and rejected Aline's application for her visa renewal. Incredible! She had reacted vindictively and stupidly

due to her misperception that I was wealthy, which appeared to be a reasonable assumption. Rather than retain her most productive salesperson, out of ego, insecurity, pride and stupidity, she let her go. You'd be amazed how often stuff like that happens, incredible. Why didn't she discuss the matter with Aline before shooting herself in the foot? Or, in the least, do nothing and wait for events to unfold?

Don't you just love when someone rejects opportunities due entirely to a misperception of events? "Self-inflicted emotional stupidity" leads to the best justice; the price they pay can be huge. It's like the accused throwing the switch on themselves! ZAP. Better than "Old Sparky" the Sing-Sing electric chair! You don't have to say a thing! They just self-destruct and spend their lives justifying their lost fortunes because they were the victim; in their own little stupid heads and that doesn't prevent them from continuing to blame the blameless. In this case that was Aline and I. Thusly, it forced Aline to go into business for herself, a much better opportunity to earn money and become far more independent.

It's a true and amazing fact of life that has repeated itself for Aline and me many times. People's anger to get back at me too due to resentment, envy, etc. initially motivated to bring me down have the opposite effect; they get burned and I and or Aline have literally become liberated!

"You dis'd me!" It's all in their heads, dumb! Thanks, in large part, due to the emotional stupidity of others Aline and I have thrived over the years. Frankly, we take a dose of credit for our own success too; don't get me wrong.

Without the visa-sponsored job, Aline's legal residency in The United States was in jeopardy.

A suitable solution was needed, fast. With trust and confidence in our relationship, we had agreed that the best way to resolve this was to hire an immigration attorney and find another way. The way forward was an investor visa. A \$50,000 investment, made by Aline, in a new business of her own would provide the necessary visa. For the record, Aline is now a citizen of The United States. A real Franco-American Yankee Doodle Dandy! God bless America!

We took the right route; I found a near perfect opportunity to sub-lease a store in the building where we lived on West 57th Street. Gizmo's One Hour Photo was born, a terrific little store, another pocket for us and a way to rescue Aline's American legal status.

The store lease was a sublease, meaning, her landlord, owner of a video rental business next door, sold film developing and printing service, as a side add-on to his customers. We insisted that he agree to insert a clause in the lease that would restrict him from selling those services, a non-compete clause, that was a given, naturally. He agreed, at least that is what he had said and he signed the lease affirming his commitment, legally. His reluctance to honor that clause turned out to be his undoing, the next retailer whose stupidity helped to bring him down and, in the process Aline and me advanced to a better situation.

Several years after Gizmo's had been opened I found an opportunity for Aline to move her business to a better location on Lexington Avenue, one that suited her objectives and dovetailed with my deteriorating business situation. By comparison, my business was

far larger employing over sixty people at six locations. The one-hour photo industry was in the throes crashing. Her volume of business on 57th Street had fallen and we found a much better place and at a reduced rent for her to park her equipment and re-establish her business one that would provide more income.

On one occasion I entered the landlord's video store, next door to Gizmo's, to deliver his rent check and I had noticed a sign behind his counter featuring photocopy and photographic services. Clearly, this was a major violation of Aline's sublease. I knew I'd crucify him for cheating us because clearly he was taking business away from us, a major breach of our sublease. For me, it was a yes moment, a mechanism to escape from the clutches of the sublease, providing a clean break and the necessary escape to relocate the business. It was also an opportunity to get even with a greedy, stupid snake that was ripping us off.

I got in touch with a friend who happened to be a very large, skinhead Italian guy who also was one of the smartest guys I had ever met. I told him about our dilemma and he agreed to implement the solution for us, one that I had devised.

Putting the plan into play, he walked into the landlord's video store, looked around, pretended to be interested in the terms of their video club membership, which was a customary marketing tool back in those days. He and Aline's landlord became engaged in a conversation regarding the privileges, benefits and cost of video club membership. After the completion of the conversation with the landlord he revealed that he had noticed the sign behind the

counter featuring the photo copying service, the one that I had told him about. He placed an order, waited for his order to be completed and then he acquired all the receipts, in detail, and strolled out.

I called my lawyer immediately and he promptly prepared a lawsuit for \$100,000 against the landlord. About two days later the landlord was “served” with a “summons and complaint”. It was a slam-dunk! Naturally, we didn’t provide the evidence we had gathered against him. That would have been dumb. But, he knew, in his heart, that we had the goods. The trap was set.

A day or two later he approached us and attempted to negotiate a settlement. Ultimately, we agreed that we would drop the suit in return for a release from all the obligations under the lease. That enabled Aline to move her equipment to 360 Lexington Avenue, a much more favorable lease opportunity at a far better location. The schmuck landlord on 57th Street was left with an empty store because he was a greedy pig. He just couldn’t live up to the deal; rather he had to put his sticky fingers into our pockets. Some just keep denying what they should have learned the first time they tried to screw themselves out of a beneficial relationship.

Only one of my most tenacious business creditors attempted to prove, with her lawyer, that Aline’s store was actually mine, derived from money that flowed from me directly. I do hope that she spent a lot of money trying to prove what she never could prove because it was untrue. Even if I was the real owner she would never gotten a penny, just the means to wreck Aline’s legal status in The United States at

great expense to her. It was just another emotional misperception by another ego driven insecure little worm who was slithering down the wrong trail and that little trip down the wrong path ultimately got much worse for her and she slid down the pole like a greased rat. Aline and I roared when she “folded her tent” again though just not for the last time, yet! We anticipated that and were licking our chops because we rightly predicted where her next SNAFU was coming and we manned the gates and that nailed her like a Nor’easter and it blasted the wind out of her sails.

I guess that creditor once again had thought that I wasn’t too smart. Dumb da dumb dumb DUMB! Yuk, yuk!

We played it smart and found the sweet spot, planned and implemented a strategy that helped save our asses.

The store we had moved to provided all the benefits we had wished for and more. It was a nice source of extra income, continued the validity of Aline’s visa and ultimately we gave the business to the landlord because the continued attrition of the business due to the plunging One Hour Photo industry moving in the digital direction gave us no benefit at that location. It did however service it’s purpose well. The “side-car” of jerking the greedy female villainous creditor went back to her roost.

By and “bye” the video store vanished and our photo store at that site became a doggie wash and dry, bones, leashes not leases. We moved to Florida for a year, upon good legal advice until I could complete

the legal process of putting my one hour photo chain out of business through Chapter 11.

Ah, New York City is a place where anything is possible. This time someone had wanted to throw my wife out of her film store. That sort of reminded me of Tony, "I want to talk to you about your film store." Unlike Tony, we had interests on one side, ours! See "slice", "I Got Interests on Both Sides."

Some Dumb Sun

Sun, had seemed to be an attractive person; meaning her intelligence, sophistication, background and ability to engage in stimulating and interesting conversation was readily apparent to me. She was a good-looking woman, not a babe or runway model, a somewhat hefty, overweight, mature looking, perhaps you could say had entered middle age, very conversant, extremely smart. As one who had held an advanced degree from a very prestigious university located in The People's Republic of China, she spoke nearly perfect English, very well informed, self-expressed, and socially engaging. Yes, I had assessed her as a very "attractive" person.

In addition, she was energetic and anxious to connect with me as a resource to enhance her fledgling tour business. She was a licensed New York City tour guide with multi-lingual abilities, a potentially valuable resource for me as a guide to hire on a tour-by-tour basis.

Our first conversation was on the phone. She had called me in response to an ad I had placed on a guide association website. As a result, I invited her to meet and discuss potential business opportunities.

Our conversation was engaging and she seemed to have an excellent background and considerable knowledge of New York City. We each expressed an interest in going forward with our discussion and we agreed the meet at a coffee shop on the Upper Westside, not a Starbucks!

Several days later we met. I had coffee and some comfort food; she had tea and some health food. I love eating with weighty people who order health food. No

doubt, they are “closet” eaters. If they’re eating healthy food regularly then how did they get so plump?

Sun told me quite a bit about her background, her childhood in China, the hardships that she and her family had endured, the scarcity of food, their meager housing, political fears, their struggles to survive and the challenges of creating a productive and secure life in, what was at the time, a third world country.

Sun had inquired about my background and business experience with an ear bent eagerly listening to me revealing how I had, in a relatively short period of time, built a successful private tour business in New York City. She had asked numerous questions such as: “Where does your business come from? How do you use the Internet as a business tool? Who do you use as a vehicle provider?” I felt that despite her intelligence, it was obvious that she was picking my brain, an unfriendly potential competitor. I was a bit disappointed and insulted because it offended my intelligence and that revealed her primary mission. It exposed that she was not as smart as I had thought.

She was clearly reptilian, blatantly voracious for business, somehow desperate for money, and a major turn-off to me. Apparently, she had not realized that I “got it!” I perceived that she had a “wheel” missing and that had raised my suspicions but it did not eliminate the prospect that she would work for us as a Mandarin speaking licensed guide. On that basis she really could do us no harm.

After “the sit-down” and some further evaluation, I decided to give Sun the opportunity to join us

together with our other tour guides and possibly become a member of our staff.

She was pleased to have succeeded in acquiring this new opportunity, one that might advance her tour-guiding career. I subsequently made the preparations to put her on one of our websites in order for prospective clients to become aware of her enabling them to “book” tours with her through our business.

At a New York Guides Association Christmas party Sun meet Aline and Sun had enveloped her with attention. Aline remarked that she was smothered with chatter by Sun who was seeking to create a firm and powerful connection, with Aline, to make an impression that she was capable and available for opportunities going forward. Nothing was wrong with that but she was very domineering and pushy. Aline perceived that this woman was unauthentic. Instinctively Aline did not trust her and it turned out, in the end, that she was right, too right.

She cautioned me about this woman. There was something strange about her, she told me and cautioned me to be on guard. I had not sensed that yet, much to Aline’s surprise.

A number of weeks had passed and Aline had gone to France to visit her parents in Nice. During her visit, I, being alone, had gotten antsy and decided to seek some company with someone seeking some interesting conversation. Despite Aline’s warning, I called Sun and invited her to meet me for a tea, a drink and a bite to eat at a moderately priced restaurant-bar in midtown late one afternoon.

She agreed however, she had suggested that we meet at Trump International Condo and Hotel on Central

Park West and Jean Georges restaurant. I immediately rejected that idea, due to the cost. A little bell went off in my head, hum, what's up with that? Trump? To have a casual meet for chitchat seemed odd, perhaps a "setup" meaning a trail that would caste suspicious notions as to my "true" motives for the meet. Essentially, that I was looking to impress her for impure reasons.

We met at the restaurant where I had suggested, much lower profile, and became engaged in some very stimulating conversation. We spoke about her life, background, what it was like to live in China as a child, her fears for her family and herself, survival, and currently her goals for her fledgling tour business. I spoke about my background, family and how I got into the tour business, and so forth. She had told me that she had a teenage daughter and that her first husband, her daughter's father, was living in China. Currently, she was residing in Brooklyn with her second husband and her daughter and that she was trying to hold her life together and make a successful life here in New York City of her tour business.

I concluded that, quite likely, she had "trashed" her first husband and married the second husband in order to begin the process of obtaining legal status in The United States for her daughter and herself.

We said goodbye with a handshake, she stopped by the ladies room and I left the restaurant alone.

Aline's stay in Nice was extended. Her parents are very elderly and her presence there provided a great deal of support and benefit for them. I encouraged her to stay; it was the right thing for her to do and at

that time of year, the winter, the tour business in New York City plummets.

I had told Aline, during one of our daily conversations, that I had met Sun for a drink and we had engaged in some small talk. I was quite surprised that Aline had cautioned me again not to see her. Keep it strictly business she had warned me. This was not a jealousy issue. Aline is a very secure woman, very. She also knew that I enjoyed the company of smart women and they enjoyed being with me too, so I've been told. It was not a threat to her just a word of caution for me to be on guard.

Good conversation is not easy to find especially with people who are extremely bright, well educated, and are from far away places with unusual cultural backgrounds. Sun provided all of that and we had a very interesting discussion that afternoon.

Contrary to Aline's advice, I called Sun about a week later and invited her for a *redux*. She accepted and we met a few days thereafter at the same place.

We continued our prior conversation discussing Chinese history, culture, economics, and her life. We talked about my life, struggles, family, politics and current events. After a few hours, I peppered her with stories of my life, some silly off color jokes, but nothing "over the top." I steered clear of vulgar or inappropriate humor that may have been considered such by most ladies, especially those from foreign cultures. I was very careful not to cross that line. We left the restaurant and again went our separate ways. I was comfortable that we'd had another pleasant time, terrific conversation, fascinating and esoteric.

Several days after our second meet at the restaurant-bar I received a very strange email from her quite contrary to all the others that I had received before. Those initial emails from her read, such as:

You are the most intelligent tour guide I ever
met in my 8 years career.
How can I get Chinese visitors' information?

Actually, I would like to discuss with you
about the marketing stuff, my new tour
plan, since you are certainly a pioneer
in this business field, and your website,
Etc. What would you like to discuss about?

Let's meet at ____ at ____ Mon
At 3:30, ok, Sun

I made the reservation for Monday 31th's (sic)
Lunch at 3:15 PM at Nougatine Jean Georges
under my name Sun M. It is at Center (sic)
Park West, the 1st floor of Trump.

My emails:

Just to clarify, I am accepting of your email and
know that you're Chinese, and that's not relevant.
I am married and love my wife. My only intent
was to have a business meeting with you, with
the purpose of exploring opportunities. My agenda
is pure and simple.

The emails kicked back and forth with more chatter
from Sun that included very inquisitive and defensive
suspicious posturing. It seemed that she was
attempting to lure me into a trap; to agree to buy her

an expensive lunch, or go out to her neighborhood and determine if I had a desire to go out of my way, perhaps to be near her home and to “come on to her” while my wife was away. It didn’t add up. I saw it as a devious ploy at the time. I was beginning to access Aline’s admonition as good advice, “woman’s intuition?”

The final emails tell it all: After the second meeting at the same restaurant, she sent me another email that floored me and confirmed that Aline’s instincts were “on the money” in more ways than one. Having a robust sense of humor, during our meeting I tossed out several jokes, some a bit off color but not in bad taste, in my opinion, but maybe they just might have been in hers. Nothing in any way intended to create the notion of, let’s get out of here. I never invited her to leave the establishment with me nor was it implied. She apparently had an addenda.

Here it comes:

It was disgusting that you talked about sex in the meeting. I felt deeply insulted.

1,000 apologies for yesterday. I didn’t mean any disrespect. Our friendship means a lot to me.

All I ask for is your friendship and forgiveness.

That email was evidence that I backed off because her email revealed to me that either culturally or otherwise she was, very unusual, a rogue looking for a “mark” to go after.

Knowing that she had left her marriage, the father of her daughter, came here, then conveniently met a

man who had at that time, been engaged to be married, and she had chased him despite that and then married him and went back to China, apparently to bring her daughter here from mainland China, legally, due to her marriage to an American was a major signpost. She plotted and used him as a mechanism to bring her daughter to The United States to obtain legal resident status granted to her and her daughter. The following email from her confirmed that.

Don't write me anymore. I don't forgive that. I don't want to see you or hear from you any more, including the marketing meeting, otherwise I don't know what would happen when I am very upset. I preserve (sic) the right about what to do.

To me, this is evidence of three things: First, that she's nuts. Second, that she consulted a lawyer, or had prior experience in such antics. "I preserve the right about what to do." That came directly from an attorney. She got it wrong because she meant "reserve" but "the cat was out of the bag."

What was that about? I found out pretty quick. Third, it was to set a trap. Final email from Sun, here comes the strike!

Or mail me a \$1,000 check by the end of next week instead of 1,000 apologies. Then I would be able to throw out the fly I was force (sic) to swallow down by you.

So, it was all about money, extortion! Boom! What the hell was that about? And the stupidity of asking for

money in writing and payment by check! Perhaps her lawyer hadn't finished law school yet?

The prior email that I shouldn't contact her anymore reconfirmed her craziness because after I had done a bit of investigating, I had been told that if I called, emailed or contacted her, in any way, that I could have been confronted with a knock at my front door by a couple of cops at three in the morning arresting me for "aggravated harassment."

That was the reason for that email: "Don't write me anymore . . .!" It was a sequence of events leading me down a path that she had plotted, one that could have ruined my life, my marriage and our business.

Before Aline came home from France I had consulted with three friends, a NYC Police Officer, an attorney and a doctor, all three very close friends with lifetimes of wisdom and experience very relevant and diverse backgrounds chimed in:

The cop suggested that I file a complaint and have her arrested for extortion. To him, it was a black and white case. I had all the evidence needed via emails and truly it was a slam-dunk case of extortion. I turned away from that because it could have become a "can of worms." I had no idea who she knew or of what craziness she was capable. In addition, she could have hired a "legal aid" attorney or a hit man. People lie and they love to take advantage of "the system." I had fit the type, in her head, of what she was hoping. If you are married to someone with assets, especially if they're not your own, then chaos can ensue and destroy you. Therefore, my friend may have been a terrific cop, but the kind of life experience that was in my face was not in his arsenal.

To me, it was apparent, that he didn't know how to look at all the angles.

The lawyer's advice was that the notion that the late night knock at the door by police was a long shot, but not impossible. We agreed that the best thing to do was nothing. I did have the ace of spades; the extortion email and certainly she knew that was her Achilles heel or perhaps she was not as smart at this game as I had assumed. She underestimated my intelligence or life experience too. It was a chance that she had apparently decided to take. Desperate people do desperate things. What the hell was a thousand bucks going to do for her? Taking a chance for that, just "small potatoes"!

The doctor asked me what I planned to do when Aline got home. I decided not to tell her because I had felt that the entire situation would go away. There was no logic to waking up a "sleeping dog" about a "fly that had gotten swallowed" when nothing of significance had actually happened. As it turned out, events unfolded in a most beneficial and interesting way.

The email exchange between Sun and me created a trap due to her last email and, as a result, she had gotten herself entangled in her own web. Nothing had tipped me off about what was about to happen next.

Aline returned from France and got back into her routine. I didn't tell her that I had seen Sun for the second time. It probably would have disappointed and annoyed her and accomplished nothing good. Although I had disregarded Aline's advice not to see Sun the second time, it was far from a betrayal or an unfaithful act.

I wanted to avoid the potential of disappointing her or creating a few lousy evenings between us. That's why I had decided to keep my mouth shut. I had no guilt, but I felt just a bit of regret that I hadn't followed her advice. I was feeling a somewhat contrite.

Certainly, I had believed that a little space, in such a way, was within bounds. At best it was my decision and again, it turned out that I should have taken her advice.

I never contacted Sun after the extortion email and suspected that the threat would have evaporated. Moving forward and pressing charges against her would have accomplished nothing good and it could have resulted in a "shit storm." Sure enough I never heard from her again, but Aline did!

Several days after Aline returned back home she met a friend at a restaurant for a leisurely lunch. While sipping her wine her cellphone rang. It was Sun! Sun had received Aline's business card at the guide's association Christmas party we had attended about a month earlier.

When Aline returned home later that afternoon, she had asked me, "Guess who called me while I was having lunch?" I had a strange feeling it was Sun. After Aline told me that it was Sun I had asked her what she wanted. She told me that she told Sun that she'd call her back when she got home. There was no conversation between them due to Aline's wish not to disrupt her lunch engagement with her friend.

I, without hesitation, told Aline that there was an incident and I spelled it out for her in detail. I showed her all the emails between Sun and me.

The only disappointment Aline had was that I didn't accept her advice not to see Sun a second time while she was in France. I agreed that it was a mistake and admitted that I should have heeded her warning.

I had shown Aline *all* the emails including the last two, the \$1,000 extortion email and "the stay away and don't communicate with me email" before she got on the phone with Sun. She was shocked!

She agreed to call Sun right away. Sun was no match for her. Aline steered her right down the alley. I, with Aline's consent, listened to their conversation on the other phone.

"Hi, Sun this is Aline."

"Oh hi! How are you doing?" Sun ask.

"How can I help you Sun?"

"I just want you to know that your husband took me out for drinks and some food twice while you were away and he spoke to me in a very inappropriate manner, telling me jokes that were not in good taste. I was very insulted and want you to know that we met while you were away in France."

"Didn't my husband offer to meet you and me when I returned from France, the three of us instead of the two of you? You could have met with us both instead if you had felt uncomfortable just meeting him alone? Did he provide you with that choice?"

"Yes he did."

"Sun, let me ask you, what is the purpose of your call?"

"I want you to see *all* the emails that were sent between the two of us."

"Okay, send them, here's my email address . . . "

"But, Sun, what is the problem? My husband gets along very well with women. He enjoys having conversations with women and they find him to be an interesting, amusing and sensitive man, unlike most men. In fact, he has more girlfriends than I do. You know, it's about interesting people to talk with, nothing more."

"Let me just send you the emails okay?"

Sun sent the emails and omitted the two final emails, the extortion and the threat. Hum?

The intentional failure to send those last two emails was an obvious act to mislead and lie, by omission. Aline never responded to Sun, what for?

There are a lot of good lessons here:

First, the tale of the wolf in sheep's clothing. This seemingly normal person, intelligent, interesting, engaging and well-presented articulate person is a sociopathic nut job. She was out to destroy a man or at the least make a "buck" for herself in a deceitful, despicable and illegal way. But, she miscalculated because she misjudged, thinking that I would be so upset, weak, and guilt ridden and fearful that she would contact my wife and that I would crumble, giving into her demand for \$1,000, by check! That was the stupidest and most desperate part of it all! A check! Despite knowing, as she should have surmised, that once Aline know her story then why would have paid her the \$1,000. To Sun, my purpose in paying her would have been hush money. She evaporated that motive and told Aline about the incidents just to sabotage my marriage out of spite and malice. There's no other motive for that that I can come up with!

Second, she could have called the cops and I could have faced criminal charges, enormous legal fees, lost time, stress and a ruptured a marriage if had I been married someone else, a person who could have blown this bullshit way out of proportion and pushed it into a break up.

Third, if I had pressed charges against her, the worst case scenario could have been a financial calamity, one with the potential of one or some of her “friends”, from the other side of the tracks, causing me bodily harm or even death, seriously! This person was a certifiable nut job and potentially capable of anything. Fourth, even an experienced person can be fooled. The world, and this City are filled with wackos. Be careful and watch out for yourself. People are, I have learned, not always who they appear to be.

Be aware that it's a jungle out there and don't get wooed into a trap. Good luck and follow your instincts. When in doubt, assume the worst and go with your gut. Seek advice and don't fold your tent.

As for my “friend” Sun, how did she make out for all her trouble? Well, she accomplished absolutely nothing. She tossed away an opportunity to have a beneficial business relationship with us. She exposed herself as a fraud, sociopath and damaged her reputation.

Finally, I could have taken, a potential deportation route for her and her daughter to be thrown out of the country or landing her in jail. If I had perused that enthusiastically, I believe it is very likely that I would have prevailed. Fortunately for her, I've got better things to do.

I “reserve the right” to do that and she, on the other hand, could conceivably, attempted to convince a judge or jury that I contacted her after her last email simply by lying. Justice is iffy. There’s always a chance that the unexpected will happen. Never count on anything in the criminal justice system. Nothing. The DA may have not even wanted to pursue the case if I decided to press charges. I’ll never know.

It’s a really crazy story that just can’t be made up. Be careful out there. Some people on the streets are certifiably crazy! Keep your eyes and ears open and when in doubt keep movin’ buster. A you ladies out there be careful there’s no shortage of men that can harm you in many ways. Be careful!!

The Mis-Guided Russian Guide

Although we have several excellent Russian speaking guides on the “team” I responded to an email from a Russian-speaking guide who was seeking an opportunity to be on our roster. There was no harm acquiring additional qualified guides especially those who have excellent foreign language skills. It’s good business to have backup and it costs nothing to recruit excellent licensed guides.

Igor was pleased with my interest in meeting him at The Time-Warner Center at Columbus Circle for an interview. We made a date, and I requested that he call me, upon his arrived, due at 11AM. At 11:13AM I received a text message from him that he was “here.” I replied that I too had arrived. My phone rang again at 11:15AM and he told me that he was “here.” A duh! Upon sighting him, as he waved, I didn’t know how to recognize him any other way, I walked toward him and we shook hands and I promptly told him,

“I can’t use you because you did not follow my instructions and your phone call was late. How can I assume that you were here on time.” I continued.

“Sorry but, I cannot depend on you to follow instructions and show up on time. When you called me you were nearly fifteen minutes late and that’s unacceptable!”

He pleaded with me to give him another chance and babbled about the distance that he had traveled to meet me, having had train trouble and that sort of crap.

I told him that I was not “buying” it and that being prompt is the first axiom in business especially for an interview. He was persistent and tenacious,

incessantly begging and pleading with me to reconsider.

My cell phone rang in the midst of all of this. I promptly took the call. It was a hotel concierge asking me if I could be there as soon as possible to provide a tour for their guests. I indicated that I would be there within half an hour.

Igor was still standing about a foot in front of me. I told him that perhaps he had learned a good lesson and I asked him to please “get out of my face!”

He continued to banter, asking me for another chance again and again and begged for my forgiveness relentlessly. I turned and walked away from this *putz*.

I arrived at the hotel and while I was engaged in conversation with the concierges I started to receive text messages from Igor. After I received about the eighth one, I read them all to the concierges after I had been explaining the experience with this guy.

These are his text messages, one following the next rapidly. I, in the texts stands for Ivan:

I just want you to know that it's your
loss buddy. You should really reconsider.
You have poorly judged a great tour guide
wrong. Good luck doing business. I.

You probably don't get much business
anyway with your impressive personality.
That's probably why your wife left you
and went to Europe. I.

Wouldn't be surprised if she's cheating
on you and just staying with you for the
money. People like you are funny. I.

Probably got a small dick too, you short piece

of shit. I.

Probably got a small dick too, you short piece
of shit. I.

The above text I received twice

No hard feeling though, but we just can't escape
the truth. Call Me (sic) if you rethink your decision.
I might reconsider given that You (sic) will be nice
to me.

I showed these emails to one of the concierges and
had explained the story to him. He suggested that I
reply in the most hysterical way and I did.

OK you got the job! C

We were practically falling on the floor with laughter
when I hit the send button! Then his text messages
continued!

What? I.

Are you serious? I.

I don't know it could be a trap. You are probably
furious about what I sad (sic) to you. Why would
you about what I sad (sic) to you. Why would
you want to give me the job? I.

Plus, I don't know anything about this job. Why don't
you call me and tell me please. Is it a full time? How
much will I make? What sort of hours? R.

I can't trust you, I think you are a con artist of some
kind. I have tried meeting with you 3 times already.
You first approached me in central Park while I was

Giving a R

While I was giving a tour, you told me you were impressed.
You were trying to get me to work for you. Then a few
months later I contacted you. R

Its been 3 or 4 times. You are a very sketchy man. Really,
Buddy, I can't trust you. I should report you to the
authorities perhaps, but you know. What I don't want
Trouble. R.

Where can I meet you if you say I got the Job? Time Warner
Center again? 11 AM, that seems to be the time & place
all the time. When I call you you're always in a noisy place. I.

Very suspicious I

So tell me how can I become part of the team at Custom &
Private tours? I

? I

Do I come to Central Park West & 96th St? Is that where
your office is? I

I would have to send you my correct resume with the
correct name and address through (sic) & information. I

When can I send it? I

What is your email? I

Real on please. I

These text messages were flying in every few minutes
while my tour had begun. It was distracting, annoying
and revealed much about this guy. He was vulgar,
extremely angry and totally screwed up. He exposed
himself as a liar and was suspiciously neurotic. I told

my guests that I had a “cockroach” in my cellphone and that I wanted to kill it.

“Please excuse me for a moment as I’d like to get rid of it.” I shot him the following final text message.

I am putting you on notice that there is no job
due to your messages and disrespect and further
attempts to contact me will be reported to the
police as grounds for malicious harassment. Cliff Strome

Amazing how one experience can provide a benefit for the next. It’s just another example of “reading” people and learning how to survive in The Big City.

Juan Comes Back Home

Years ago, I operated a retail photofinishing business that morphed into a one-hour photo chain and commercial digital imaging facility. With a staff of hardworking New Yorkers from all over the world, the business thrived. Together with those talented and hardworking employees, a terrific business was built and flourished for many years. In the beginning, I employed two hard working people, an Irish woman from Queens and a young Dominican man who had proudly earned his high school diploma, Juan.

Juan was a most likeable guy; enthusiastic, energetic hard working and he always got to work on time. As the business grew I took on additional employees and Juan became well liked and respected. Always ready, willing and able to pitch-in and lend a hand. Juan was an eager learner as well. He acquired a great deal of knowledge about the production end of the business and eventually he taught others how to print, mix chemicals, maintain the machines and monitor quality control. He took great pride in his work and was happy to “advance” himself, seeking to build a bright future for himself and his family.

There were others, employed by me, who had advanced and exceeded his growth, income and responsibilities. Although Juan was making a very good salary, with benefits, he built up some “steam” sensing that I was holding him back, due to his ethnicity and country of origin. Others from Puerto Rico, Jamaica, The Dominican Republic, Africa, China and other far away places, which were better educated, with excellent sales and computer skills,

with training in electronics and management who were advancing faster than Juan.

He became resentful and seemingly unhappy. Climbing the ladder of success suddenly became an unattainable goal, in his mind, and consequently his morale and performance faltered. We spoke about that on several occasions and my efforts to uplift him were not successful.

Much to my surprise and dismay he quit without notice! I was terribly disappointed. He wasted no time applying for unemployment insurance benefits and had been denied, as he should have been. Subsequently, I also received notice from the unemployment court to appear at an appeal hearing, at Juan's request. I presented myself in court and much to my amazement he won! Juan lied repeatedly and erring on the side of safety, the administrative judge ruled in his favor.

For me, it was an arrow through my heart and a possible big dent in my checkbook's future. Every time an employee collects unemployment benefits the employer's contribution rate increases and with nearly sixty employees that resulted in thousands of dollars of increased payments for my business.

His next strategy, having one win under his belt, was to file a complaint with the EEOC, The Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. That's potentially big trouble for any employer. The law is on the side of the employee, or former employee. This commission was created as part of the 1965 Civil Rights Act. It is designed to protect the employee's interests with callous disregard for the interests of business owners.

The examiners have enormous discretionary power and the prospect of taking an employee to court is very repugnant to employers. Being accused of violating someone's civil rights in front of a jury of proverbial "postal workers" is not a good thing. I am the dressed up suited Caucasian business owner and in their eyes I'm living "large" abusing the poor hardworking minority who are merely getting by and "breaking their asses" by a "fat cat" who's enriched from the sweat off their backs. For me, it was the "system" with scales of justice tipped in favor of the employee. Clearly, I was on the wrong side of the law. I had an experience in the past with another former employee who had become pregnant. She had taken advantage of the system and me. She, a "manager" had become very lazy and excessively obese during her pregnancy. She took long lunches, was frequently late for work and complained about everything and nothing. She topped off her lunches with Twinkies, Ring Ding, cream filled snowballs and Devil Dogs. I cautioned her, out of concern, about the consequences of eating such junk while carrying a child but she choose to ignore me. She had the right to eat whatever she wanted. An extremely emotional woman; she built her case, hired a sleazy lawyer and slammed me with an EEOC complaint.

I was compelled to hire an attorney, prepare for a hearing and upon my attorney's advice, after a long arduous process, I paid her \$25,000 to avoid facing a jury who my attorney had assured me could award her a six figure settlement or more! Because her child had been born with a mental defect caused by, as I was told by an employee who had a close relationship

with her, a difficult birth due to oxygen deprivation, as a result of her excessive weight causing complications. Therefore, she and her child suffered the consequences. I too could have been a victim of her lust for sweets, in court facing a blue-collar jury.

Enter Barbara, the nail polishing, obsessive and self-involved “manager” with the over painted face, hair all perfectly in place, high heels and mirror, always in close reach, an experienced one-hour photo store manager, so I had thought. She had owned a few of her own stores in the past. Needing a manager desperately I had decided, against my better judgment, to hire her and give her a shot. She “worked” for me for approximately six months or so and I became disappointed with her lack of performance and leadership, sloppy work habits, and completely void of technical knowledge and lacking an ounce of sales ability, otherwise she was perfect. I gathered evidence that she was all about Barbara and the job was just a means for her to pay her bills, nothing more. Inevitably, a separation was in the cards.

Without notice, she, following in Juan’s footsteps, quit her job. Off she went, to Wall Street. It was not to stake her claim in the lucrative game of finance. But rather, it was to open her own one-hour photo store. It was far from the best location on “the street” because it was east of Water Street and that was a much quieter part of Wall Street way “out of the way.” The foot traffic was very unimpressive and she was up against some very stiff competition a few short blocks up “the street” where the action was, where the rents were much higher too, of course. No doubt

she had loans, equipment leases, still a hefty rent, insurance, start up costs, construction, fixtures, inventory, legal fees, personal guarantees and all the other expenses and commitments that came with such an operation.

Of course, I did my homework and visited the store to see what was happening. I checked it out and looked for opportunities that I could extract for my business playing the role of a typical New Yorker. I did find “pay dirt” and licked my chops knowing that I had discovered was going to be very worthwhile.

Juan was working there “off the books” and collecting unemployment insurance benefits at my expense! Wow! It was time to make a plan.

The first thing I did was to send my biggest and strongest employee, Dan, down to her store with a camera. Dan showed up there on a Monday, the busiest day of the week in the one-hour photo business. He was a kick boxer and bar bouncer on the side, by the way. His mission was to enter the store, casually walk up to Juan and while seated behind a printing machine, whip out a camera and snap a few photos of Juan, hard at work. He also took some shots of “nail polish Barbara” seated at the front of the store. That was all I needed to put the first phase of my plan into action. “Let the games begin!”

I called a New York State Department of Labor investigator and reported what I had found: Juan, working “off the books” and collecting unemployment benefits. The Department of Labor examiner told me to mail him the photos and he assured me that swift and proper action would be taken. Several weeks passed without hearing from the investigator so, I

called him. He was unavailable, always. Getting him on the phone was impossible. I wrote several letters, certified mail, return receipt requested, and to his supervisor as well and to the commissioner! Nada. No one was home! I got those little green postcards back from the post office verifying that all letters had been received. That's it, government employees hard at work, screwing the business owners and turning their backs on us to play Robin Hood.

I called Juan at the Wall Street store after I gave up with the Department of Labor and I asked him if he would like to sit down with me, have a meeting. He was glad to hear from me and we scheduled the meet. We got together, very cordially, exchanged small talk and then got directly down to business.

He was very contrite and regretful for what he had done to me. We discussed his quick and improper departure from his job, his fabricated reasons for doing so, the unemployment insurance ploy and the aid and assistance he had given to Barbara especially accommodating her by working off the books, exposing himself to legal problems by collecting government unemployment checks while working off the books is a serious crime. He helped Barbara start her business and last but not least, the EEOC case. He went on to tell me that he didn't like working for her because she was abusive, lazy, didn't know a thing about the business and didn't pay him well. She knew that he was receiving unemployment insurance payments and he had admitted that she was paying him in cash. She was using him as a tool enabling her to bilk the system. She also knew that his unemployment checks were coming out of my pocket

and therefore, I too was subsidizing her business. Balls!

Juan expressed his deepest regrets, apologized and wished he had not left his job. He admitted that I had always been good to him and he wanted to come back. He was in tears. I explained the plan to Juan as he eagerly listened to every word.

“Ok Juan, here’s the plan. On the day after Memorial Weekend, one of the busiest days of the year in this business, you’ll be back on my payroll. You’ll start at 8 AM and you’ll return to work for me as if nothing ever happened. All’s forgiven. You are not to provide any notice to Barbara that you are not showing up for work the day after Memorial Weekend. She’ll open her store without you, no printer. That will crush her. Your participation and silence is vital and required or my offer is cancelled.” He understood completely and was wearing a broad smirk on his face from ear to ear. Juan was in the game and glad that he could participate with getting even with Barbara.

“I will notify the unemployment agency that you have started working for me and that your unemployment checks will cease. You’re back, paid on the books and I want you to contact the EEOC and drop your case too.”

He was ecstatic and the plan was executed flawlessly. So, here’s the windup: I got a good employee back. Juan learned a lesson, Barbara got what she deserved, Juan got off unemployment insurance and he dropped the EEOC case.

There are people out there who believe that the road to success is paved with gold by feeding off others. It’s not the way to go. Play by the rules, work smart and

****do the right thing! Get even with those who try to succeed by bringing you down. It's called "street justice." Batter up.

The Free Bulgari!

Salesmen come in all shapes and sizes and a certain Mr. Chuck White was quite a most amusing oddity in many ways, not just shape and height but big balls too. A man who decided to step into the ring and at 6'8" he made the mistake of doing battle with me. He was in his late thirties, impeccably dressed and always wore great suits, coats, shined shoes, perfectly fitted, tie and shirt flawlessly matched. Chuck was always groomed to a "T".

He was thin and tall, very tall, even taller than Dave, our friend in the prior teddy bear story (6'5" vs. 5'6"). Chuck was perhaps 6'8". He was a "smooth operator", quick talker, so quick I often had difficulty understanding him. But, I knew why he spoke so fast. It was his way of hoping that he'd slip in a glitch, right through the cracks. His slick talking ways had enabled him to remove big bucks from unsuspecting customers eager to buy without "reading between the lines."

He created his own trouble, with me several times and the last time was nearly a fatal mistake for him. Poor Mr. White, as a result of his tactics, I felt that someone had to teach this guy a lesson and it might as well be me because I love the spoils that come with teaching people lessons and I just love to teach too! Here's the story.

Mr. White sold high-end color copiers for a distributor of Canon Copiers. He was very successful, worked very hard, aggressively and tenaciously, but, at times, his strategy was a bit too "creative" for his own good. He was what you'd call a "big earner" and a bit of a shark. His technical skills were well above

average and he knew his business inside and out. He knew how equipment would make money for his clients and was very good at driving home those benefits creating a ton of business for himself. He knew every “trick in the book” and many that were not in “the book,” yet.

Back in the late 1980’s through the early 1990’s the color copier business was new and booming. Digital copiers and large format bubble-jet color copiers were new technologies and those who had gotten into it and knew how to sell the service had the opportunity to “print money” by targeting their markets effectively. My business had been granted a spectacular opportunity to participate, at the inception, as a beta test site for Canon. My company was one of seven in the United States selected by Canon to test market copies made by their equipment in order to help them learn how to best target the market. We had already had demonstrated experience and success at attracting and servicing a large customer trade. Their objective was to determine if there was a sufficient market for the product, large format color Bubble Jet copies, and find out how it make it “fly.”

Business was so hot, that several years after acquiring the first \$100,000 unit we purchased another, several years after the Beta test program, and that’s where Mr. Chuck White came in, stage left, not “*right*.” I told Mr. Chuck White that I would provide a purchase order for the copier if he added four “heads” together with the delivery of the copier.

A “head” was a \$2,500 part that needed replacement from time to time depending on the volume of use.

Therefore, I had added \$10,000 to the purchase order for four “heads” and told him to have them delivered them with the copier. The benefit for me was cash preservation. I would not have to pay for those heads every time I needed one, rather they would be financed with the equipment improving my cash flow a bit. He agreed, the papers were signed, sealed, but not fully, delivered.

The copier arrived and installed but there was one problem, three “heads” were delivered not four as agreed and specified in the lease. Mr. White pressured me to sign the “D and A” “delivery and acceptance” document in order for the leasing company, or bank, to pay him for the copier that enabled the financing source to begin collecting monthly payments from me. I told him I would sign it when I received the missing head. He pleaded with me. I relented and signed but, I told him in no uncertain terms; if I do not receive that fourth head before I need it then I shall create a lot of unhappiness for him. I warned him that I was not someone to “play” with and I would not tolerate his bullshit if it should come to that! He assured me that I had nothing to worry about it. “No big deal” he told me. I saw it as an opportunity to trust him and if he didn’t come through then I had remedies at my disposal. I was extremely firm about that and down the road he found out just how serious I had been.

The best predictor of the future is the past. This was not going to be an exception to the rule. Mr. C. White didn’t disappoint. My premonition was correct. He ignored my phone calls and reminders regarding that absent fourth head, which was paid for in full.

"I got two left." I told him.

Then a month or two later,

"It's Cliff, I'm down to my last head, buddy! There's still time."

Then the call that I had hoped not to make:

"I'm out of heads."

I gave him a week to show up with the fourth hard. He never called and never showed. How stupid!

I ordered the replacement, well in advance, and it came through the normal pipeline. I was not going to enable him to put my business in a vulnerable position. We remained up and running again without skipping a beat. One must anticipate all the possible failures and protect their business. Acquiring a terrific reputation is difficult; losing it is easy, costly and stupid, if avoidable.

Within a week or so I called my attorney and had him draw up a lawsuit, a claim for damages of \$100,000. We knew that my costs didn't amount a cent not because of him keeping his word, but by me taking steps to ensure that Mr. White's failure would not jeopardize my interests. If you promised to to get even then take out the big guns and push forward. I was not seeking a "slap on the wrist" I was determined to go after him. He had been paid in full and I could have been left in the lurch. He didn't give a shit. Had I been unable to obtain the part I needed it could have resulted in enormous harm to my reputation. My customers need service not broken promises and if I can't provide them with what they needed then there are others for them to choose from. Suppliers do run out of parts, it happens. Had that happened or if I had failed to order the head in

advance I could have lost a lot of business now and in the future, income and damage to my reputation, big time!

I warned him again and again. People's must have consequences good or bad. He behaved like a child and I was determined not to accept this crap, especially from him. Act like a child and I'll treat you like a child, nothing wrong with that in my opinion.

After several days before Mr. C. White's court imposed deadline to respond to the complaint I had received a phone call from him.

"I want to come to your office and talk to you," He said.

"What do you want to talk about?" I asked.

"I want it to go away. You know what I mean?" He told me.

"Okay Chuck, stop by." I said.

He appeared at my office several hours after I invited him to stop by. He was anxious to get this monkey off his back. It was a stupid and needless incident caused by his failure to follow-up and that should never have happened. Consequences!

All the chairs in my office had been removed, just prior to our meeting. I had asked my assistant to do so to ensure two things. One, this was going to be a very short meeting and two; I wanted him to know that his very tall statue did not intimidate me.

He entered my office and looked somewhat puzzled upon noticing the absence of chairs. He removed a sealed envelope from his breast pocket, placed it on my desk and pushed it in my direction.

"What's in the envelope? I asked.

"\$5,000."

I pushed the envelope back to him, without opening it even thought it was thick and puffy. He promptly asked me what would make it go away. I told him that there's a rather nice gold watch in the window at the Bulgari store on the corner of 57th Street and 5th Ave and I'd like to see on my wrist. If you've got some fat plastic with you then let's jump in a cab and that will make it go away. The watch was worth three times more than the cash that was in his white envelope.

We took a cab to Bulgari and it all went away, except the watch, of course! As a gesture, due to my kindheartedness, even for an asshole like him, I suggested that the Bulgari salesman ship the watch to my sister's home address in New Jersey to save him 8% on the sales tax. So, I really am a nice guy and I even paid for the cab☺

Canon Fires a Dud!

Back in the 1990's a terrific opportunity had emerged for my business. We were invited to participate and blaze a trail to test market a new technology as a beta test site for, a soon to be released, color copier known as the Canon Bubble-jet A-1, the device mentioned in the previous story.

This revolutionary copier produced color copies, "off the glass" up to 24" x 36" size prints, something that had never been done before. "Off the glass", in the copier business means that copies could be produced from originals that are laid upon a glass platform of a copier, not from digital files, something that was yet to come.

A beta test site is a marketing program designed to gather information regarding customers' reactions to pricing, quality, uses and acceptance of a device's output in order to create the most effective marketing strategies to introduce a new product. What is hoped to be, an expanding marketplace that must be pinpointed in order to maximize efforts to drive success.

The arrangement was this: Canon provided the copier, ink, paper, parts and service for us and charged a fee for each copy that we produced. The copies we produced were sold to our customers at a price, set by Canon of \$60 each for full size copies. We split the gross sales revenue with Canon 50/50. That's all we paid, just half of the gross revenue and we were allowed 100 copies a month at no charge, an allowance for makeover of unsalable copies.

The beta test was conducted over a six-month period. We sold more copies than any of the other beta sites.

Our sales exceeded \$100,000 and we captured a very robust clientele. I enthusiastically looked forward to purchasing a bubble-jet for my business to continue to enjoy the benefits for my business.

All the beta site test companies were offered a Bubble-jet A-1 at full price, \$100,000. I received a call from the Canon national sales manager, from Texas, offering me the “opportunity” to purchase the device.

“Are you offering me a new bubble-jet or a used one?” I asked.

“We’re offering you the opportunity to purchase the one that you have been using during the beta marketing test period.” He replied.

“Now why would I want to pay full price for a used machine?” I inquired.

The arrogance of offering me the opportunity to purchase a used machine at full list price reminded me of the scene in *Godfather II* that took place in Michael Corleone’s office at Lake Tahoe on the day of his son’s Confirmation celebration, with the corrupt senator Gehry. The senator tried to bilk Michael out of \$250,000 and 5% of the gross receipts to obtain a casino gaming license. The legitimate cost of the license directly from the state of Nevada was merely \$5,000.

Remember that?

Michael’s reply was classic:

“Senator, you can have my answer now if you like. My offer is this: Nothing. Not even the fee for the gaming license, which I would appreciate if you would put up personally.”

I told the Canon manager that I would purchase that used machine at full price less the money that I had

already paid Canon during the beta test period. That just about cut the price in half, a saving for me of about \$50,000 not to mention the huge benefit to them due to our participation in the beta marketing program. I told him, "You can't burn the candle at both ends!"

The folks at Canon were scratching their heads for weeks. They wanted it both ways and that was, in my opinion, unreasonable. I called the other beta test companies and asked each and every one of them if they were purchasing their beta test copiers and they all agreed to purchase their bubble-jets but amazingly at full price. I did not tell them what I had up my sleeve. Doing so would have thwarted my strategy. We were the only operator in New York City and the only one in the country that played hardball with Canon.

What amazed me was that the other beta site business operators were the best and brightest in the business and my strategy had not occurred to any of them, not one. Was it because they didn't have the DNA in their veins? I just didn't know!

Several weeks later, as I was pondering my next move, I received a call from the Canon sales manager, the national marketing manager of Canon who was in charge of the bubble jet A-1.

"I have a Bar Mitzvah present for you Cliff!" he said.

"We'll go along with your proposition to purchase the copier that you had used during the test period at the price you requested, \$50,000 half of the regular price! I'm sending you all the documents via overnight Federal Express. Just sign the papers and return and

keep the lid on this too. If the other beta sites find out about this I'll have a big problem."

I was a bit offended by the "Bar Mitzvah present" comment as if I, because I am Jewish, sniffed out the money with a long nose or was it a compliment because Jewish people have a reputation for being savvy business people? Not to mention that there is no shortage of non-Jewish people who are darn savvy business people too! I'll never know what he meant and I really don't care. What mattered was the money that I saved, money that Canon tried and failed to get out of my pocket.

Our continued use of the bubble-jet had a different arrangement than the beta site program. We paid the leasing company the monthly payments for the BJ-A1 and we received ink, paper, parts and service from Canon for a fixed rate of \$12 per copy. The bubble-jet had a built in meter that kept track of the number of copies we produced for billing purposes.

We we enjoyed a huge volume of business. We collected \$60 per copy, paid the \$12 fee and the monthly lease payments and that was like printing money. We were clearing over \$40 per copy! This was unheard of. It provided a net, pretax profit of 66%. We also drew more business for other phases of our business due the increased store traffic. In addition, our reputation soared as a source of cutting edge technology services in the industry.

Interesting, how huge success can cast a new perspective upon the "cash cow" equation and one benefit befalls unanticipated ones as well.

At the end of each month I received a statement from Canon for approximately \$15,000. When I considered

their cost of ink, paper and parts, I felt that it was outrageous. It was a “locked in deal” because there was no other place to purchase those goods and services. The bubble-jet rarely required service; occasionally a new “head” the device that drove the ink to the paper needed replacement from time to time. That’s the item that my friend, Mr. C. White, who had sold me as part of my next bubble-jet lease, was supposed to provide, a set of four and he only had delivered three. Refer to the previous chapter for further details. Canon’s point of view must have been that Cliff is billed \$15,000 per month and is billing his customers \$75,000 and we pioneered the technology! He’s a pig! He’s making enough money!

My outlook was that I should have had the right to purchase ink and paper outright for customary and usual pricing, at industry standards. Carving out a new deal would save my company a fortune. If I needed parts or service, I would have much preferred to pay a standard industry rate to keep “the iron” humming. I paid for the machine. It was mine. They’re not my partners.

They balked, squirmed and refused to negotiate. I wrote letters to the top brass and they were ignored. I refused to give up. I decided play hardball and stop paying them altogether. Building leverage was my game plan.

I’ve always thought that I’d rather be the party that owes money than be the one to whom money is owed. Why? Because the one who owes the money has already gotten the benefit and it’s the unpaid creditor who is at risk. The more I owe the better off I am and the worse it was for Canon. That doesn’t seem logical

to the ordinary person who has no business experience but, if you think about it, it'll click in!

I continued to have my manager order ink and paper in huge quantities, far beyond our entitlement based on our usage. We stockpiled enough supplies to sink a small battle ship! Apparently, Canon never coordinated the count of the copies made with their customer's orders for ink and paper. In other words, we were billed only for the metered clicks, \$12 per copy. The shipments of ink and paper continued to be delivered without additional charges that were the deal while Canon was "asleep at the switch." They just didn't monitor the use of our machine with the outflow of supplies we ordered. We also obtained parts on the black market at very low prices from Canon repairmen, further evidence that Canon didn't have a clue as to proper management and control. In addition, where did the technicians get their hands on the supplies? Humm? Our relationship with Canon's technicians was a big plus for us. Thanks to Canon, their fault.

Before anyone at Canon took action against us I had piled up over \$160,000 in unpaid bills with them for usage. Another "failure to communicate." Good old "Cool Hand Luke."

Eventually, I received the expected letter from Canon's accounts receivable manager advising me that our account had been suspended, something that I had expected would happen. They finally woke up. "Good morning Canon!" That's exactly what I wanted, because now they had to stop billing me the \$12 per copy charge. Canon couldn't sue for what they didn't bill me. Meanwhile, my legal debt to Canon remained

constant and we continued to use our machine with enough supplies to sink a battleship.

In addition to that, what would they bill us for? We ordered nothing from them after that final statement and the termination of the account was like Canon tying themselves up in knots! We didn't call them for service, parts, ink or paper after the account was suspended. With all my advanced planning we were on the fast track riding upon the good old "gravy train". Another \$15,000 a month savings for me paid a lot of bills such as, college tuition, trips, dinners, whatever and building a "war chest" for the inevitable legal battle that was looming.

Canon sued my company for \$160,000 the balance due on my account. Naturally, I expected to do battle. My lawyers had been "sharpening their knives" doing their due diligence and gathering all the information we needed for the clash. This was going to be fun which was dumb and a bit naïve because Canon had unlimited resources and they'd ground me into the dirt, but . . .

My lawyers, through their research, had learned that a recent court case had been filed in The U.S. Supreme Court to resolve an issue regarding concept as to whether a service contract be a "condition" of sale for a device? In other words, if a car, or any other device is purchased, can the seller compel the buyer to enter into a contract for service of that device with the manufacturer or their authorized service vendor? The decision of the court was that no sale of a device implies a right to force the purchaser to commit to a service contract that carries a fee. The case was filed against Eastman Kodak, another stupid goliath and

they eventually fell on their sword and crushed thousands of good loyal employees.

I, the David, with the slingshot, countersued Canon, for the immediate and permanent discontinuance of the service arrangement as a condition of the sale of the bubble-jet A-1 and also for the return of all the money I had paid them up until that time for service. I knew that the money that I had paid them was well spent providing me with a handsome return. However, it was illegal for them to do so because I was forced to do so and that was contrary to the court's decision. I had never expecting that the court would decide that Canon was entitled to payment, that was our starting point.

The thrust of the legal justification is also known as "unjust enrichment," In addition to the Supreme Court decision against Kodak. We had the briefs and court decision in our hands. The highest court in the land was on our side but would that be a viable defense for non-payment of a service that we had agreed to and accepted? Why not? The law nullifies many contracts that are in opposition to decisions of the court. That's the process.

I suggested to Canon that having sold perhaps thousands of bubble-jets worldwide it was not credible that any of their customers had arrangements that departed from their "boilerplate" plan. With evidence in my hands, that I'd gathered, I demonstrated to them that I've mustered media attention time and again in the past with The Wall Street Journal, Daily News, trade magazines, etc. and they were well aware of the damage that such publicity would cause them if other owners of the

Buddle-Jet became aware of what we had learned legally and perhaps had been granted to us through a court decision. Naturally, I knew that their advertising dollars carried a lot of clout with the media, but as an industry leader well knows how to spread the word without media however it was my intimidation to pursue a possible class action suit that would have been, in the words of one of my lawyers, “a shit storm” for them. That was another slingshot they had to duck and dodge.

After numerous meetings with the lawyers we agreed to a settlement. I paid Canon one half of the money I owed them, the rest would be abated, and they granted me the right to purchase supplies, parts and service at a fair price and be the only exception not to be billed \$12 per copy. Essentially, it was a good move for me. For Canon we kept the lid on the entire matter and to move forward amicably.

In sum, I simply could not allow Canon to get away with their program for numerous reasons. The effort that I, and my staff, put into creating our bubble-jet success enriched Canon very well. I paid Canon more than any other bubble-jet customer during the beta test site period. They gathered a great deal of useful information from us and that provided them with enormous advantages while formulating their sales and marketing strategies.

In addition, we spent a lot of time and money to obtain that business by developing new customers, not only for ourselves but for Canon as well. We purchased the device, and it was ours alone. They acquiesced only when it was in their best interests.

That's how it works. Everyone has to serve his or her interests and that included me.

What I love about this story is that a little guy, me of course, put up a fight against one of the industry giants and punched 'em in the gut and they cried, "Uncle!!" I walked away a lot better off, made more money, kept my mouth shut and maintained a good mutually beneficial continuing relationship with Canon.

Hanging Out and in the “Clink”

The apartment was small, on the 48th floor and those very large windows provided a great view of the city. At 640 square feet it was a matchbox compared with my prior home, a five-bedroom center hall colonial that sat on a shady one-acre lot forty minutes north of the City. Even though this studio apartment was tiny, by comparison, in many ways, I had more space then in my idyllic 3,200 square foot suburban home.

My new abode, the first of many after my departure from my first marriage, was a magical place. Perched up in the sky at The Sheffield, a high-rise midtown luxury rental building, located on 57th Street, I was living a dream. In many ways, I had more space in that little nest then I had in my prior residence, emotionally. “Free at last . . .”

Apartment 48S had been occupied by a Norwegian cabinetmaker that had transformed that cookie cutter studio into a unique and beautiful setting with a personality, a soul. It was the most spectacular studio in a building with over 850 apartments, most of them, studios.

Doormen, maintenance men and other staffers in the building loved that apartment. It was adorned with pink ash stained cabinets, built-in bookcases, an alcove divider, wooden window moldings, elegant hand painted art, a platform for the dining area with built in planters atop, wainscoted wall carpentry, halogen lighting, sconces, faux painting, stained floors, original art and molding painted on the doors and walls and a built in desk, also handmade with beautiful detailing.

The City view from this studio was equally impressive. Facing west it provided magnificent views of The Hudson River and the some of the New York City skyline. I never tired observing ships of every type moving up and down the river and sunsets were an ever changing show at day's end. I furnished the apartment with a white upright piano, two bar stools, fresh flowers, a couch and off-white carpeting and Venetian glass decor complimenting it all perfectly.

The final touch was a custom made 80-gallon salt-water fish tank installed in the alcove wall divider visible from the bed alcove and the living room. A marine biologist serviced the tank monthly keeping those gorgeous fish happy and swimming. Entering that studio at day's end with the fish tank providing the only illumination created a warm and dramatic welcome. It was the picture of cozy and comfortable luxury, a late 20th century garret fulfilling all my wishes for a place I could call my home, my own.

Windows! The building did not provide a service to clean them nor would they recommend a window cleaning service. I suspected that the cost of insurance and the potential liability was too great. The building was not equipped with a scaffold, at that time, lowering itself from the roof, with a swinging arm, providing safety for such brave souls. For me, it was the only flaw in the apartment. With great views it was an impeccable sky-high studio with imperfect windows. I had no solution and I stopped looking for one.

Several weeks after I had made my final attempt to find a solution I came upon a man who was walking down 57th Street wearing work clothes, a blue work shirt and matching workpants. He was carrying a bucket, a window wiper blade and a few rags slung over his shoulder.

Suddenly he approached me,

"Hey man, do you live in the neighborhood?"

"Yes I do. Why?"

"I clean windows bro and I wana need some business, bad! How big is your apartment? How many windows do you got?"

"It's a studio. I have two large combo windows each with smaller windows on the sides. I'm also up on the 48th floor. Are you willing to clean them?" I asked.

"\$20 bucks and we're done, guy!"

I accepted his offer and together we entered the building and we talked into my studio in the sky. Imagine, a guy on the street, someone I didn't know and together we entered my apartment, as if this guy was my brother! Well, he did call me, "bro"!

As soon as we entered he asked if I wanted to "do" a joint and a beer.

At that moment I noticed that he didn't have any safety equipment, no straps, belts, gear, nothing! Amazing!

"No, I don't do weed anymore, thanks very much. But, are you about to "get high" both ways? I mean really get high, up here, without any safety straps? Are you for real?"

"Yeah! I do it all the time and haven't fallen yet."

"You're fuckin' nuts man! What if the ledge is wet, icy or the wind kicks up, a flock of birds fly into you, you

loose your balance, just slip, or a hawk lands on your head, eh? Did you ever think about that?" I scolded him.

"I'm in complete control man. That's what I do! Why do you think I don't go in planes? I have no control in planes. Hey, I'm not stupid, man!"

"Okay, do it! Clean 'em up!"

I grabbed my camera and when my new friend was totally out there, mentally and literally, holding on to the window frame with his hand wrapped around one of those pink ash stained moldings, I took a picture.

I couldn't believe the balls and the idiocy of this guy. What would have been the harm of wearing protective gear? This blew me away, a totally insane act of insanity! I can see him falling and yelling up to me from the descending heights, "I shoulda put on a safety beeeeeelllllltttttt!!!!!! SPLAT!"

After he got back inside after cleaning the other windows we had a few drinks. I was in need of a means to relax and had to calm down. Drinking, smoking grass and hanging out of a 48-story window was not the answer for me. Finally, I can look back on someone who had done something far stupider than texting while driving. That too, a dumb act that hadn't been invented yet back then in the mid-nineties.

We exchanged names and phone numbers and said our good-byes with firm fist bumps and hugs of respect and affection.

About four or five months later I had received an envelope, in my mailbox, bearing my address, hand written with a return address that I had a lot of difficulty reading because the handwriting was

seemingly written by a young child. The only thing I could make out was Riker's Island and NY, NY.

Riker's Island is New York City's Alcatraz. I opened the envelope and it was from the "stoned" window guy. He had written that he had been "busted" in Times Square for attempting to purchase "coke" from an undercover cop. He was sentenced to one year in the "clink." The purpose of his letter was a request that I send him some necessary goods such as; underwear, levis jeans, talcum powder, a sweatshirt, shaving cream, disposable razors, deodorant and a few other wants and needs. So, I went on a shopping trip, purchased all that he had requested and put the stuff together with a note and sent it to Riker's. I never received an acknowledgement or a thank you letter, not even a quick phone call. He was a big disappointment to me.

About a year after I had sent my "care package" to my favorite window washer, my widows became as dirty as they had been before we met. By chance, we "ran into each other" again at the exact spot on 57th Street where we had met about a year before. He looked good however he had no bucket, no tools and no straps with him.

"How you doin' Cliff? I'm out! I need you! Please lend me some money so that I can buy the tools I need to get back into business, man!"

"Did you get the package I sent you? The one with the jeans, underwear and all of that?" I asked him.

"Yeah! I got that."

"Well my friend. We're done. You took the time to write me a letter asking me to send what you needed, at my expense, but you never bothered to thank me!

You contact me only when you need something. Now it's my turn again to give you something else you need, a lesson. The difference this time it won't cost me anything and it will be the best thing I've ever done for you, a good lesson to live by. Good bye and good luck."

I walked away from my window-washing "friend." One good lesson that so many people fail to learn is this:

Don't reach out for others only when you need them because if you do then the day will surely come when they will turn their backs on you. I washed myself of this guy but never considered washing my own windows. *C'est la vie.*

A tale of Insurance and Drivers

The overwhelming majority of people living in Manhattan do not own a car. What for? Anyone who goes from point A to B in Manhattan, driving their car should stay in their room! One of the best things about living in this City is the benefit of not having to find and pay for parking upon your arrival. Trains, cabs and buses eliminate that problem, not to mention walking or biking. The cost of parking, insurance, gas and the car itself is maddening. For those who own cars and live in Manhattan there may be some appropriate reasons that justify the expense such as: an occupational related necessity, recreational homes, visits to friends or family who happen to reside outside The City. Or just a compulsion to spend some time “taking a breather” to “get out of town.”

Several years ago we decided to purchase a car for Custom & Private New York Tours. I looked at the numbers and realized and was convinced that there was more than enough business to justify taking that step.

It seemed very simple, just buy the right car to do the job, make the right deal, get the insurance, check out the best price, explore convenient parking options and hire the best driver, compensate him in an attractive way for both of us. *Voila!*

My only major concern was how to properly register and insure the vehicle for business use. That’s where things got very complicated.

In New York City all “cars for hire” must be licensed through the TLC, The Taxi & Limousine Commission, a New York City Agency that has jurisdiction over

taxis, limos, “black cars” Uber, Lift, Via, etc. What that entails is obtaining TLC license plates that necessitate high annual fees and frequent and useless inspections provided by corrupt inspectors who get kick-backs for overlooking needed repairs, etc. All drivers must have a TLC driver’s licenses in addition to an ordinary driver’s license. The TLC license requires periodic drug tests, numerous cumbersome documents of all kinds and a signed acknowledgement that any vehicle that they drive will not be used to transport their clients who they may suspect to be prostitutes. Now, tell me, how is a hack supposed to know what a hooker looks like for sure. Some do, that’s a no brainer some look like debutants or upper class chicks.

In addition, such vehicles are subjected to frequent stops by TLC officers who harass and annoy drivers for all types of nonsense such as broken taillights, expired inspections and spot checks. They’re generally just a bunch of childish ball busters.

I had decided since the vehicle would not be a “car for hire” meaning its purpose was not to provide transportation only but rather to conduct private tours that my car would, most likely not be under TLC jurisdiction. In other words, if a client requested a transfer to an airport, after their tour had been completed, we cannot legally transfer them to the airport due to the legal purpose of the vehicle is for tours and personal use and not “car for hire” which is defined as use that is intended to transfer people, for compensation, from point A to point B.

Therefore, Custom & Private New York Tours acquired an SUV, a Suburban, because that’s the

largest passenger vehicle available on the planet. It's the same size as an Escalade and less costly because it doesn't have the "flash," the "mark" of a Cadillac and a larger useless gas guzzling engine. We choose the color Silver because all the TLC vehicles are black and I wanted to have a low profile to deflect TLC inspectors from harassing us, especially during tours. Also, it is easier to spot the car during tours while returning to the vehicle.

The first qualified driver I found through Grieg's List was a retired judge. Would you believe that? The guy loved to drive! He quit after a few months because he lived with his 93-year-old mother and the job took him away from her too often. Due to her diminishing ability to care for herself he had decided that she needed him a home more often.

The second driver, Keith, was a nut job. He was a good driver but weird and quirky; with mood swings and gyrations that were problematic. He freaked out when I requested guests to tip him, in his presence. He was extremely chatty with the guests while I and other guides were presenting information during our tours. Despite numerous requests he couldn't seem to change his habits.

The third driver was Mr. Goode. He was a very experienced driver always excellent behind the wheel. My guests always felt very safe with him at the helm. He had a terrific sense of the traffic flow and he poured on just the right amount of sane aggression on the road but he never overdid it.

The problem with Goode was that he had issues, big time. Apparently he was an angry guy, mostly internal, loaded with tons of resentment and envy.

Unlike the other two drivers he consistently wanted more money even though all the drivers were very well paid and they, without exception, admitted that they were compensated better than any similar job that they've ever had.

Our financial benefit of buying the car only accrued when we kept those wheels rolling beyond the threshold of breaking even on the investment. We made greater use of the car than I had thought when the car was purchased.

While Tom was parked in front of an Upper Eastside hotel an adjacent car hit our car that was about to park. As a result the Suburban needed approximately \$4,000 worth of bodywork. Upon investigation, the insurance company satisfied the claim and I realized that the vehicle was not properly insured. We needed to obtain the proper coverage to protect the company and our guests.

One morning, after the Suburban had been repaired and was back in action, Mr. Goode and I were on our way to pickup a family for a tour at The Trump International Hotel and Condos. While on our way to the hotel I had asked Goode if he would drop me off at a theatre on 54th Street because I needed to purchase theatre tickets for some of our clients. He dropped me off and I requested that he swing around the block to 8th Avenue so that he would be facing The Trump International to facilitate our ride to meet our guests and start their tour. He gladly agreed to do so. After I had purchased the tickets I walked over to 8th Avenue and noticed that Goode had parked the Suburban by the curb, illegally. The Suburban was sitting, empty, and that's no Goode! I was shocked as I saw him

walking toward me, from across the street, holding a cup of coffee. I also noticed that a traffic officer was about to write a parking ticket for \$115.

I approached the officer, pleaded with her not to issue the ticket and she grudgingly acquiesced. Goode unlocked the vehicle, seated himself behind the wheel as I took my place beside him and off we went.

"What did you do that for? You know that I would have gotten coffee for you if you had waited for me. I've done that for you so many times before! You needed your coffee so badly that you had to risk a \$115 ticket? Who the hell did you think would have paid it? You didn't think, for a second, that I would have paid that one, did you? I said angrily.

"It's all about the fucking money with you." Goode shouted.

"Hey, you've gotten tickets before and I've paid them all because you had reasonable justification. Those tickets were not entirely your fault and therefore, I paid them. But this is different! You know damn well that you were risking a ticket for lousy cup of coffee. What planet do you live on? It wasn't insulin schmucko!

He proceeded to drive up to Trump International and we both sat staring ahead in silence. I was fuming, fit to be tied. He had a dream job that filled his needs. I even picked him up in front of his home every morning or at a coffee shop around the corner from his home. Who has a boss that picks them up? Incredible!

Here's the final coup. He turned his head, facing me while driving toward Trump Hotel and said,

"I don't have to drive today!"

That was about twenty minutes before the scheduled tour. He thought that he just took the power and had me by the balls. What a surprise I had in store for Goode.

I told him, "Pull the car over."

He did. Then I said,

"Put the car into 'park'" and he did. I leaned over toward Goode, turned the ignition key down, shutting off the engine and yanked it out of the ignition switch and told him,

"We're done. Take your stuff."

He removed his backpack from the car and walked away without saying a word.

Immediately I called a limo company, arranged for an SUV to arrive at Trump International within 30 minutes. I called the client and told him that I'd be about fifteen minutes late. He was pleased because they were running late too. I called Aline and told her to meet me at the parking lot behind our building. I told her the Goode incident when I arrived. She was totally in synch and agreed with the way I handled it. I can only imagine if the incident had occurred farther from our parking lot and we had less time to make the correction or that the client was ready to go at the planned tour start time what the consequences could have been. I would have waited until that tour ended to "can" Goode but I didn't want to subject myself and the guests to the certain pale of discontent that would have been ever present during the tour. Damage control would not have been a seamless experience. Goode acted so stupidly and he self-destructed. It boggles the mind.

Goode was a super schmuck, kissing his job good-bye because he had to have a cup of coffee! No, a coffee was not the reason for his actions, it was a mindset that compelled him to take power, so he thought, and test me even though he knew that my reaction, after working together for nearly six months, would possibly compel me to throw him under the bus. He took a chance. It was “brinkmanship” testing me to see how much of his shit I would allow him to chuck in my direction. What was the benefit and what were the probable consequences? His equation, flung at me was not merely stupid but rather it was evidence of a deeply troubled man.

In truth, it’s sad that someone who needed the job, one he could never replace, would take such a risk, for nothing, and walk away just like a schoolboy in short pants.

I took the subway to Trump International from my home, a 10-minute subway ride from the hotel and met the chauffeured SUV and my guests. The “music played on” and Goode did not have a seat in the band. One of the hundreds of respondents to my Grieg List Ad for another chauffeur was received from Mr. Goode with “I apologize.”

I didn’t respond. I have been working with Robert, my new driver, for over a year and his attitude, performance and appreciation of the opportunity to work with him. But! He have, over a short period of time acquiesced to some of our guides requests to make a U-Turn here, an illegal left turn there and it piled up measurably and the insurance company decided to drop him from the policy and as I result I had to search for a new TLC driver, six years

minimum experience and no moving violations or accidents in six years. I was so annoyed at Robert for allowing those foolish requests to be taken seriously. He knew that he could have simply told the guides that I can't do that I need my driver's license to earn my living and if I get too many then it will jeopardize my job. So, that's exactly what happened.

I told my guides not to ask a driver to perform an illegal maneuver!! I told Robert not to comply with such instructions. That didn't help.

The next driver was a full time New York City firefighter. His name was Robert too, a mature man who drove a ladder truck and certainly a Suburban was a piece of cake compared to that! He was excellent except for one thing. He appeared at the garage where we would meet 45 minutes prior to tour time but he was often too late and that didn't work. I suspected that it would be his downfall because he was driving to the meeting place located on the Upper Westside coming from Bushwick, Brooklyn by *car*! The subway was much more of a sure thing but driving in the morning with all the traffic was not smart. Then he had to look for parking three blocks away on the block where there's a firehouse and a police station, so that he wouldn't be ticketed. The last day he was running very late, I called and he didn't answer. I kept calling and he finally picked up the phone, "Where are you Robert?"

"I'm down by Canal Street!"

"So put the car in a lot, first fire station you see and I'll meet you at the hotel, I'll drive to the hotel and meet you there, catch a subway, ok?"

That worked. He'd never have made it up to me on the Upper Westside and then we'd have gotten to the customers too late! He quit after that job.

The current driver is fine; he's been with us for about 6-8 months and hope he remains for a long time.

Back to getting the insurance:

I called numerous insurance agents and the few who I had contacted, specialized in the type of insurance we needed but none would touch us with a ten-foot pole.

I did some research and determined that since this was not a "car for hire" I just may not be under the jurisdiction of The TLC a "car for hire." I suspected that for quite some time because a TLC care is strictly one that is used solely to transfer hires from point A to point B and not needed therefore to conduct tours.

I wrote a letter to the chief counsel of The TLC seeking a letter that our use was not under TLC jurisdiction. Having been ignored by her for about a month, I wrote another letter enclosing a copy of the original letter and sent them both together via certified mail with return receipt requested. She called me finally and after a lot of squirming bullshit during our conversation she finally agreed that I was correct and she said that she would issue a letter, on The TLC's letterhead affirming that our vehicle did not require TLC plates to provide tours. It took a lot of effort because she told me that the TLC doesn't issue such letters. I pleaded with her that I am trying to abide by the law, follow the rules and bear the expense of buying the proper insurance for my clients and this is what is required of my by law. I told her in the most proper but emphatic way,

"If you decide not to provide what I need then I shall have no choice other than to take you to court. I'm have the right law firm and I guarantee you that I shall get that letter whether The TLC writes them or not but this is one letter that's going to get written come hell or high water! What you are attempting to do is thwart my effort to comply with the law and play the game by being straight." I got the letter.

Then I got involved with the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles and that was such an endless run around, no two agents had the same answers to all my questions, providing incorrect information and gave me a run around that had me spinning in circles.

Then a fabulous idea hit my brain. Who was the previous commissioner of the TLC? What was he or she doing now? I did an Internet search and found him, Matthew Daus, a transportation attorney practicing law on West 56th Street. I called Mr. Daus and we had a long and pleasant discussion. He totally understood exactly what we needed and he agreed to help. I provided him with a check for \$3,000, his retainer. Within a few days two insurance agents who specialized in the type of insurance I needed contacted me. Due to Mr. Daus's recommendation, I was able to obtain the right insurance coverage. He sent me a refund check of \$2,200 against the retainer. Amazing, that's what it takes to get things done in New York City, legally.

Chapter V

Thoughts & Reflections

Brooklyn: Once Fear, Now I'm Never Too Near!

Perhaps the Dutch got it all wrong from the get-go! They named this outlying farming community Breukelen, after a Dutch town, meaning broken land in Old Dutch. As a kid I always stayed away from Brooklyn. YIKES!! There was never any compelling reason for me to go there. The tabloid papers frequently featured headlines similar* to these:

FALLING BRICK KILLS 6 YEAR OLD IN BROOKLYN

SUBWAY HIJACKED IN BED-STY

FOUR SLAIN IN BROOKLYN SHOOTOUT

SIX-YEAR-OLD BOY KILLS 3 SISTERS

TEEN BOY EATS DOG

Generally, I hung out in Manhattan and the safer environs of would you believe the north Bronx? Yes, The Bronx! Brooklyn was the forbidden land or “The Promised Land” a place that promised trouble. Queens and Staten Island offered nothing back then as far as I was concerned. I should have strayed away from Queens, a vast plain of highways, airports and boulevards peppered with great diners, diverse neighborhoods and too few neighborhood parks.

That's bit of an unfair exaggeration, no doubt, but try it for yourself, diverse yes, but a vast wasteland of boring urbanites, for the most part with a few exceptions, to be fair.

As a kid, and as a young man, I never traveled anywhere. I hated baseball, boring, didn't even go to the 1964 World's Fair, it was in Queens, and Staten Island was, to me, a suburb that was more like New Jersey than New York City. The best thing about Staten Island, for me was, it cost nothing to get there, the ferry!

The names of some of the Brooklyn neighborhoods disturbed me a lot. Gravesend: Whose grave is at the end of what? Crown Heights? Perhaps it was the crown my mother used to refer to after I committed a minor crime like leaving my dirty clothes laying on the floor, "I'll crown you!" As in break your head! Red Hook. Whose hook and why was it red, blood? Sheepshead Bay. What happened to that sheep's body? "Boy's High" School. Who's high? Who's high on what? Greenpoint; what's the point? It's very silly but that's what kept me away from "Crooklyn." Ft. Greene. Do they really need a fort? Flatbush. "Flatbush" how'd that happen and whose bush got flattened? I'm just being a bit silly.

The first time I had to go to Brooklyn, the day Robert F. Kennedy had died, gloomy, to pickup my teaching license at 110 Livingston Street, the HQ of The Board of Education. I was looking from side to side for the inevitable ambush. I parked my car, an MGB, in a parking lot, no street parking for me. I located the Board of Education building and made my way up to the sixth floor to The Bureau of Licensing.

Miraculously, I maneuvered my way through the maze of offices littered with red tape, filled with bureaucrats who were half asleep. Finally, I emerged with the coveted license in my hands. To me, at the time, it was the most important piece of paper that had ever been handed to me except for a roll of toilet paper when . . . ! The license was my lifeline, my ticket to avoid the military at a time when we, as a nation, were torn apart by the most unpopular war, or rather "conflict" excuse me, since The Civil War. Vietnam was a "police action" or a conflict but no, not a war. Such crap that this government feeds us and we paid so much in blood and treasure. It's literally obscene! Next, I was on to The Bureau of Assignments where I obtained my district, post haste.

"We're going to give you HARLEM!" the clerk shouted, a large African American woman who roared with apparent contempt! She put fear in my brain but now was not the time to withdraw from my mission.

This was the Harlem of Nicky Barnes, the kingpin drug pusher, and a place that would have changed my image of Brooklyn, by comparison to a place more akin to Scarsdale, an affluent New York suburb. But, it turned out to be not nearly as bad as I had expected. So much for Brooklyn! I got what I came for and I left unscathed.

Now, after a generation, time had brought wholesome and very positive change to nearly all of Brooklyn.

Years ago my son David told me that he was moving to Brooklyn.

"Brooklyn? Are you nuts?"

I asked him.

"Yeah, Brooklyn. Dad, been there lately?"

"No, I haven't been to 'Crooklyn' lately."

My fears still dwelled within me even though I knew that David was far from stupid. I had decided to break down those barriers, those ghosts of years past. I had decided to check it out with an opened mind. People generally don't do that. They have their notions of neighborhoods and never venture back, out of fear. Time after time, I've revisited rotten neighborhoods recently, those I had feared in the past, and I'm inspired and often say to myself, "I'd live here!" Amazing!

When I visited Brooklyn to meet my son to check out the neighborhood, I had experienced a place that I had never been to before. Brooklyn Heights! That's about the most gorgeous neighborhood in the entire City! Coulda, woulda, shoulda bought a brownstone there when I could have afforded one about thirty years ago for about \$80,000. Today, strap on another two zeros and you too could call it home! Yes, two zeros! But, at that time, in the 1980's there was a reason why the homes were so cheap. Recently a brownstone sold for \$16,500,000 on Columbia Heights Street in Brooklyn Heights.

David and I spent part of the day walking together through America's first suburb, the first New York City landmarked neighborhood, with 600 pre-Civil War homes, still standing, featuring architectural styles such as: Georgian, Federal, Italianate, Greek Revival, Queen Anne, Neo-Classical, Beau Arts, Dutch, Brownstones and Churches with magnificent Gothic detailing, ornate Italianate framed entry embellishments, Renaissance structures covered in limestone, Flemish Bond brickwork, pediments,

lintels and magnificent oak and mahogany doors with elaborate moldings.

This neighborhood, one of Brooklyn's best, is a clean, safe, vibrant place that boasts a rich history and a sense of tranquility. Truly, it is a marvelous neighborhood, merely one of many in Brooklyn that has sprung to life providing better, safer, serene and happier lives for residents of our most populous borough.

We walked beneath the Brooklyn Bridge on the Brooklyn side. What a site! Such splendor, history and beauty and then went on to DUMBO, "Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass", aka, Brooklyn's Soho. It's a neighborhood filled with converted commercial loft buildings, new high-rise condos, small businesses, charming shops, several bookstores, restaurants, gourmet coffee shops, bars, bakeries, waterside parks, Jane's Carousel and X-Manhattanites who yearn for a bit more space, for a bit less money with rapid access to Manhattan. That's a place, with a soul.

Williamsburg, "Willyburg" and that gorgeous bridge, rich in history bearing a sign posted by the City for motorists leaving Brooklyn that boasts, "Oy Vey, I'm Leaving Brooklyn." For many Jewish people who moved across the river to Brooklyn from most notably The Lower Eastside, crossing the Williamsburg Bridge was like traversing The Red Sea as enslaved people entering the promise land.

Kent Street along the waterfront is now teaming with young adults living one subway stop from Manhattan. Bedford Avenue is littered with more watering holes per block than just about anywhere else in the City

with the possible exception of LES, The Lower Eastside. Young movers and shakers are building a new community there replacing remnants of the old Jewish, Irish, Italian and Polish neighborhoods that had existed in that immediate area. It's giving way to a new and younger generation, bursting with energy, talent and optimism. Eager young folks are working and pushing ahead building their futures and Brooklyn's too, just as past generations have done. It's another layer of history in the making.

Brooklyn has become a vibrant center of culture, museums, libraries, music, art, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Academy of Music, "BAM" the Botanical Gardens, NBA basketball and magnificent parks, old and new bursting forth.

And don't forget Coney Island. The transformation of Brooklyn is exemplary of the conversion of New York City and its got its "mojo" back. What's a mojo? It's soul, identity, and trademark, a mark of distinction, a brand, an abundance of enthusiasm, diversity, pride and charisma.

Take a walk through Ft. Greene, Greenpoint and check out some of those streets off Manhattan Avenue, DeKalb, Atlantic and Flatbush. Take a step back to the mid 19th century; Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Boreum Hill, Park Slope, Red Hook, and on and on. It's almost endless.

Some neighborhoods might require a dose of courage, though less than in the past. Bed-Sty is much better then when Spike Lee created "Do The Right Thing." Crown Heights is on the upside fast track, East New York will get there and currently has the most construction permits in the borough. Bushwick is

coming up nicely as well as the mecca for graffiti and a place for hipsters hang out and move to, just one of a number of places that we never thought would “make it.” When the real estate gentrification genie makes it’s way to Pitkin Avenue and brownstones start selling for a million plus bucks then just about all of Brooklyn will have “arrived.”

The transformation is incredible. The power of optimism, people laying down roots, urban pioneering in Brooklyn has created dynamism forging a future with neighbors from all over the world. Brooklyn is a case study in urban renewal from the grass roots, an example of change for the good, one that needs to be studied and duplicated in other cities.

Therefore, if you've been to Brooklyn, a long time ago, then you haven't been there at all. That's New York City, change; it's the only constant, the only thing that stays the same is change.

On a nice day, take a walk over The Brooklyn Bridge. You'll get a view of Manhattan that's well worth the trip and you'll be one of the tens of millions who have taken this iconic stroll, a symbol of New Yorker's spirit and resolve. And when you get to Brooklyn look for the sign the City has installed on the bridge “Welcome to Brooklyn. How sweet it is!”

“Hey Brooklyn! Yus doin’ good! We “loves ya” Brooklyn! I’m aksin’ ya, eh!”

Sorry about that Brooklyn, you guys don’t talk like that anymore, right? Nah . . .

*the headlines at the beginning of this article are fictional hyperbole but they do make a point.

Who's Your Neighbor?

Years ago, Liza Minnelli recorded a song entitled "Ring Them Bells." It's about a fictitious woman named Shirley Devore, whose parents were fretful because she, at the ripe old age of thirty-two, was still a single woman. They had decided to help her search for a man suitable for marriage by arranging a trip for her to pursue the lucky one who would become Miss Devore's loving and devoted husband.

As the lyrics unfold, while searching for her prized beau, it had been suggested that she visit the Dubrovnik coast. Off she went and there she met a man who happened to live in apartment 29F in the same building as she, who resided in apartment 29E, at 5 Riverside Drive on the Upper Westside in Manhattan.

Fact is stranger than fiction. Any New Yorker will "buy in" to this story. This fictional account of finding romance thousands of miles from home, with a next door neighbor, undoubtedly has happened time and again, especially for New Yorkers who often would not recognize their neighbor if they saw them at The Wailing Wall or The Great Wall of China!

Having lived in buildings with over 400 apartments or as many as 900, I have no doubt that this song conveys a true story.

While living in The Sheffield, a fifty-story building on West 57th Street with eighteen apartments per floor, it was unrealistic to know the names of more than a small fraction of my neighbors even those who lived on the same floor! How could I even consider them my neighbors, with 900 apartments and an average of 1.5 people per apartment yielding 1,350 residents,

more or less? That's more than the population of most villages and small towns. Is an apartment building a small town?

People safeguard their anonymity in large cities. The only way for me to get to meet my neighbors is when and if we were waiting together for the elevator, pick up our mail, hold a door or dispose of the trash at the same time. Usually neighbors say "hi" or "thanks" just for holding the elevator door. Introducing yourself and announcing your apartment number is seldom done. It's looked down upon and seems very peculiar in New York City. People go about their lives, plugged into an iPod, iPad, iPhone, Blackberry, reading or writing emails on their way to the lobby. The silence is odd, punctuated by the clicking of keystrokes on handheld devices and the faint sound of music, which at times isn't so "faint" but, at times, it could make you want to faint.

Today, I live in a building that's about half the size of The Sheffield. There are ten apartments on each floor wing, two wings for a total of twenty. I have to admit that I know the name of five people who live on my floor and that's probably five more than Aline knows. She, I believe, is quite typical!

Most people lead hurried and hectic lives, especially in urban centers and they are too busy and just not that interested in who their neighbors are, where they're from, what they do or what they think. We want peace, quiet, our space and security. Once our apartment doors are closed our neighbors might as well be half way around the world. But, if they were in need of help or assistance for just about anything, we'd all be there for each other. Why? We're New

Yorkers and that's just the way we are! By the way, if you need a cup of sugar, "ring my bell" that's okay too, even though I don't have any. It wouldn't matter whether I knew your name or not. If you live down the hall, we're neighbors!

The sugar is unimportant, it's the spontaneous opportunity to say "Hi neighbor! What's your name? What can I do for you?" See ya in China, but I may not know who the hell you are! But, if we meet in Split, Croatia, we just might get married!

Who's Bored in New York City?

There are hundreds of thousands of people in this City who awaken daily without any idea how they're going to spend their day. It makes me sad. It's about them and not about the City. Whether it's depression, loneliness, paranoia, ill health, old age, boredom, anger, financial problems or any other deprivation, anyone who's bored in New York City is a most unfortunate soul. They must have lost opportunities to connect with themselves. Others enjoy all the beauty, events, socialization, energy and cultural opportunities that are available, many of which happen to be free!

I've greeted a new day many times without a plan. For me, the best solution is to grab a book, my favorite magazine or newspaper at get on the subway and consider all the choices that are available. In no time at all I make a choice destination and off I go. Thus far, I haven't made a regrettable decision. Even if my choice was not the best, it was my choice to do, see, and experience something new and different. It's endless. Just exit a subway station, there are 483 to choose from, one you've never been to before and as you emerge a new vista unfolds before you.

This City has more of what you want than any other. There are street fairs, parks, The Staten Island Ferry, Governor's Island Ferry and that includes free bicycle "rentals" and there's the greenway along The Hudson River, The High Line, take a stroll over the Brooklyn Bridge. The views are breathtaking, people watching is an old pastime, window shopping, free kayak rentals with instructions provided upon The Hudson River, Brooklyn Bridge Park. Central Park, Prospect

Park, Greenwood Cemetery, America's second most popular tourist attraction in the mid 19th century, City Island, pocket parks, the changing skyline, observing the water traffic, the sights and sounds of people talking, street hawkers and dancers, watching people doing their jobs, helping each other, shouting, amuse yourself, and notice their weird facial expressions it's all there, free and easy to get to. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is "free" although most visitors pay the customary voluntary \$25 "donation" not realizing that the fee is a voluntary donation. The sign displays the message, in somewhat smaller type, "recommended donation." But, the greatest bargains in New York City are on the sidewalks, yes the sidewalks, craft and flea markets too!

Strolling down the sidewalks provides the greatest "side show" on earth. Not only due to the opportunity to observe people but also take notice of the diversity, coming from everywhere, with different ideas, cultures, languages, modes of dress and gestures. There is no face of an average New Yorker. Listen to their languages, check out their body language, their clothes, hair style, and shoes, listen to them speaking French, Russian, German, Italian or virtually every language on earth. Be amused how they light a cigarette, hold it, notice their walk, how they hold hands, tilt their hats, sip their drinks, it's very amusing.

Venture into stores, check out their window displays, hang out there, start a conversation, look at how merchandise is featured. Observe the architecture, the endless variety of styles and the art that adorns countless structures large and small and roam

through the City, find traces, artifacts and monuments of history that are all around you. Just look, it's all there; memorials, pieces of The Berlin Wall, statues, terra cotta carvings, buildings with spectacular ornamentation are everywhere. It's a glorious urban landscape rich in history, substance and beauty.

Venture to a place you've never been to. There are 722 miles of subway tracks and 472 stations. For the cost of a ride you can travel through time and visit places you never knew existed. There are so many neighborhoods to visit in New York City and they all have their own karma. The City is a mosaic, a virtually endless palate; cultures, communities and experiences await you. Just go there. Take a ride to Williamsburg, a very interesting place, The Bronx Zoo, free on Wednesdays, City Island for lobster tails "on the water" for about twenty five bucks including a Heineken. Or enjoy a Philly cheese steak sandwich via the R train on Fifth Avenue in Bayridge, Brooklyn, and on and on. Did I forget to mention Arthur Avenue in the Bronx? It could be the best Little Italy in the City where the aroma of cheese will knock you over and sausage that will make your eyeballs roll, pasta to die for and prices that can't be beat!

The world has laid down roots here. If you want to get happy, active and stimulated, this is the place to be. Where shall we go next? That's up to you and don't forget to bring a camera or iPhone to capture images of your experiences and sites. Slicing and dicing The Big Apple is my favorite pastime, try it. You'll never regret and never forget.

Graffiti, Now and Then

As with just about everything else in New York City, graffiti has changed. It's constantly evolving, impressive, relevant and powerful. It has reached a high plateau and has earned the right to claim legitimacy as a true art form.

Art is expression, creativity and imagination bringing forth a message, hopefully. But, at the very least it conveys emotions, beliefs, culture, the urban experience, an outlook placed on a surface, a form of communication and speech that's real and filled with passion born from human the spirit. It conforms to the passions of new and vibrant energy that is very much alive and thriving in New York City.

No one is qualified to judge a piece of art with absolute authority. Only we have the right to express how a piece of art touches us. It's all about belief and opinion, our own subjective realm. Those who make a living as art critics exist on all sides of the discussion. Life is a bell shaped curve and that's what art is about, subjectivity. Beauty resides "in the eye of the beholder" and that includes graffiti because it truly is an art form.

There are those who will examine a piece of art and declare "it's junk" and by any measure they have the right to label it "junk" or virtually anything they wish. According to what law of aesthetics, what mathematical equation, what yardstick, or frame of reference gives one the right to determine the value, pleasure and measure that art means others? Junk to some is stimulating and delivers a message or is simply pleasing to look at to others, "it speaks to me." Art is, about individual choices providing

opportunities for the viewers to decide for themselves.

Graffiti is a terrific art form for those who seek creative self-expression. For those who “write” as they say in graffiti vernacular, their efforts provide expression that casts aside our politics and emotions with little or no regard for the sanctity of “public property.” “Writers” have the right to express themselves, although doing so on public space is a violation of the public and our community. In some places it provides a positive and prideful message of a community. Therefore perhaps it should not be considered graffiti. Who’s to say? We all have the right to take it or leave it.

Back in the 1970’s and ‘80’s graffiti was a ubiquitous plague that had befallen upon the City. It seemed to be everywhere. Why?

Look at life through the eyes of a kid from the ghetto at the time that the mighty City of New York was on its knees, pleading for help and on the verge of bankruptcy. The streets were filthy, schools were failing and police disengaged themselves from communities that they were there to serve and protect. Thousands of children were living in horrendous substandard housing and most were deeply frustrated and angry. Single parents were struggling in buildings and neighborhoods that were saturated with illegal drugs, poverty, violence, crime and filth. Gunshots were heard so often that many ignored the familiar sound of firearms. Police sirens screamed incessantly, money was. There were no places for children to find needed space, quiet and peace needed to complete their schoolwork. Running

down to the store to buy momma Pall Mall's and vodka was a fact of daily life for thousands of subjugated ghetto children who were under age to buy such things but they were sold them anyway. What resources were at hand for them to express themselves? What role models were there to save them? Who understood their plight? Who provided encouragement, hope and the prospect of a future? Where were safe playgrounds, enrichment programs, and parents who were able to provide their children with what they desperately needed, wholesome food, warmth, adequate housing, love, nurturing and guidance?

Teachers were there sure, but far too many were unenthusiastic, providing substandard performance in an underfunded school system, one that recruited thousands of inexperienced teachers who were for the most part "green", ill equipped and poorly trained to teach in urban ghettos and incapable of coping with all the challenges facing them.

I graduated from an excellent university with a degree in education and it took me about a year to balance my act as a novice teacher in a Junior High School in Harlem. I cared about my kids. Most teachers were not so inclined. For \$106 a week, take home pay, most teachers were passing through the system, biding their time and teaching was not their primary mission. When I became a student teacher, as part of the college curriculum what I saw outside the classroom windows were cows! Somehow I know that this environment was not idea for training for teaching in an urban ghetto. Yep! I didn't see one cow in Harlem☺

The City had few options. There was no money, the environment was extremely hostile, and droves of children were living on life's edge. Society owed those kids much more than that. The least experienced teachers were attracted to teaching in the urban ghettos of New York City as a means to avoid the war in Vietnam. For many, their interest and devotion to the teaching profession was AWOL, "away without leave" just passing through.

If only the best and most experienced teachers were assigned to face those challenges and the "greenies" were instead, assigned to the best schools it would have produced better results, for the unfortunates. It just doesn't work that way folks. It would have been politically incorrect.

The deck has always been stacked, most tragically, against teenage boys and girls, who lacked essential role models. They had no place for their anger. They found destructive outlets to vent themselves with dire consequences. Immersed in that environment as a teacher, I had learned to understand my students, their frustrations and anger. They didn't ask to be born or raised there or enter this world with all the deficiencies that their world had hurled upon them. They struggled to survive, cope and endure the best way they could with empty toolboxes. Some did better than others and many of them created graffiti as a means of expression in ways they knew would draw attention from a society that tragically had turned its back on them.

This "betrayal" was not planned, sanctioned or organized. Everyone in this City was aware of the degradation of those youngsters in the ghettos. The

vast majority of people were focused on their own problems. Graffiti became a valve for those who sought a means of expression; it was a howl, their frustration and anger painted for all to see. "I'm here, I have a message and it's in your face!"

I hated graffiti back then because I just didn't understand it. New Yorkers looked at it and saw it as ugly, an expression of a City that had gone wild. It marred the City and provided an obscene backdrop exposing the underbelly of New York City in a ubiquitous, grotesque and gritty manner. It was a plague upon us. Clearly, this was not art; it was scribble, "junk art" and offensive. "Jose 167" written in big rounded letters with sprayed Day-Glo borders had invoked the notion that we were simply out of control! I felt that we had been invaded. This was my City, my home. "How dare you take license to disfigure it?"

The subway system took a huge hit. Subway cars, public property were all palettes for thousand of "writers." It revealed a City plunging downhill, raped by rabid teens who took over and ruled.

What will become of us? What will the future bring? My concern for us all was deep and real. I was persistently fatigued and troubled by it all. It was an appalling blight on the landscape, a rape of the environment and a reflection of a society plunging deeper into despair. Admittedly, I didn't get it. I just didn't understand it.

Those days are over. Sure, there's graffiti in New York City now. Most of it is found in the same neighborhoods that gave rise to it before but it's not the same.

During those difficult days we had a different form of expression then we do now as those neighborhoods have changed. Today, talented artists express themes with enormous skill and creativity. Verve has replaced nerve and locals respect it for what it is. This new art or evolved form of graffiti has become more accepted, even welcome. Today there are many examples of graffiti that are extraordinary all over the City. Themes depict children on their way to school laden with books, chess pieces adorn school walls, elders are illustrated as active and happy people, black and white folks are engaged in conversation, ethnic themes exist expressing pride, Yankee heroes were adorned recently at 157th Street and River Road in The Bronx, a spectacular display, clean and unmarred, a work of art, on a building wall dated 2004. Why? Apparently, locals respect and perceive these visuals as legitimate expressions of their culture and values. This is not “junk art.” It’s real and it touches the heart. It is validation that conveys the impression that artists are delivering messages that are timely and important. They are part of the community, it’s culture, uplifting, vibrant, prideful and positive.

It’s a new day. No longer a competition of yelling, “Look at me.” Rather it’s “Look at you, look at us, look at our community, school and our City!” That’s the difference and it’s big.

In Queens at Court Square there were some very large commercial buildings that had been transformed into artist’s lofts. There was an arrangement with the building owner to allow artists who were renting space in the buildings to ply their

craft on the building exterior. The graffiti was so impressive and truly fine art. There were western scenes of gunslingers in saloons, monsters, gangsters, surreal scenes from outer space, etc. etc. People visited from all over the world and I've taken many people there to enjoy and photograph the graffiti.

It's gone now, tragically. The owner of the property decided to demolish the buildings and replace them with high-rise condos. He white washed the buildings eliminating the graffiti. The artists sued him and after a long court battle they were awarded a \$6 million settlement! How's that for transformation?

Check out the graffiti in Bushwick, Brooklyn, it's the most impressive form of graffiti we've got left here in the City.

"The artist" is now part of something, a community that strives and expresses pride in itself. They're not destroying it. They are celebrating it. That is the new message, embracing, not rejecting, loving and not hating.

Yes, graffiti has changed and it is visual evidence of the maturation of New York City, another example of how this town has survived, endured and how people in New York City have evolved. We reach and create with all the guts and passion we have. Viva graffiti. It's the true urban art, and that's only one man's opinion. What's yours? "Write" man. It's the "write" thing to do.

Going, Going, Gone!

The true litmus test for a New Yorker is the refrain, "Oh, I remember when that was there!" It is just one very poignant sentiment, about this town, that speaks to me. I have lived here since day one. I was born in Manhattan. I recall so many of the images along the path of life many that have peppered my childhood, images that are chiseled in my brain, images that no longer exist except a distant memory that evokes welcomed by very melancholy longing that will always dwell deep in my heart and my soul.

I too have become one of those who walk the streets of New York City, seemingly without a purpose and silently say to myself, "I remember when that was there!" But, there is a purpose and a mission. It's a long walk that takes me back to a glimpse, a reminder or an image of the distant past. Perhaps a Checkered cab, and old style alarm box, a bishop's crook street lamp or an old street sign that missed the last two crews who were replacing them, etc. etc.

I too have become another walking archive, a time machine, of New York City's past with a curious anticipation and apprehension in search of remnants from days gone by. I fear uttering phrases that reveal my melancholy, as I would risk giving myself away as an elder, one who carries a senior metro card and a social security debt card in my pocket. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saddened at the phase of life I am in rather it's the sense that I'm not fully a part of the word that I'm living in as I once was.

Putting myself in the elder category, a long time New Yorker, one who looks back on a full and active life etched in the stone and steel of a City gone by, is a

mixed blessing. Change has been dramatic through seven decades and has made me who I am. There are countless images sealed in my brain, most that can only be seen in films, photographs and with words “painted” by historians and fiction writers.

The wicker subway seats, ceiling fans, tungsten light bulbs, the 15 cent subway fare, cigarette ads, “Most Doctors Smoke Chesterfields” and the “Meet Miss Subway” signs, Checker cabs, elevated trains, payphones, subway tokens, wooden turnstiles, low hemlines, seamed stockings, ubiquitous fedoras, buses bellowing black smoke in your face, no site of sidewalk scaffolds, BMT and IRT subway signs, double breasted suits, The Camel billboard in Times Square billowing smoke rings, wing tips, double decker City buses, bow ties, one cent chewing gum vending machines installed on subway beams providing two pieces of Chiclets in little cardboard boxes, 5 cent newspapers, women wearing hats with enormously wide brims, 5 cent candy bars, dark blue 3 cent postage stamps featuring The Statue of Liberty, subway tokens, free street parking and no elderly ladies wear the brand, Red Cross Shoes, 10 cent phone calls, and on and on.

What’s even more remarkable was the absence of all the electronic gadgetry way back then; iPods, iPads, iphones, color flat screen television, NETFLIX, cable TV, curved flat screen TV, Wi-Fi, X-Box, credit cards accepted in taxis, Metro cards, the internet, Facebook, Instagram, snap chat, twitter, computerized street parking machines accepting credit cards, lit street crossing signs displaying that the light will change counting down the seconds, bike paths, street

stations that provide bicycle rentals, subway elevators and escalators, accordion double length buses, pedi-cabs, stainless steel newsstands and bus shelters, epoxied gravel sitting areas in public squares with public tables and chairs where streets use to be with beautiful flowered pots that are actually watered by contracted truck by the City.

I'm not an alien who has landed here for a visit. It's people such as I who have and still are undergoing this transformative experience. The changing human condition defines this City and flows through the veins of those who've been here long enough to reflect and take in the astounding differences in just a few short decades.

What amazes me even more is knowing that every generation since our arrival from other parts of the world to "the island at the center of the earth" has experienced dramatic change. What I am experiencing has been going on for 12 generations. Perhaps this generation is experiencing the most technologically life changing devices, communication mediums, transportation, sources of information and our way of life, a dramatic transformation never before experienced since the creation of mankind.

This rite of passage runs deep. I have earned the right along with all those who have walked these streets, experiencing all of the 1950's, 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's, 00's and 10's I've held firm to a vision and commitment, the belief that this City is much more then the comeback City. It's a City that has morphed into a place better than ever before.

As I walk through the streets of the City, a City that differs vastly from the one I knew only ten short

years ago is, in fact, a futuristic place that's almost surreal. My daily consciousness, sense of increased well-being, feeling of safety, bursting with optimism and pride that I carry a constant source of comfort and satisfaction. Such thoughts, a short time ago, were rare and fleeting.

Unlike most cities, New York City is an organic City. I look around at everything and wonder how the changing landscape of people and streetscapes has affected us all. I inhale what I see now with enormous excitement and wonder. I gaze and ask myself questions, constantly. Why is this here? Who was behind it? Why is it still there? Why hasn't it been replaced yet? Who makes those decisions and why this way and not that way?

People look, gasp in wonder at One 57, the new 1008 foot glass condo designed as a waterfall, that has risen across the street from Carnegie Hall at the time of this printing, the tallest poured concrete building on earth and the tallest residential building in the Northern Hemisphere.

But hold on folks because located at 432 Park Avenue stands our tallest building at 1,396 feet above the street, the highest roof in the City. That is taller, if you consider the roof, not the pole on the World Trade Center, that roof height, topping out at 1,368 feet. Mr. Macklow purchased the fabled Drake Hotel for \$400 million and demolished it. Why? His words, "Because, at \$7,000 per foot, estimated sale price, for the highest floors in the new building, 432 Park Avenue. Why not?" The sky's the limit or is it the money or ego of a handful of ambitious real estate developers and the technology and market demand

that justify such incredible structures? There are several other structures in the “57th Street Corridor” that are under construction that will all have spectacular heights, several under construction that will be taller such as 111 West 57th Street, a real slither building 45 feet on each side, 15 foot ceilings, one condo per floor and 1,550 feet high! It’s been called “Billionaire’s Row” a new place name for a neighborhood that’s rising to a new and impressive level never before experienced in this City.

Chase Manhattan Bank has announced that it is about to demolish it’s world headquarters located on Park Avenue between 47th and 48th Streets a 700 foot high steel and glass structure that will be replaced by a building that will top out at approximately 1,200 feet! How would I feel if the City stayed the same as it had been since 1960? Boring! What would be the thrill of venturing through a city that stands still? I’d love to experience a trip back to the New York City of 1960 to see and feel the difference, the look, the people, their mode of dress, the Stetson’s and all the styles of the series, Mad Men and all the other subtleties that still remain in my head. Liken to a noir movie that captures the emotions of the past, gone forever, memories are indelibly etched in my head, along with many others who share similar thoughts and emotions who feel the same. For those who have spent their lives in cities such as Paris, Athens, Rome or London live their lives less shockingly as dramatic changes are far less a part of their urban landscape. Stagnation, sameness and constancy are not what cities are for, in the mind of a New Yorker. We demand change, we make change happen and that’s

the best evidence that we continue to stay fresh by lurching forward. It's a visual expression of our vitality, our inventiveness, imagination, drive, resources, creativity and ingenuity. If we don't change then we are inert and in New York City that just doesn't "cut it"! What worked yesterday doesn't work today, and what works today will not work tomorrow. That's New York City!

I remember when the glorious Pennsylvania Station stood. Undoubtedly, the most significant edifice that has been deliberately destroyed in this City by its own people, to be replaced by a fast food mall invented by the self-serving, self-righteous real estate interests that looked only at the bottom line.

The new Penn Station is the bottom, the cesspool of terminals, a disgusting symbol of a City gone mad. The rats are having a blast, feeding on piles of scraps, trash and McDonalds. The shame is the quintessential essence of greed and moneyed interests gone wild in cahoots with a city politic that looked the other way or were too stupid or greedy to understand the consequences of their ways. It's a shame on them and the powers that had been. Surely they were "in bed" with the vultures who feasted on the spoils, worse than the innocent rats devouring fast food trash. The bad news is that they're still here and fortunately we have a Landmarks Preservation Commission to put the brakes on such demolition adventurists.

Imagine Caesar taking down the Coliseum in Rome and replacing it with a fast food mall! He would have been fed to the lions. I dare say that we, as a City, one that lurches to the future, have come a long way. Grand Central Terminal is still standing thanks to

Jackie Kennedy Onassis and her cohorts. The original Hearst Building still stands although as a shadow box, for a \$500,000,000 Sir Norman Foster “erector set” dia-grid behemoth. We seem to have struck a balance, building the future and preserving much of the sacred past. Good lessons don’t come cheap. We’ve paid the price, in spades.

When The Coliseum, was built in 1957 at Columbus Circle, it was such a big deal that the U.S. Post Office issued a stamp, three cents, to mail a letter, commemorating the event. Abandoned, in large part, due to its inability to compete with the Jacob Javits Convention Center, it was demolished giving way for the Time Warner Complex less than forty two years after its construction. This is a story that virtually defines this City. I remember when The Met Life Building used to be The Pan Am Building and what a horrendous monster that will always be to millions of New Yorkers because it merely is an overbuilt pile of cement grotesquely invading the sky, blocking out the sun on Park Avenue and obscuring The Helmsley Building by eliminating its contrast against the sky. It’s a perfect example of building junk. We’ve been very good at that in the past.

I recall working for my father on Saturdays at 1190 Sixth Avenue, between 47th and 48th Streets, as a kid in the late 1950’s. Peering out of a third story window I saw brownstones, across the street, with makeshift store fronts that have since been replaced by huge structures of concrete, glass and steel; towers hovering over fifty stories high framing the entire Westside of Sixth Avenue from 42nd Street to 55th Streets. Frequently, I pass by; enter the deli that now

occupies my father's former place of business where I had worked, a camera store and film-processing lab. Occasionally, I enter, purchase a coffee, and glance across the street asking myself, "Where has it gone?" or "Why did it change?" I ask those questions, rhetorically even though I know it is always about money. It's about seizing and creating opportunities that this City serves up on a silver platter for those who put those complex deals together and fatten their wallets. Those complex deals become very easy after the first three or four deals, nothing to it. Buy the land, assemble the properties, get the permits, hire the contractors, get the loans and market the space and ka-ching!

They gloat that they have mustered the power and influence to re-create this City. I do believe, for the most part, it's good for us too. Brownstones simply cannot house all those who come to work in those glass and steel towers. They are a necessity providing space for a growing City that has mushroomed into vast canyons of glass and steel. Building size is driven due to increase land value that is a function of "highest and best use" an age-old real estate axiom. The ability to create more space through construction technology together with the ever-increasing demand for more space demands that taller ones replace older buildings. We are competing with other global primate cities and fortunately Mayor Bloomberg started moving forward to rezone mid-town east with a major zoning change on approximately 78 blocks around the Grand Central Terminal area to provide for demolition of existing buildings and with liberalized air rights laws that allow such rights to be

applied to locations that are further from the granter in order that benefits can be transferred to developers whose projects are greater distances. For example the Chase Bank new headquarters is payment Grand Central Terminal that would be the owner, Andrew Penson, \$200,000,000 for those rights and both sites are seven blocks away from each other. Way to go Michael!

I've imagined if Abraham Lincoln were in midtown in the 1860's he would have seen those brownstones too, or something quite like them. Lincoln would have marveled at the transformation of five story buildings replacing two or three story wooden frame structures. He may have said, "Well, it's about time! Where do we go from here?"

Imagine the next series of changes. Who can conceive of the deliberate destruction of those towers, making way for the next bold leap to grab more space from one-acre lots? Is the endgame at hand? Did those of generations gone by believe that the City had reached its final maturation, as in "we're done?" Look at every block and notice the older structures that line the side streets. There's plenty of room for more. If we were able to come back in one hundred years and have a look, it would be confirmed that the City that we had thought had reached its "endgame" was a City still in process, a turn of the page. That's one of the "magical mystery tours" of New York City, the tour through time. Unlike anywhere else it moves and it flies on in a most impressive way. The Chase Bank HQ is the best example of that transformation, the "endgame" skyscrapers that were built in the '60's are now inadequate and 700' tall just doesn't cut the

mustard, 1,200' is the new "endgame." Check back in sixty years or so and who knows, that 1,200 footer may be "sent out to pasture, who knows.

New York City's constant is change, a vibrant society, always lurching into the future, people who experience more change in less time than even New Yorkers could have ever imagined. In a City that is always short of time, the "New York minute", we have managed to accelerate the speed of change faster than ever before.

Reflecting on all this rapid change, living in New York City is an experience unlike any other. Surely, change occurs in other cities at lightening speed such as Dubai, San Paulo and Shanghai, etc. These experiments are ongoing and those cities will never acquire the magnificent historic footprint nor enjoy the richness of a City that is layered and built on a foundation of an incomparable history with a soul that is imbedded deep in the bedrock and the soul of its people.

The difference is that such places, planned cities, are fabricated by so called experts, urban planners, who are textbook engineers and designers, creating environments that lack layers of historical context and significance. Foundations of the past are absent, history is non-existent, and the roots of a culture are not to be found. Those cities are likened to a Disney World Theme Park, or Las Vegas both void of a true sense of "place" such as defines New York City. Here every block tells a story, has a history and its own culture and is embedded deep in the soil and in our souls.

When you walk through New York City you walk in space-time, through a place with a history and a destiny. It's about concentration on the second hand of a clock and you can always watch it moving. It never stops and that journey is the expression of all the energy and imagination that has made New York City what it was, is and yet to be.

New York City is Special, here's why

If you lived to be one hundred and stayed in the same village all your life, plowed fields, thrashed grain, carried water to your home and went to sleep at the end of every uneventful day, at about 8 PM, then your long life would be short on accomplishment, change, creativity and excitement.

Imagine, a city whose age is measured in three digit numbers, four hundred for example, and you claimed that that City, in many ways, is older than any city in Europe. How could that be?

In Europe, long phases of its history had been stagnant and change, as a dynamic force, didn't happen for centuries. Change was perceived as undesirable. There was a constancy of life that was imprinted upon the mindset of the populace; nothing to reach for, no gripping toward the future, a future that had always been perceived as its destiny to create positive change and reverse and learn to respect the past as well. Society clung to its timeless ways and embraced the now.

Life, it had been believed, was doomed to dwell in a place known for stagnation, void of invention and a place void of improvement. It was assumed that the steadiness of the present would serve future generations far into the vast distance of time. Values, beliefs, the mode and pace of life were perceived as sufficient and inevitable. Life would carry them through and enable them to occupy those places as they always had for generations and on and on. There was no need to neither seek more nor change their way of life. "Don't change our lives because change is frightening and fraught with risks of the unknown."

There is no doubt that there were many who rejected those precepts but they could not alter the power of the thrones, King, Queens, Dukes, Earls and Princes of kingdoms or the Pope, Cardinals and prelates of The Catholic Church. Few tried and very few succeeded. Most were punished harshly for their ways. Knowledge was not power it was death. Learning was a threat to the dogma that permeated the medieval world. Only the villainous nomads and mongrels, the Huns, Visigoths, Cossacks, Saxons, Anglicans, Vikings, Celts and Franks slaughtered, plundered and seized the landscapes of Europe drowning in vast and obscene pools of blood.

Throughout mankind it had been believed that the earth was flat. How many courageous scientists, astronomers and mathematicians had proven that it was not so at risk of life and limb? Curved shadows of the earth on the moon, celestial mechanics, and the disappearing horizon were evidence that was tossed aside by multitudes of the powers that be. Fear of change was the driving force that kept villages and emerging “urban centers” plunged into a never ending darkness for millenniums subjugated by religious dogma and black magic fanatics, sorcery, witchcraft, dreadful fear of excommunication, barbaric torture, the rack, burning at the stake, death or banishment from a primitive society one that remained in ruins.

Those who lived in villages and rural areas, as most did, lead fearful lives dreading marauding barbarians who often invaded their simple abodes, raping, plundering, enslaving and burning their villages, torturing and killing like animals with unspeakable

viciousness. The prospect that their simple way of life would be pillaged transforming primitive societies rife with ubiquitous ruin and death was an ever-present calamity. They were defenseless and vulnerable living in constant fear; a life not worth living.

For hundreds of years many European cities had lain dormant, void of change, change that did not come for approximately fifteen centuries. The Medieval Ages, aka the Dark Ages, experienced nearly two millennia of stagnation, obduracy, zealous religious beliefs, prodigious dogma highlighting the importance of the hereafter, superstition, witchcraft, debauchery, blind devotion to canons of faith and the dread of so called advancements in science, reason and logic. Those who sought to break down barriers by searching for new and better ways were banished from a terribly stagnant society. Excommunicating, burning pagans, Jews, Gypsies and infidels at the stake and inflicting horrendous punishments such as being drawn and quartered, impaled, a favorite of Vlad the Impaler. Enduring disabling economic and social fates amidst a reign of cruelty and terror that millions had to bear through Europe and most of the western world. People stayed stuck and lived out their lives, if you can call their existence "lives"!

Great cities had remained as they had been since the death of Christ. For centuries cities decayed in horrendous filth, squalor and all were afflicted by war, fire, disease, lawlessness and rampant crime, tyranny and despotism, starvation and city life laden with unbearable stench, debauchery, plagues and voodoo medical treatment. Peasants for generations

lived out their lives the same way their ancestors had and all expected that life would remain for generations to come as it had always been.

It didn't take long for Henry Hudson's sponsors, The Dutch West India Company to get down to business back in 1624. Once they became aware that New York was rich in fur, beavers roamed the hinterlands by the millions they decided to fund the first arrivals, French-speaking Belgium Huguenots. Shortly thereafter the Dutch themselves dug in their heels. They didn't come here to preserve the past, rather they came here to put the stamp on the future, and as such, they came with an open mind and most importantly the desire to make money, the driving force that resulted in a forward thinking society, one that would be built upon shipload after shipload of beaver pelts.

If an idea, innovation, creation or way of thinking could propel and project their society, one that would push their objectives forward, then they would seize upon it enthusiastically. They grasped every opportunity to cast aside the old ways and above all, create a new place that had begun as a business deal. The purchase of the island of Manhattan or at the least, a pact, an act designed to create a mutually beneficial relationship with the Indians was a seminal event. The rise of those who came to these shores from afar and the demise of those who received the newcomers, unknowing that their futures, the Indians, was destined to be foreboding, and eventually lead the a ruined society, one that was

destined to suffer complete annihilation of their way of life.

Despite no shortage of lecherous, lascivious, reckless and lawless citizens, the settlement succeeded to sow the seeds of what would become New Amsterdam and then The City of New York with a bloodless takeover by the British in 1664, a city named in honor of the King's brother, The Duke of York.

It wasn't always a smooth and seamless transition to say the least. The tragic Kieft's War and the Peach War, under Dutch rule, had spelled death and destruction, cruelty and treachery for the Indians as well as the Dutch.

The Dutch embedded cultural activism into their society and that footprint still reigns firmly and securely to this day. This City, legally named, The City of New York, was established as a business model. If it helps us to succeed and makes us money then it's good. If it promotes success and success was about money and the creation of a society, one that would be more stable and productive then it too was good. If it impeded their objectives and created uncertainty and negative energy then steps were taken to stamp it out, as was the summoning Peter Stuyvesant, "Big Daddy" who was rallied to impose strict rules and regulations to restore and maintain law and order then so be it and that too was good.

In short order, the Dutch recognized that change was the key to success, always reaching and building a better future, discarding the ways of the past, fostering change as had been thought, for the greatest good providing more wealth and greater

opportunities for the little Dutch settlement to continue to thrive and prosper.

Ideas advanced a good and wholesome environment for people who were determined to find better ways, by using their minds and their assets to build, design and carve out better lives and futures for themselves and their children while discarding many useless ways of the past. Conceptually “the past was the past” and the future was theirs if only they pushed forward, unafraid, taking risks and continuing to toss off the dogma and shackles that had held “the old world” stagnant for over fifteen hundred years.

The Dutch have always been a liberal society. Throughout the ages they have fostered diversity. “If they want to work, then let them come.” If they are law-abiding people they were always welcomed and if they had money to invest then they were welcomed with opened arms.

The Age of Reason and The Age of Enlightenment, the movements that cast off stagnation that had pulled up the shade over Europe that for centuries had roots that are traceable to the Dutch. The Dutch established the world’s first Republic and they were the first society to dethrone a King, William of Orange. Even today, it is perhaps the only country in the western world where prostitution and marijuana are legal in the same place, albeit guided by sensible restrictions. I am not endorsing that as a value proposition rather as an example of their “live and let live” ideals and liberal roots. They are examples of “hands off” culture permitting people to live their own lives without an intrusive, dogmatic and evangelically minded government. Their approach was for

government not to be dictated by kings or queens. No government interference in the “affairs” of man, where same sex marriage has been tolerated long before it became a respectable issue of discussion and a reality in America! There is no place for government to meddle or disrupt the lives of their citizens as long as they are contributing to society as a whole and obeying laws that uphold its precepts, a precursor, if you will, of our Declaration of Independence. “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is, in fact, a Dutch phrase. How many religious and moralistic notions creep through the cracks of our constitution, violating our sacred freedoms? “Live and let live and don’t impose your sacrosanct values and lifestyle standards upon others.” Shouldn’t that be the preamble of our Bill of Rights? And if not, then why not? Your freedom ends where mine begins and vice versa.

What about our own country’s grasp of such precepts? What ever happened to “the pursuit of happiness”? “The pursuit of happiness for whom?” What business do our states, federal and local governments have to impose legislative “values and morals” regarding abortion, same sex marriage, stem cell research? The answer is; whatever pleases politicians and lobbyists from imposing their values or path to re-election, their paths to their survival and survival is their highest priority placed upon us. Toss out conscience, civic duty and honesty. The politicians are in it for one thing and it isn’t our betterment. Wake up America! We as a nation, certainly not as a city, have slipped back to the ideals and ideas of the Middle Ages in far too many ways. Let two women get

married. Why is it anybody else's business? Back off Washington, D.C. and get out of town! New York City doesn't need you to decide or judge our moral values and create laws for us to live by, laws that are clearly unconstitutional. Laws being written by religious zealots who espouse poisonous venom upon those who disagree with their rhetoric? Such hypocrisy abounds among righteous evangelicals who literally are caught violating their own values. Do you recall those crocodile tears streaming down Jimmy Swaggart's bawling face, caught with his pants down, literally? Imagine, a U.S. congresswoman claiming that she and her husband have cured people who were homosexuals! It happened! Imagine that we have people in our jails for decades for smoking a joint! Incredible. The most technologically sophisticated country on earth with stone-age morality and anti-Darwinism science still being taught in some of our public schools funded with taxpayer's dollars! We've seen and heard about some of that in the print and TV media.

New York City enjoys the fruits of liberty and let us hope that, the blessings of liberty will bear more fruit and go on forever. We, here in New York City, don't agree with much of the rest of America on many issues but we never lose sight of the fact that you have the right. But, we are concerned that much of the rest of America has a hateful and skeptical bend on New York City. That's a shame, such a shame.

New York City's culture is deeply rooted in Dutch traditions. Truly, they are New York City's real "founding fathers." I often imagine; what if the Dutch had pushed back the British in 1664 with some help

from the French. They accepted and encouraged a pluralistic society, welcomed blacks, tragically not always without limitations and Jews, with some restrictions too. Catholics and others from the world over have “paid their dues” to fit into the matrix of New York City. Anyone who came to work, live peaceably and abide by their laws was welcomed, “Let ’em stay!” Although the Dutch were not perfect, considering 17th century norms, they were quite exemplary. Can you think of a more perfect culture to have founded this City?

As soon as the Dutch hit land they fervently went about their business, building outposts and bowery’s, that’s Old Dutch for farms. Without a moment to waste, they cleared the land and established their little village, New Amsterdam. They built a rudimentary fort, log style homes, cleared roads and, of course, dug canals. In a very short time they created a small foothold at the southern tip of Manhattan and a thriving little village took hold. By the time the British arrived in 1664, uninvited of course, the population had settled within the village as far north as Wall Street named after the wall that Gov. Peter Stuyvesant had build from river to river to protect the village from wild beasts and Indians. Men guarded the wall defending it from would be Dutch thieves who sought to remove its wooden planks to use as firewood. Only Jews were exempt from such duties however a tax was imposed on them instead. Asher Levy, a wealthy and influential Jewish merchant, petitioned the Dutch West India Company’s Board of Directors to enable Jews to participate guarding the wall in lieu of the tax. Much

to Stuyvesant's chagrin and bewilderment the directors of The Dutch West India Company agreed with Mr. Levy and the custom was changed, perhaps, in a sense, the first act of religious freedom in America. Most agree that the Flushing (a neighborhood in north east Queens, a borough in New York City) Remonstrance, signed in 1657 by a group of English citizens who were affronted by persecution of Quakers and the religious policies of Stuyvesant. None of them were Quakers.

Many others had ventured further north, carving out a village up in Harlem, trading with the Indians and also clearing land "upstate" now known as midtown! Imagine that midtown was referred to as upstate!

The pace of change continued relentlessly by the Brits, who built, traded, manufactured and thrived as well. Shipping and commerce soared and impressive churches rose higher then before and the center of the "new world" began to emerge and thrive.

Boston and Philadelphia, two cities founded upon principles of religious freedom, not commerce, culture or diversity were growing much more slowly and never regained their status of primate cities in the "New World." As they dwelled in their pews, New Yorkers went about the business of building their city on fundamentals, other than religion, focusing on commerce, inventiveness, innovation and of course large doses of debauchery and lascivious behavior. New York City was destined to become America's primate City never again to be challenged.

From the very beginning, New York City was about growth, innovation, ideas, hard work, diversity, commerce, fast paced activity and action; never

sitting back waiting for others to lead the way but rather setting a breath-taking pace, forging ahead, a steadfastly a never ceasing spiral of growth, innovation and power.

New York City possessed the world's busiest harbor, The South Street Seaport, the world's tallest buildings, the Erie Canal completed in 1825 changed everything, the most luxurious and largest hotels would come to be, The St. Denis, The Astor House, the first Waldorf. The street grid conceived in 1811 was to be constructed upon a man-made flattened landscape facilitating growth faster then before.

The world's first and soon to be largest department store, A. T. Stewart's and others such as John Wanamaker's, Bloomingdale's, Lord and Taylor, Macy's and O'Neal's rivaled the best that Paris and London had to offer. We set out to build the world's largest subway system, by far, with innovations never before conceived by other cities. We constructed the world's first landscaped public park, for all the people, not merely the nobility, built and paid for with public money on a scale never before imagined. The world's first escalator, an amusement ride at Coney Island, five cents a pop, the country's first building code for tenements requiring bathrooms on every floor and windows in every room and the completion of The Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 double the length of the span of the longest then existing steel cable bridge, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, all New York City firsts were impressive groundbreaking wonders of the world.

New York City was about change, constant and forever carving out the future, never clinging to the past, breaking new ground, always growing, higher and higher with a breath that overwhelms other cities from every corner of the world.

Recently, Asian cities such as Dubai, Singapore, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei and others bear names, some that have been seldom heard until recent times and have become mega metropolises, urban monsters whose populations have skyrocketed virtually overnight. All preconceived within the framework of a “well planned” infrastructure without environmental, transportation, social, health and educational infrastructures necessary to provide superior quality of life for their surging bursts in population. New York City has been there, done that and throughout centuries of change and adaptation we have blazed trails and created the mechanisms to wield the improvements that have continued to improve the quality of life for our citizens and newly minted residents.

Additionally, there are few historic roots embedded into preplanned modern expanding cities created by urban planners and multinational corporations. A mirage has erupted in those cities, built over or adjacent to tin shacks, slum neighborhoods one against the other. They are little more than endless seas of squalor, misery and despair: Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai, and New Delhi to name a few. The runaway scourge of air pollution has rendered many of those cities and countless others uninhabitable with polluted water and air. But, not New York City with the smallest CO2 footprint then any major city in The

United States according to the federal EPA. The water is so pure that we're exempt from filtering it by the same agency but we filter it anyway!

How can this be compared with New York City from an historic perspective? Our city is the result of four hundred years of fast paced evolutionary growth, measured by changes driven by technology, needs that were recognized, satisfied and resolved over four centuries; cultures, vastly different have become intertwined since the dawn of our short history, a mosaic of the entire world dwells here unlike any other place on the planet.

Creating "model cities" carved out of deserts, built on artificially engineered islands or planned on boardroom tables with computer modeling, designed by a few urban planners creating inorganic and synthetic neighborhoods that are ill conceived, transient and rootless. It's the origins; the bedrock of New York City that can never be duplicated or transplanted. That is why this City is so special, so exceptional and unique.

Dubai's Palm and World Islands seem to be failures, not only economically but environmentally as well. They are paying a high price. Growth must be organic, natural and man made within the framework of providing safe and natural environments enabling practical, sustainable, efficient and beneficial living, not brought about by a commissioned sales force that hawks condos through elaborate financing schemes and promotional lures but rather managed by good governance balancing all of society's needs and interests placing quality of life upper most in mind.

Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses, the great “builder and destroyer of New York City”, is the best example of opposing urban developmental strategies. She put the kibosh on a mid-Manhattan expressway that would have torn the City in half and destroyed much of Chelsea, The Village, Soho, Tribeca and Downtown. Surely, this City has been a great experiment from the start and its roots are embedded in each man, woman and child who has left their footprints on the pavement, in every factory, wharf, alley and dark unpaved street where layers of history are imbedded beneath our feet.

“The only thing that stays the same in New York City is change!” It has been said,

“If you haven’t been here for ten years then you haven’t been here at all.”

For those grand and glorious cities in Europe that claim to be thousands of years older than New York City, I say,

“Sure, you’ve won the numbers game but what have you done during all those years since way back?”

Compare that with someone who has lived ninety years and was in a coma for forty years or an octogenarian who spent most of their years incarcerated with a vibrant, talented and accomplished musician, writer, researcher or even an ordinary person who has raised a family and retires after the end of a long “career”. Who’s older? Sure we both know the answer. Who has accomplished more? Who has given the world more and who has had a more successful life? How long did Mozart or Lincoln, John Lennon, George Gershwin, MLK or RFK live? The answers are 35, 56, 40, 39, 39 and 42. In their

tragically short lives their accomplishments were enormous. Imagine what this town will be like a short twelve generations from now, the time forward compared with the time past when our ancestors had arrived. Oh, what it would be like to peer into that magical looking glass? No one knows what lies ahead. Imagine!

In the short period of time that New York City has existed it has experienced more periods of change, creation, novel concepts, innovative methods of manufacturing, discoveries, attempts, inventions, reinventions, successes, cultural achievements such as the Broadway musical show, dance, literature, music, TV, comedy, cinema and taught and given more, providing the world with thousands of ideas, artistic treasures, new scientific discoveries, medical breakthroughs, creative achievements, literature, and more commercial firsts than anywhere else! Most of all, we have provided the best evidence, that the world has ever known that great diversity working and playing together harmoniously in this place known as New York City is unlike and unmatched by any other city on earth.

Come see the world, come to New York City. Put on your seatbelt because this is the City that never sleeps and never stops. It's a ride without end and it's a trip you'll never regret one that will always be remembered not only in your head but deep in your heart as well.

Who Goes to Coney Island for "Nothing"?

Nearly everybody, about one-hundred years ago, who lived in New York City went to Coney Island for just about anything! With over 1,000,000 visitors on a typical summer weekend day, Coney rocked like no other place in New York City history. That "island" has been merged with Brooklyn proper, with landfill therefore, it is actually Coney Peninsula. Where did all that landfill come from? Did it come from the subways? Sure, where else? And when the subway was extended to Coney Island or now peninsula you could get there for a nickel or on foot or bicycle if you were fortunate enough to live close by or you had two good legs to walk with, back in an age of infectious diseases, rampant street fights, poor medical treatment and roving gangs. Best of all, an amusement ride such as The Cyclone or The fabled Parachute Jump was the best ride in town a menagerie of fun and a place to frolic for just a hand full of nickels.

That was the age of no air-conditioning and no highways that could take you that far to the east end of Brooklyn. Who had cars anyway? Besides, Jones Beach did not yet exist so Coney was virtually "the only game in town" if beaches, food and amusements were your wish. Only the upper class had other options to get away from the grunts and grinds of urban life, if you can call that "life." Life was experiences at "Coney" a place that everyone loved except people like my father who would never drive to a beach in his car, one without air conditioning, creeping through bumper to bumper traffic. For him, schlepping to a beach on the subway was a non-

starter, also void of air-conditioning back then too. Frankly, I don't blame him one bit!

With a virtually endless boardwalk, Atlantic Ocean beaches had an abundance of so many bodies in attendance that you could have walked on their backs, leaving your footprints in the sand was purely a fantasy. Be careful for what you wish for; a sea of humanity basking in the sun, enjoying the ocean breezes, taking a respite from city strife and each other came with a price. It was simply one urban crowd transformed from one place to another.

Those who stayed behind had the City all to themselves, just like today. Sure, you can get a table just about anywhere on a Saturday night in June, July or August in Manhattan! Yes, families by the thousands spent their nickels and for one or perhaps even two days a week, during the short New York City summer, the masses had brief vacations on the cheap and eight square feet of sand that they could call their own. I would have opted to go to an "air cooled" double feature movie in Times Square!

Mr. Nathan Handworker opened his first Nathan's there in 1916 on the southeast corner of Surf and Stillwell Avenues. You'd have found crowds cramming the "stand" salivating, waiting to chomp on those delicious 'dogs, for more than the original price of a nickel, but still a bargain. Perhaps Stillwell Avenue should be changed to "Stillthere" Avenue! Just taste one of those 'dogs and you're hooked! He "slammed" his competitor across the street. How? He gave discount coupons to doctors and nurses who worked at Coney Island Hospital and they all rushed over to savor the unique, spicy, succulent hotdogs

made with his delicious incredible secret Romanian recipe. People "knew" that Nathan's 'dogs were healthier. Sure! It's just another New York City ploy, a fascinating story. "A gimmick!" That's all you need, an idea and if it's good enough then the rest will fall into place if you work it through. You make it happen with an idea and with the breath of life, enthusiasm love and sweat peppered with tenacity and tears.

I peered out the front window of the first car of the B train, on my way to Coney Island not too long ago, a train that runs on the ground through most of Brooklyn. My recipe for escape, as a baby boomer, way back in my youth, had not been Coney, rather, it was Jones Beach, West end 2, parking lot 6. The Hamptons or off to more distant places or just a short hop on a plane replaced the local sandy shores as I mustered the opportunity.

The amusement parks, all three of them, at the height of Coney Island, Luna Park, Dreamland and Steeplechase Park, have deteriorated and remain terribly diminished. For the most part due to abuse and disuse, a faltering neighborhood, the construction of encroaching highways and the explosion of the popularity of the automobile after World War II Coney's days of glory are a faded piece of history. The Cyclone roller coaster is a toy compared to what Six Flags has to offer today and that's what people want; the big, glitzy high-tech parks boasting more attractions, zany high-tech rides built only by mega corporations that offer investment opportunities for thousands of shareholders. The neighborhood has also become extremely blighted and overused, riddled with abundant crime, grime

and slime. Therefore, why would anyone, such as I, want to go there in 2016?

For curiosity, adventure, to learn, to experience, and to take a trip back in time, a time before my time, and to grasp a sense of the "ghosts" and chomp a delicious Nathan's hotdog, crinkle cut fries and a coke, make that diet coke. As a New Yorker who yearns for the taste of the past, visiting a place that is tired, worn but historic, meeting a few of the locals, enjoying some chatter about their lives and experiences, hearing them reminisce about the ol' days and catch a glimpse of the past that is gone forever, for me, is very exciting.

The past, respect it, experience it and inhale it. Look at the flaking paint, struggle to read the worn out signs that can be seen beneath the new replacements, shed a tear, swallow that lump in your throat and embrace the past because that is how we got to where we are now.

All the good that you see and experience is built upon the past. The black and white days gone by, the cheap thrills, a simpler place and time, the hardscrabble days of doing without have created a City layered with history. This is who we are. Peeling away the vestiges that conceal our past is a trip back, a time machine that enhances the connection that true New Yorkers crave. It's called nostalgia, a powerful and emotional compilation that continues to fuel us onward and looking back at the same time.

Who hungered for computers, fancy cars, let alone cars, any cars, the fistfight that you nearly had, the holes in your shoes and the two shirts you owned to cover your back. That charlotte rouge you couldn't

afford to buy for your gal, those down and out days; were they really the good ol' days? They're just a few things to think about at Coney, eh!

Plans have been made, investors have come forward, locals, community groups and politicians are lining up to re-create this wonderful place, this vital piece of New York City history. With an ocean beach connected by an air-conditioned subway that's able to connect millions of people, the right vision and opportunity will arise. It's just a matter of time. And next time it will be much better, safer, more vibrant, and it will morph into the greatest playground that this City has ever known. Perhaps there are others too who go to Coney for "nothing" or maybe, most who've sweltered in those sun baked subway cars, who'd love to experience the change with a deep and powerful sense of nostalgia. To be in touch with the past with a burst of longing is not for "nothing."

Take me back! I want my nostalgia. Let's just hope that a new Coney will not morph into another Disney type park. It's got to have that taste and feel of New York City, the soul of the past that will satisfy those who have experienced it or heard about it from their parents and grandparents. Let's make it a real deal, New York City, once again. Hope to see you standing in line, behind me of course, at Stillwell and Surf!

Brooklyn is "Sweet 'n' Low"

Back in the early 1950's Mr. & Mrs. Benjamin Eisenstadt operated a small family business on Cumberland Avenue in Brooklyn just a stone's throw from DUMBO. Their company packaged tea into individual tea bags.

As the story goes, one afternoon they were having coffee at The Cumberland Diner taking a well earned break from the stresses of their little business. As Mrs. Eisenstadt was about to dip her spoon into a sugar bowl she remarked to her husband.

"Ben! Look at those disgusting clumps of brown sugar from prior users. It's terrible! Why don't we put sugar instead of tea into those tea packets? Perhaps we can make a pile of money!"

That brilliant idea led to the origin of Sweet 'n' Low, the artificial sweetener! Everything starts with an idea!

An idea has no value, unless someone takes it to a place, breathes life into it and pushes it forward toward success, passionately! As a result of this incident, they began to market sugar, individually packaged, a first and it began in, where else, Brooklyn! It turned out to be a sweet success. It was a time of health consciousness, weight loss with diet concepts hitting the marketplace, Jack LaLanne, exercise classes, calorie counting, and TAB, the first artificially sweetened soda exploded onto the health craze scene.

Saccharin, at that time was a primary ingredient, an additive in food manufacturing, and a liquid sweetener. It was unavailable for direct consumer use. A stroke of genius prompted the Eisenstaedt's to

ask their son Marvin, a chemist, to reformulate saccharin into a granulated compound, a powder. He succeeded and they were granted U.S. Patent 3,625,711 and U.S. Trademark number 1,000,000, without the \$ sign!

For over thirty years they had held a monopoly on the artificial sweetener market in the United States. They battled the Food and Drug Administration as laboratory tests revealed that the sweetener was carcinogenic, allegedly if you feed insanely huge quantities to rats!

Therefore, other compounds were formulated over time to reduce the hypothesized ill effects, due to the demands of the FDA, the folks who care about your health and perhaps their own pockets and, of course, avoiding risky decisions that may imperil their jobs. It's far safer to reject a new product than to approve it, right? Nah! They can't go wrong if they deny a license to sell a new product, unless the mafia is on their ass.

The mafia moved in too and demanded, "turf." Numerous competitors tried everything in the book to crush them. Sweet 'n' Low's legal fees piled up, and that crushing toll tore the family asunder. Wills and inheritance issues created rampant conflict among them. It's a classic tragedy, one that is well known among otherwise successful family enterprises. I was personally a participant in similar experiences years ago, a family business. The only difference is that my story did not have a sweet ending. My family business experience was, in contrast, Sour 'n' Low.

The name Sweet 'n' Low was derived from a song written in 1863 by Joseph Barnby whose lyrics were

based on William Lord Tennyson's poem called, "The Princess: Sweet and Low."

Sweet and low, sweet and low Wind of the western sea, Low, low, breathe and blow, Wind of the western sea! Over the rolling waters go, Come from the dying moon, and blow, Blow him again to me, While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps. Sleep and rest, sleep and rest, Father will come to thee soon; Rest, rest, on mother's breast, Father will come to thee soon; Father will come to his babe in the nest, Silver sails all out of the west Under the silver moon! Sleep my little one; sleep my pretty one, sleep.

Later on, the composer Harry Warren put the song Sweet 'n' Low, to music. (1893-1981). He also wrote "September in the Rain" and "Jeepers Creepers." That, Sweet n Low" was a song that the Eisenstadt's had danced to when they were "keeping company" a term from World War II days for being engaged or "dating" likened to more recent vernaculars such as, "going steady" or "dating."

Take a look at the back of a Sweet 'n' Low pink package and if you are wearing your eyeglasses or are young enough to read the fine print, check it out, Cumberland Packaging, Brooklyn, New York. Sweet 'n' Low is the third largest producer of artificial sweeteners behind Equal and Splenda. I guess the FDA must have mutated healthier rats since the days when Sweet 'n' Low or "engineered" rats that are graft resistant or partnered with rats that failed to smell the sweetener but had keen noses for the money!

But, you can't beat the original, and for one very simple reason. Jackie Gleason, "The Great One" remarked about his beloved Brooklyn, it is posted on a street sign, on the Brooklyn side of the Brooklyn Bridge. "Welcome to Brooklyn. How Sweet it is!" and that includes Sweet 'n' Low! "Has to be!"

Beggars, Panhandlers and the Homeless

The most accessible cash for street hawkers in New York City is carried in our pockets, duh. We are walking money trees, ripe for pickin' as the homeless unfortunates surrounding us plying various styles of the coin grab and snatch game; aggressively politely, aloofly, tenaciously, timidly, faint-heartedly or bullishly, they ply their "game" of beg for "scratch."

They come in every shape, size and color all wrapped in various garb using their own style from rag-tag to blending in with the rest of us, these poor unfortunate souls reside at the lowest end of the socio-economic strata. Yes folks, they're a sad scruffy bunch, the beggars that flock, rovers occupying the City. It's part of the landscape that is New York City and it seems to be, even during hard times they appear to be relatively under control.

We all expect to be approached by these tragic desperados now and then. New Yorkers are pretty good at spotting them but, at times, even the best of us get caught off guard and the most unsuspecting turn out to be members of the a subterranean street culture of zero capital enterprise.

Most are very good at what they do actually. It's a living. There are numerous ways to perceive, thwart and disengage them, if you like. You can give away your money for a quick fix, a safe and speedy escape from the afflicted.

Your money is seldom spent on what they need, but rather, on what they want, just like the rest of us! Ever think about that? Yes, the needy have wants too and most of them are very good at satisfying them and in many instances, they're better than the

employed. The big difference between them and us is that they are unbridled with financial commitments and obligations. Even their needs, bear boned is satisfied with less money then you can imagine. They know every trick in the book! Food? Hang out near a McDonald's and scour the trashcans, dinner! Warmth, is found at the next subway stop and a quick duck under the turnstile or a swipe from an unsuspecting commuter will do. They seldom bother those who appear to be over age 64 because 65 and older have senior citizen cards that can only be swiped once every 18 minutes to prevent abusive illegal use because the fare is a bit less than half. They do try to nail seniors on their way out of the subway because it's quite likely that their cards haven't been swiped less than 18 minutes prior to being spotted by a would be perp.

I do sympathize with them. How lucky we are not to be in their shoes, if they even have shoes. We may have a few more zeros that define our own financial "problems." They live on the edge of the edge, like many of the employed middle class and the lower part of the upper class, which I consider to be those living in Manhattan who's family income is \$350,000 per annum less. That's just about enough to make it appear that you're "makin' it here buster but they're living low on the high end.

Three hundred and fifty "K" ain't enough to live "large." That's a one bedroom rental in Manhattan, own or lease a two year old Honda Civic, put one kid in private school, buy a few goodies on 47th Street, the diamond district, take the wife out to dinner nice, once a week, see a Broadway show twice a year and

fly off to some island every year and have an inkling as to what a savings account actually might be like.

Did you know that most New Yorkers are living on the edge? 21% of us are actually living below the poverty line and 58% of New Yorkers have a net worth of less than \$5,000! I wonder how many of those have zero net worth or even a negative one! You know who you are out there! You're the guys with the \$6,500 watch and the ladies are sportin' those \$2,500 LV bags with \$7 in their pockets and wallets with maxed out plastic in those French bags they're totin', eh?

We, the more fortunate, often groan that we cannot afford to decorate our homes or afford to buy the apartment we want, the best seats in the house, that watch in the jeweler's window that we pine or the leap to the larger BMW or Audi. What a shame, what a game! It's childish whining, pure and simple.

Up until the recent past I always admired the guys who sported impressive watches, Rolex and the like. They appeared to be the guys, who were successful, their "red badge of debt." Now, I am fascinated by the well dressed men who are wearing Pulsars costing \$15.95 with three year batteries that do more for less and most of all reveal that they're not out to impress those who are overwhelmed by the high-end time pieces, blatant evidence of the "look what I have mentality." Who are the winners in that match up? I'll take the Pulsar, Tom McCann shoes and Jos. A Bank suit (buy 1 get 2 free) and take the savings to the bank. Back to the bottom of the sack!

It's a struggle for most of those folks who pursue their trade with their hands held out seeking a coin or

two. In a sense we're all beggars, such is life, just wearing better clothing and seeming more legitimate doesn't reveal that you are "make it." We wear the uniforms of legitimacy, suits, \$200 silk ties and shined shoes disguising our true mission which is to make as much money as we can and toward what end? What's the reward, dud? Naturally it's about values and choices for those who are authentic and provide real value to those who they work for, or are self-employed doing well and those they care about. The others are scammers, wolves in sheep clothing, the pretenders who are phony, vacuous creeps who lure the insecure suckers who want to be seen with those who appear to be real. Who of us is totally and completely honest? Let them "caste the first" C note. Are the fat cats those who burn the midnight oil at Goldman Sacks, or rather "Sacks of Gold Man", figuring out how to get richer off their client's losses by dreaming up multi billion dollar schemes with thousands of sucker clients who are tanking and not thanking their money mis-managers who are overpaid for stealing their client's dollars. It's not begging it's called "white collar crime" just another name for stealing. That's theft big time! They poor guy who rips off the grocer for a six-pack gets a police record and some short jail time, a week or so I guess. Who becomes homeless? How does it happen? Is it bad luck? Is it a consequence of poor parenting, non-parenting, their own laziness, illness, mental challenges and deficiencies, coincidence of cascading bad luck, divorce, lack of medical care, cultural deprivation or a combination of the above? There are reasons for everything, "there by the grace of God . . ."

Providing for our homeless and downtrodden is a New York City tradition. The City helps them much more than most. I believe that is virtually a New York City creation, caring for its own in innumerable ways. The first public hospital in The United States is Bellevue Hospital, just one example.

Shelters! Okay, they're not the Ritz, but they provide food, medical care, training and a benevolent heart for those in need at least as many as they can and find. New York City pioneered public assistance and support for its poor. We raised the bar and made history and many other cities followed our model of generosity, care and support.

One evening, at nearly 1 AM I was walking across 57th Street off 8th Avenue returning to my apartment. A man approached me and told me that he was very hungry. "Please, please PLEASE give me some money so I can get something to eat. I'm so hungry!" he pleaded.

"Sure, there's a diner across the street. Let's go inside, grab a seat and order whatever you like and I'll pay for it on my way out so you can eat alone." I told him.

"But no, I don't need no food now! I want food for breakfas' for tomorrow for my six-year-old son and me. Don't you understand me?" he begged.

It had been another crazy night and I had a bit of trouble processing it.

"So, what are you saying? You're not hungry now? You don't want food, but you want me to buy food for you to have breakfast with your son? Am I right?"

"Yeah, you right!" he said.

"Like what? I thought that you were hungry?"

"I want to have breakfas' with my son I said!" he told me.

He took a picture of his alleged son out of his wallet and showed it to me.

"He go to school and I wan' him to eat righ'." he told me.

"Sure, let's go around the corner and I'll buy you what you need. Sound like a plan?" I suggested.

"Yeah, let's do it!" he replied.

Together, we walked around the corner to a Korean owned traditional deli located on the corner of 56th Street and 8th Avenue. I bought eggs, bread, orange juice, milk, butter and bacon. Total cost was about sixteen bucks and when the cashier gave me the change, I turned it over to him.

"Thanks a lot man. You the man!" he said.

"My pleasure! Give your son a big kiss for me and good luck to you!" I replied.

I felt good about what I had done, the preverbal Good Samaritan that was I, yeah!

The next day I entered the same deli and the cashier recognized me. She asked,

"Aren't you the man who was here late last night and bought the food for that guy?"

"Yes. Why?"

"After you turn corner he come back, return all food that you pay. He tell me to give him back money and I give him back all money!"

That was extremely disappointing. I was duped. How sad. A life tossed in the trashcan. What a waste.

I used to see the same panhandlers "working" their usual locations day after day. I guess they knew the City pretty well. Apparently their spot was their

"business" location, as savvy retailers too know all about pedestrian traffic, demographics, volume and times of day to make the big score. Panhandlers choose their spots, with science, in order to make the best return on their "investment", their time. Are they looking for wealthier traffic, liberals, older or less fortunate souls, tourists, the younger crowds or those who have barely escaped the same fate and had "been there done that?" I just don't know that business every well, thankfully, and hope I never will. But, just for fun, I've imagined panhandling as a learning experience, taking a shot at it, just to see what it's like.

My business model, if I were to be a panhandler, would be to wear a Tuxedo with all the trimmings, carnation, gold studs, patent leather shoes, and all "the works." I'd do the subway thing, come up with a fabulous pitch with perfect articulation, expression, diction and syntax and just "let it rip." How's this?

"I am so grateful to be here with all of you, fine ladies and gentleman of this wonderful City. We all know that we are living through very tough times. As for me, my Mercedes has been repossessed. For those of you who do not know, that means, taken away from me. I've lost my condo on the beach in the Hamptons; the bank took it away from me due to non-payment. The five-bedroom ski house in Vermont and even the Rolls has been repossessed too. I no longer have a business. I have no money, and no honey. Please help me. I've given generously to the homeless for many years and never thought that this fate would fall upon me. Please, a \$5 bill would be perfect. No change please! Open your hearts and please help one New

Yorker get back on his feet. I will be forever grateful. I'm not going to ask for God to bless you as others do. This has nothing to do with God! It's about you and me. I also have a swiper scanner on my iPhone 7 that will enable you to make your donation via your credit card or Apple Pay. That way, you can earn sky miles. Perhaps I'm the only panhandler in New York City who can provide you with, points on your American Express card. See, I'm looking out for you; it's not just about me. PLEASE!! HELP ME!!

Have you ever seen a tuxedoed man beg for money? Would you prefer to give him money than one who is clad like he walked out of a hamper? PLEASE let me know. Perhaps that will be my sixth career change opportunity!" See you on the A train or should it be the 1, 4 or 7? Pick a train that will give the most, that's a sociology study that some kid at Hunter College should delve into.

I used to see an African American woman almost daily, very short hair, petite, wrapped in a torn, ragged grey wool army blanket, sitting on the sidewalk, shaking, pretending to be shivering and holding a cup, looking very desperate, crying and begging in a low muttering, mumbling voice, never saying a word, collecting lots of dollar bills, doing quite well, much better than all the rest that I've seen. She looked like she was at the bottom heap of humanity, such a pity; it made your heart go out to her. On one occasion suddenly I saw her get up very nicely dressed beneath the well-worn wool army blanket meeting a friend and promptly telling her in a loud strong voice.

"Come on you'll, let's get somethin' to eat, I'm outa here!"

Her voice was loud, strong, confident and crisp!

Recently, many years after the most recent siting, I saw her doing her sidewalk "thing" in front of Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue just beneath the Atrium sign, "Open to the Public." Some contrast! I stopped, turned around and asked her,

"Where've you been sweetheart? I haven't seen you for a long time." She looked up and gave me a wink and a smile.

"I'm doin' fine!" she said.

Perhaps she had remembered me? "Did I make an impression?" Sure, "someday my prince will come!"

"The Donald" should have her on The Apprentice to teach others how to generate income without assets, something that few can even imagine doing in the "real world."

Years ago there was a talk show, one of the first, The David Suskind Show. One evening he welcomed a guest, a panhandler who had "worked" the streets of New York City for many years. His technique was, as he put it, primed to the way he shouted "please!" He'd pronounced, "please" with a long, yawning howl, loud and strong with a hearty melodic cadence, "PPPLLEAAASSSEE!!!! He blurted out this refrain over and over again. Every time the rhythm and pace had a different chime, tone and pitch. It worked!

According to him, during the interview, after he had collected about \$200, not a bad tax-free payday back in the late 1960's, he went to a mid-town parking lot, retrieved his Buick Electra 225, the top of the line Buick, at that time, and drove back to his home in

Bayonne, New Jersey. Then he'd settle into his two family home and rested from the rigors of his workday. His wife had a normal decent paying secure job, as I recall, a teacher. You can't get health insurance from panhandling, as far as I know but, as I recall, it was available for free if you had no assets, or your assets were in someone else's name. It really didn't matter. His wife's job had him covered, no doubt. She probably prepared him dinner and cleaned up the kitchen too while he sat back and watched "All in the Family" glued to his stated hero, Archie Bunker.

They're out there and although there's a law on the books against asking people for loot it's seldom enforced. Should it be? Both parties, giver and taker, are breaking the law and it violates the spirit of quality of life initiatives that began in New York City in the early 90's.

In Seattle there was a persistent crackdown on the problem and, as a result, panhandling virtually vanished. Isn't this a City of great innovation? Let's do the same thing and provide adequate and accessible means for the homeless and hungry to obtain nutritious and ample food, medical care, job training and adequate shelter.

The law may not be constitutional due to the first amendment that protects the right of freedom of speech so, let 'em do their thing, eh? If we all refrain from giving money to them then they would stop looking for handouts. Ever leave a bowl of milk outside your doorstep for a cat? What happens next? We all know the answer.

Panhandling is also illegal in the subway and it always starts the same way,

"Ladies and gentlemen, I don't mean to disturb you but I lost my job and I'm just trying to get something to eat and stay out of trouble, aka, steal, rob, mug, beat or kill! The veiled threat, pay or die!

I'm still "keeping an eye out" for the guy who scammed me out of \$20 that night at the deli but I doubt that I'd recognize him. I am sure he's looking for me too, not knowing, of course, that I am aware that I had been a victim of his sting already.

I still feel sorry for anyone who finds himself in such desperate shape and has to resort to this type of activity to "survive." I cannot judge them, in good conscience, because we're all created from nature and nurture. I suppose that good gene pools and quality parenting, wholesome environments, mentoring, love and support make the difference. I know from my own personal experience and will confess that I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones.

I never understood why our public schools do not provide a course in parenting mandated by a new curriculum. How many times did we learn, over and over again, about Christopher Columbus? Those lessons omit the truth about that murderer, rapist, kidnaper and torturer. Check it out, I'm not kidding, not a nice man! He is just another deified historic "American" hero. Perhaps he too would have been a terrific panhandler. Why don't our schools teach what's really important and not continue to stuff that historic tripe down our throats generation after generation?

“Manifest Destiny” is another creation of our historic past. Who really blew up the Battleship Maine in 1898? How did America acquire Arizona, New Mexico and southern California? Look that up in your Fifth grade American history textbooks published by Holt and Co. Let’s teach life lessons and prepare our next generations for a life of success. That’ll never happen. Why because “the people” don’t want that, they’re happy just the way we are. Incredible!

Panhandlers have had other lives, a past, and to us it’s a complete unknown. It could happen to any of us. I look at them and wonder. Was she a nurse? Did her husband abuse her? Did he lose his job or become sick, divorced, bankrupt, alcoholic or clinically depressed? We’re all human and that’s what should reside in the front of our brains! All of us entered and will leave this world the same way we all got here and depart on equal terms as well. Although the wealthier will have 1,000 per square inch woven Egyptian cotton sheets to “shit the bed” and the rest of us will be on Wal-Mart made in some Chinese city that we’ve never heard of. Do you care? Nah! Why mess up a \$600 sheet, right? Because there’s Tide and you ain’t goina be there 😊

We’re all entitled to food and shelter in a society that prides itself on morality and good conscience but, we as a society have come up a bit short on that score. The more we give on the streets the more acute the problem becomes.

I suppose the growth of panhandlers is a function of how well they perceive the job the City is doing when they show up for help at a shelter compared with how much they can “make” on their own, pursuing their

trade on the streets. In other words if they're doing a better job then the city then why should they let go? Let's hope their numbers dwindle for all the right reasons and not because we are not providing generously.

The City or some independent "think tank" outfit should do a survey among the homeless and ask them why they do not avail themselves of what the City has to offer them and evaluate it with the street scene so we know how to improve the public system to feed, clothe and shelter them.

We, as a society, need to learn how to provide those folks living on the edge of the edge with opportunities to have meaningful and purposeful lives. Just try spending a day sitting on the sidewalk with a sign asking for spare change in the heat, cold or rain. That is a change we would not wish for ourselves. Hey guys, ready to give up your Rolex for a Pulsar?

There are some political zealots in New York City who ask for donations to support a constitutional amendment that would guarantee housing for all. How would that work? It's unimaginable! I do understand the moral and human right to food and shelter but the free housing idea is off the radar screen! I'm in favor of giving panhandlers food and not money and even that was a scam with the guy who went back to the deli to get MY money back! Don't be intimidated by these folks. Just pretend that you don't hear them or don't understand them. Talk back in a faux-foreign language and shrug your shoulders! "No speaka da Engla!"

Am I better off panhandling or going to a City facility to get what I need or, should I become a criminal? We

have the power to tip the scales and clean up our act.
Let's build on what we've done and do better!

There's Propulsion for us "Somewhere"

Our subway system cranks out an abundance of hefty noises. Trains are, of course, the greatest source of noise down there, but herds of kids take a very close second and at times they rank #1. Express trains roar through stations and pound our eardrums. At times there's more than one train at a time, one for each ear and at times three! You vibrate, "shake, rattle and roll." I've witnessed many people who cringe and stick their fingers in their ears as the roar of the trains reaches their peak. Some stations, with curved tracks, causes wheel flanges to squeal, squeek and scratch against the rails emoting sounds reminding me of scratching a blackboard with my fingernails, a sound reminiscent from childhood. Even just the threat of nails scratching a blackboard brought chills and shivers to me, in anticipation!

There are mysterious sounds frequently present, such as clunking and clopping sounds coming from beneath C trains as they accelerate and decelerate. It seems as though there are loose parts down there. There probably are, not very reassuring! I also hear the click clack of the wheels rolling down the tracks, over the joints connecting the rails, somewhat unnerving.

A number of French subway lines have rubber-lined wheels reducing train noise enormously such as the city of Lyon. Montreal has the first totally rubber wheeled subway system, bravo for them. Why not here? I guess it's about money, what else is new, not that some of the French subways are "rolling" in dough, silence yes, dough I doubt it. New York City's subway system is huge, no rubber for us, eh? Could it

be due to a shortage of rubber because of the City's initiative to give away millions of condoms to help reduce the spread of AIDS and reduce teen-age pregnancy? Maybe they should be recycled and our subway train's wheels should be covered with used condoms? It's long been a New York City tradition to recycle and find new uses for old stuff. Just look at The Highline, the lobby of 200 Fifth Avenue now it's Eatery or The Meatpacking District is suddenly "The Pack Meeting District" or Jane's Carousel, Gantry Park and its Pepsi sign now a landmark and how about Chelsea Market, a reborn incarnation as if the food messiah finally landed. Come on folks, the more condoms we use to cover subway train wheels, the better our hearing will be. "Recycle condoms and protect our precious hearing." Now that's an issue I can support! Certainly Senator Schumer, the biggest schmuck in town would be all for it standing in front of a TV camera lens of course. Hi Chuck! Nice hair job, "a little hair today, a lot more tomorrow" buddy!

The sounds of people; some speak so loudly you can hear them from the opposite end of the subway car. Babies, my personal favorites, crying and school children shouting at each other are the most annoying and unpleasant part of a subway ride.

For years I've walked up to crying babies and put my face in theirs with a deep clownish smile and I tell them in a deep, direct voice with a frown:

"There's no crying here. I'm the crying police. There's absolutely no crying allowed."

And they stop, about 95% of the time and the parents appreciate the gesture. Amazing stuff! True!

The most intriguing sound that I've ever heard in the subway is a three-note melody, a bar of music that is exactly on pitch with the first three notes of the song "Somewhere" from Westside Story. The lyrics that correspond to those notes are "There's a place" (for us). I knew I wasn't imagining it. It wasn't random or erratic, because I had heard it many times and only on certain subway lines when those trains pull out of the station. I do have a pretty good ear for music and I was confident that the consistency of the melody and absolutely certain that I wasn't losing my mind.

I asked some people who use the subway about my observation. No one knew what the hell I was talking about! They thought I was nuts! I did ask a number of riders seated or standing next to me, on several occasions, immediately after the three notes trumpeted the melody and no one had paid any attention so there was no confirmation of what I was hearing. It's very typical in New York City. I didn't need confirmation, because either way, whether they heard the melody from Westside Story or not didn't matter at all. Either way it proved a point. Please are not focused or musically included and therefore have little or no interest or the musical aptitude and appetite is just "outta town!"

People see but don't look, people hear but don't listen. People are too busy texting, listening to their music, reading or sleeping. They've all escaped into their own encapsulated worlds. Good for them, no criticism there friends.

Sometime in early 2009, I picked up my copy of The New York Times, outside my apartment door as always and I glanced at the first page before I set it

down on the table. I was very amused reading an article about a propulsion system on some of the new models of subway cars that the MTA had purchased recently! A newly designed propulsion system “excited” the third rail, the one that provides 700 volts powering the trains. That propulsion system emits the three notes that I had been hearing, the frequency of the first three notes of the song “Somewhere”! Amazing!

According to the New York Times article of February 21, 2009:

“The newer transmission, alternative current that is chopped into frequencies that excite the steel and produce the sounds, in this case, the beginning of ‘Somewhere’, said Jeff Hakner, a professor of electrical engineering at Cooper Union. Other trains running at different frequencies fail to produce similar recognizable sounds.”

So now, if you are fortunate, next time you’re in the subway and you’re unplugged from your iPad you just may be treated to a piece of a Broadway show! Tickets please, take your seat!

Horn Honking and Other Needless Noises

Driving in New York City, particularly Manhattan, traversing its bridges and tunnels, during rush hours, in wet weather or on Friday afternoons, most of all, tries the souls, patience and ears of us all! While horn honking is at times a necessity, the vast majority is willful and needless. Excessive horn honking is “road rage” a certifiable mental disorder, a form of adolescent behavior, misplaced anger and is thoroughly childish, stupid and unnecessary.

I’ve never forgotten an incident that I had encountered many years ago while I was waiting in a long line of traffic impatiently about to try to enter the Lincoln Tunnel. I tooted a short honk to the guy in front of me, a tap. He immediately emerged from his car, with much effort, about 280 pounds and he lumbered over to me, grabbed my side view mirror and wrapped his enormous hands around it, securing a tight grip and threatened to twist it off if I violated his ears again. I “made with a short neck” shrugging my shoulders, and with my palms facing up began to babble in faux German like, “*Danka, mein heir! Danka, danka!*”

There are times when horn honking is justifiable, of course, but rarely. Most often, horn honking is a display of anger and impatience derived from those monsters that dwell in the heads of childish assholes. Far too many motorists, cabbies and truck drivers put pedestrians and other drivers in their “line of fire.” The most common examples are; honking at pedestrians who cross the street while the traffic light changes in favor of the traffic or, honking at a driver in front of you because they have not decided to “run”

a yellow light rather stopping instead, something the guy just didn't expect. Stopping at yellow lights in New York City can be dangerous stuff, perhaps even more than passing through them because most drivers anticipate that motorists will "run" a yellow light and the motorist behind you may just accelerate into your rear end! Crunch! Honking at motorists who are attempting to make a turn while pausing for people crossing the street, a duh, and honking for no reason at all. It happens constantly!

"I'm here and I have a horn. So, why not just use it? See if it works!" Why not calm down and let the pedestrians cross the street and you'll probably get home the exact same time! That beer will be just a cold, either way. Grow UP!

The stupidest are those honkers who blast their horns at "grid lockers" those who've entered intersections knowing that it's unlikely, or even impossible, that they will be able to pass through the intersection when the traffic light changes. These folks are not accomplishing a thing by exposing their childish emotion, selfishness and frustrations.

If traffic enforcers would issue tickets to those schmucks in a similar fashion such as the approach taken to get a hold on the rising crime rate starting back in the early 1990's, I believe that this town would be a lot quieter and richer. Isn't that a quality of life issue? I'd love horns to be loudest inside the vehicle because that way we'd put the raps on it. Ouch! Truly, the horn honkers are stupider than the "grid lockers." I'd love to see cops with Day-Glo spray cans armed with the authority to spray grid locker's cars using a stencil that reads,

"I'm a grid locking HATER!!"

That's the way to go! Sure, screw up the paint jobs on a few cars! They'll get the message. Go after the out of town drivers in mass; teach them a lesson for being so stupid as to drive into Manhattan.

While living on West 60th Street, about eight years ago, I was awakened suddenly by a "ka-lunk" sound. It kept reoccurring every few seconds. Ka-lunk, ka-lunk, ka-lunk, ka-lunk!! "What the hell is that? I got out of bed attempting to find the source. I opened the window, KA-LUNK, KA-LUNK, KA-LUNK!! What the HELL is that? I wondered as I looked at my watch. It was about 3:30AM. I identified the origin of the noise. Two large steel plates, about eight by eight feet, placed in the middle the street on 9th Avenue between 58th and 59th Street directly in front of St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital. A hospital! Repair or construction work was apparently ongoing and presumably at day's end the construction crew placed the steel plates back over an open hole in the street. But the street was either not level or the plates were warped and without wedges inserted between the macadam and the steel plates. Those plates were rockin' an rollin' and that created the noise every time a vehicle rode over them. Can you imagine how many people this affected? Apparently, incompetent and uncaring or careless workers, or all the tabove, placed them directly in front of one of the largest hospitals in Manhattan without giving a shit about the consequences. Could it be that it was a conscious prank? Sure, why not? "Hey Tony, let's have some fun, eh? Let's replace the plates so that they make a lot of

freakin' noise all night so patients in the hospital won't get any sleep and just wither in pain, Ha Ha!"

"Joe, put the freekin' plates on crooked last night, eh? We'll keep them sickos awake another night!"

The next morning I sprung into action. Mr. Concerned Citizen or fed up New Yorker, I called 311 to report the problem to the City.

"Well, that's probably Con Ed doing some repair work, we really can't help you sir!"

That was the 311 operator's reply and 311 is a city call line.

"Thanks for nothing, and have a nice day!"

I called Con Ed and they provided no relief, "Nada buster!" They "kicked the can down the road" and told me to call the City's noise complaint line, 311.

I returned to my plan so I called 311. After about TWO WEEKS the problem was resolved. Wasn't there a police officer that was aware of this? Not a doctor, nurse or relative or friend who was visiting or caring for a patient who had heard this? Was there at least one patient in the hospital who had been bothered by this? No one attempted to correct it by bringing it to the attention of a member of the hospital staff! I'll never know but just like the out of synch walk sign down the block. It amazed me that thousands of people never bothered to take action, in New York City!

It's known as "bystander effect" a term that arose from the tragic death of Kitty Genovese who was murdered in the street in Kew Gardens, Queens on the night of March 13, 1964. Numerous neighbors watched in horror. Not one of them called the police! Not ONE! Someone, who me, called about the steel

plates though, because that may have disrupted the sleep of those recovering in the hospital too, eh? I'm so sorry that I wasn't in Kew Gardens on that fateful night back in 1964. It's incredible!

Have you ever walked passed a City bus stop while passengers are getting on and off the bus? Have you ever heard the burst of noise emitted from a City bus? It's an air propulsion sound, hydraulic, whatever, very loud, that signals passengers that the bus is in kneeling mode? It's loud enough to awaken people from great distances. It sounds like an elephant's love call mixed with a dose of compressed farts! Why does it have to be that loud? Subways have a nice ding-dong warning sound signaling that the doors are about to close. Why not try that instead of the annoying, grinding bus blast? There's got to be thousands of people who live in apartments that are in earshot of bus stops throughout the City who must suffer terribly on a continuous basis. Perhaps it's unavoidable, let's wait and see. "Bill, Mr. Bill help us!" How about flashing lights instead? Imagine living in a ground floor apartment with a bus stop in front of your window? That will do wonders for the value of your abode and quality of your life. Maybe a little song such as the Mr. Softie ice cream song would do the trick, eh?

I have no doubt that fire engines and I hate to pick on firefighters, but sirens are over used. Why blast them, incessantly, especially late at night or in early morning hours when there are practically no cars around? Streets are clearly visible. The horns and sirens are constantly pounding pointlessly. It's overkill! Childish first responders get over it and

grow up! OH yes, and be safe. Why can't there be an application of a technology that must exist that bounces the siren sound back to the source, the truck, rather than continue for blocks and blocks waking thousands of people?

Firefighters are truly the bravest and most precious people we know but I'd love just a little effort here guys. Not your fault, you gotta go up the chain of command all they to the top!

About ten years ago I had heard of something about, the NYFD announced an experiment to diminish the use of sirens in Queens when fire engines are not on their way to an emergency! Well, it's about time we attempted to put an end to needless noise. How long will this take? Perhaps the FDA can approve a new drug before the "jury" is back. So far, about a year later, nothing has come of it!

Has anyone thought of how to make a quieter garbage truck yet? What about motorcycles without mufflers or with mufflers that are designed to produce the loudest sounds heard in the City? Aren't there laws on the books to prevent that? Yes there are but no one gives a rat's ass.

I live on West 97th Street supposedly a much quieter neighborhood than West 60th. My first six months there were quiet and then the noise arrived! Construction began next to my building, big time. A mega residential and shopping complex with 700 apartments covering a three-block stretch on both sides of Columbus Avenue, a humongous residential shopping center was under construction. There were approximately three construction contraptions with ultra hardened bits chomping away at the bedrock,

Manhattan schist, to excavate the foundations. I was wishing for the good ol' days of the steel plates back on 60th Street!

Several weeks after this incessant noise had started, a Monday through Friday occurrence, from 7 AM to 4 PM, I saw a guy on the corner of Columbus Avenue and 97th Street unlock a metal box, installed on a telephone pole, that read, "EPA Noise Abatement Unit." I asked him what he was doing and he explained to me that he was there to remove a statistical circular graph document; a mechanically plotted graph etched upon it electronically recorded the level of noise in that area over time. I inquired,

"What do you do with that information?"

He told me that he hands it to his superior for analysis.

"Then what does he or she do with it?"

"Beats me!" he replied.

Well, I'm so glad that the City is hard at work doing, doing, and doing, well, something that apparently provides no benefit. At least there are a few people out there who have jobs, on the City payroll, no less. Noise, from this construction project, continued for well over two years, just before I had decided that it was too late to have my ears sealed in cement.

By far, the most annoying and frequently disturbing noise, the one that not only violates our ears but makes us go insane are the automated auto alarms that "go off" at the slightest sound or vibration often triggered by an insect or a drop rain that touches a 1988 Toyota Corolla, resale value approximately \$235.00 minus transportation costs.

Have you ever noticed that only cars that even the most desperate criminals would not even think of stealing are the only ones that are alarmed? It reminds me of George Carlin's comment that the only women who are opposed to abortion are the ones that you wouldn't want to sleep with!

The alarm that I love, just kidding, the best are the car alarms that cascade a variety of electronic sounds from: hee haw, hee haw then, awee, awee, awee, and then, yang yang yang yang and finally zeeeeeep, zeeeeeep, zeeeeeep and then repeat, repeat, repeat. The sheer joy when it stops makes you feel as though you got your finger released from a slammed door!

Okay Bill, here's my solution: Tow cars away whose alarms go off without good reason, that is, if the vehicle has, a blue book value, of less than \$5,000. If it's value is more than \$500 then fine the owner \$500 or exchange their wheels for a '78 Sentra.

It's unbelievable that just the other morning, starting at about 5 AM a loud and crazy alarm went off in the rear parking lot of the complex where I live. It must have disturbed no less than 18,000 people, probably much more. The police were called, never came, my building doorman didn't have access to the records as to who rented that parking spot because the "management" office was closed therefore he could not identify the owner of that vehicle or whether or not the vehicle was parked there illegally. Thus, every fifteen minutes or so until about 8:30 AM the alarm blasted. I do hope that rocket scientist got to work on time.

I love my weekends more than ever and appreciate my peace and quiet beyond belief. Perhaps I should

have moved up to 130th Street or beyond? Who knows? It's probably noisier up there and at least it has lyric, melody and rhythm bursting forth with a familiar and distinctive Latino and Hip-hop musical flair. Despite this, I will never leave Manhattan. Perhaps they'll have to carry me out. Quietly, on a Harley three-wheeler!

Hallowed Ground . . . Zero

In the early 19th century Manhattan was protected from foreign invaders by three strategically located forts at the entrance to our harbor. Any form of attack would have been easily stopped by anyone who dared to invade New York City by sea. Known as Ft. Wood, Ft. Gibson and Ft. Clinton they defended us well. I remember the names of these three forts using with quip: "President Clinton had a Gibson and got a Woody!"

A navel attack could have been executed simply by landing troops in New Jersey or at the eastern edge of what was to become part of New York City such as Brooklyn or Queens. An attack waged via Long Island Sound or from the continent via The Bronx certainly would have been problematic for us because Manhattan has big borders, all shoreline. There were numerous forts built in Manhattan and the outer boroughs providing further protection from attack as well. However, Manhattan, an island, was impenetrable from the Upper Bay at the southern tip there those three forts were located. No enemy ships had ever attempted to invade upon the heart of New York City by ship since The Revolutionary War. A Normandy type invasion, with numerous small landing craft could have been successful only if the enemy's small ships danced between the cannon balls. Never did a flotilla of small ships make such an attempt.

Fort Totten on Willets Point near Bayside in Queens, Fort Jay on Governors Island, Castle Clinton in Battery Park, and Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island protected the Narrows keeping us safe. Fort Wood on Liberty

Island and Fort Gibson, the former name of Ellis Island all together put any ship in range of cannon balls, together with two other harbor forts, our batteries defended New York harbor quite well from invasions.

As a result, no enemy ship had ever entered our harbor however; the British did blockade New York City successfully during the War of 1812 and they had the good sense never to venture into our firing range.

It seemed that we were safer then and more secure with brick and mortar forts, armed with state of the art guns, during that era that would have laid waste to frigates commandeered by those who would have dared to attack us.

Fast-forward to September 11, 2001 and by any measure we were attacked by terrorist monsters from caves in Afghanistan that plotted the most horrific loss of life, destruction and carnage this country has ever known from outside invaders. Our forts have fallen into disuse ages ago. Remnants from times past, a time when life was simpler but far more difficult to endure was unbelievably safer then now! Nowadays, we are equipped with laser guided weapons, “smart” bombs, supersonic fighters, GPS, satellite imagery, night goggles, global intelligence, ordinance laden pilot-less drones, surveillance apparatus, and stealth technology, to name a few, all at our disposal at a cost of hundreds of billions of dollars. All of that hardware had failed to protect us adequately. What will the future bring? Today there are reckless heads of state that are “saber rattlers with nuclear arsenals and ICBM’S with probable capability to destroy us. Russia, a traditional cold war

enemy is once again throwing fear and new weaponry into the dialogue that may very well accelerate a new cold war arms build up. Don't they know that the vast arsenal and delivery capability that we have is multiples beyond what would be needed to annihilate mankind and that includes The Russians themselves?

These high tech weapons did not prevent the heinous attacks on that fateful September morning; attacks launched in our skies using U.S. commercial aircraft as weapons of death and mass destruction. Certainly, we are less safe now than we were in the 19th century.

The idea of building The World Trade Center originated with David Rockefeller, the former CEO of Chase. He pined for a way to revitalize the financial district and halt the downfall of its luster to the midtown business district after World War II. Rockefeller Center and Grand Central Terminal were the driving catalysts for developers and, as a result, the midtown district enjoyed unprecedented growth of commercial, residential and retail development throughout the second half of the 20th century. Downtown or "The Financial District" had lost its gleam and glitter. Mr. Rockefeller built a new corporate headquarters for Chase in 1960, a sixty story international modern structure with courtyards, magnificent amenities and sculptures that he had hoped would seed a new construction boom in the financial district re-creating the lost glory of Wall Street as the impressive center of finance and commerce as it had once been. His vision, hoping that

the new Chase Headquarters would jump-start the process simply did not take hold.

In the late 1960's David Rockefeller together with Nelson, the governor of New York State, (1958-1974) put together a new vision. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey issued revenue bonds purchasing "Radio Row" a sixteen-acre site in lower Manhattan through passage of eminent domain legislation and built The World Trade Center consisting of seven buildings included the signature Twin Towers as the centerpiece to become the heart of a new downtown upon its completion in 1973.

New Yorkers took enormous pride with some reluctance in "The Twin Towers" a crowning symbol, a colossus of our commercial strength and global supremacy as the "Capital of capital of the World." After forty-three years the Empire State Building was surpassed as the world's tallest building by those gleaming twin temples, a technological achievement of unprecedented innovation, imagination and hubris. As New York City has always done, after 911, we embarked on the path of renewal and replacement creating a spectacular new World Trade Center, a vision that has come to life replete with an impressive memorial park featuring two memorial pools, "Reflecting Absence" serving as the centerpieces of it all.

We are beholden to our first responders; mourning all who perished with great sorrow, and each and every first responder, heroes, each and every one who are enveloped in an eternal vale of sorrow after the attack of our glorious City and its people. The towers were symbols of our greatness and of the

victims, families and friends who lost loved ones on that most horrific day. It is an eternally enormous burden, one that is unbearably difficult to accept and or comprehend.

And to our fallen brothers and sisters whose lives were taken in innocence, their courage to summon the best that dwelled within their hearts struggling against the odds helping their fellow co-workers and strangers who happen to be beside them desperately seeking to find a way out saving so many lives in the worst circumstances imaginable. We will never forget, never.

Our firefighters, 343 men whose precious lives were taken, who raced to the site, many not called to duty, rather by their instinct, dashed to their final fire. Their memory will always burn in our hearts. How gallantly they sped undeterred into the face of danger and stared down death to save people who they had never met, people who will never know their names, people who surely will, in eternity, be grateful for their unbelievable courage and ultimate sacrifices. Not one of them turned their backs knowing that they were entering the most horrific building fires, in history. That's the stuff of New Yorkers, gallant, fearless and devoted to their fellow citizens at the risk or even near certainty of losing their lives. "They walked upstairs to die while others walked downstairs to live."

We, as a city, are rebuilding and nothing will ever stop that. Again and again, we have, in a short four hundred years, demonstrated to the world that New York City is unstoppable. When our new World Trade Center site is completed we will rejoice, somewhat

painfully, that those whose lives were lost will forever dwell in our minds and hearts. How tragic that the rebuilding process has been mired in politics, legalities, incompetence, financial entanglements reveals numbers that are so “off the charts” that there must be some cause for close hands on audits. How does a train terminal get to \$4 Billion from \$2 Billion? What planet are we living on? The waste, incompetence, the unexplainable cost overruns and the obvious mauling of the public trust is criminal. Where are the prosecutors, the newspapers and the few honest politicians with spines? Answer. There aren’t any! Ultimately, that will fade into the past and we will endure, our temples and memorials as a symbol of our greatness. But, what that money would have provided to the children of the fallen, scholarships, therapy, financial support, etc. is the rip-off that goes in tandem with city and state politics. It’s in the DNA.

The effects of 911 dwell deep within the hearts and minds of all New Yorkers. Images of ordinary people, “the general public”, looking after their fellow citizens, risking their lives out of concern; far beyond kindness are indelibly engraved within us all. How many of us would have imagined that even in New York City, on a day unlike any other, strangers, the people you ride to work with and never exchange a word, people who cut in line ahead of you to grab their coffee, people whose lives are a mystery to you, people whose skin is not the same color as yours and faces that reveal that their origin is from places perhaps unheard of by you. They were all New Yorkers entwined in a run for their lives as if tied

together in a web, a unified dash for survival, like a herd of zebras fleeing a pack of lions. Many stayed behind, setting aside their own precious lives, and their love of their families to rescue total strangers. We as New Yorkers are family. We were then and we are now. More than ever 911 has proven that New Yorkers truly have deep love and compassion for their neighbors and fellow citizens. Who among us had known, the connection that had been there before 911? Perhaps we just didn't know it at the time, but we certainly know it now.

There is no shortage of heroism in New York City. It pours forth into the streets, people reversing course, providing life saving aid for those who were gasping for air, offering their last drops of precious bottled water, giving their last ounce of strength to enable a stranger to take their next few steps forward to safety. That is the essence of New York City.

Put your CSI, Law and Order, Special Victims Unit and all those TV crime dramas in the closet. This is the real New York City, unrehearsed, one take, final shoot, not the reality program we ever wanted to provide to the world. It's the indelible and unsponsored truth. There are no better people on earth than the brothers and sisters who live here in New York City.

We are beyond deeply saddened by the events of 911 and although we cannot turn the clock back, we can look ahead with grateful pride that New York City responded in the most heroic and generous way the world has ever known. God bless New York City, all the people who love this town and all the wonderful people who did not live here and who came selflessly

to our rescue. Come to the 911 memorial and to the 911 museum and pay your respects to all those who are tragically no longer with us.

Not Every New Yorker is so Smart!

Recently, I was walking down 44th Street approaching Sixth Avenue in midtown and when I had reached Sixth Avenue I came upon a great deal of commotion; fire engines, police cars, sirens, crowds of people, stopped traffic, yellow police tape all over the place and a taxicab with a shattered rear windshield.

It was quite a scene, scary! What was going on? Hey, this is New York City and events of this nature, whatever the cause, were not uncommon. Sirens are heard constantly, dozens of police cars with flashing lights during practice exercises with ambulances, fire trucks are often seen and heard, the uncommon is common. It's all part of the urban landscape, nothing new, business as usual.

I approached a gentleman, well suited, briefcase in hand, standing with his head tilted straight up, staring intently. His fixated glare was glued to The Bank of America Tower, then under construction. Many others were motionless, standing like stone all with their heads tilted up. I too looked up and still had no clue as to what was going on. What were they looking at? Apparently, all I could conclude was that they were looking directly at the Bank of America Tower and apparently something must have gone terribly wrong. My thought was that this post-modern "green" beauty's frame was completed and a few remaining windows were being installed. This was to be the second tallest building in Manhattan, tied with the Chrysler Building, after The Empire State Building, again the tallest, tragically reclaiming the title after 911.

"Hey! What's going on up there, sir?" I had asked the nearest observer. His answer was shocking! It absolutely floored me!

"There's glass falling from the building!"

He shouted, never looking at me, not taking his eyes off whatever was happening or about to happen from above. Like mimes, they were all frozen in time, fascinated, still, eyes up, incredible!

That hard to believe clarification, "glass falling" explained the smashed taxi windshield and building janitors who were busy sweeping up huge jagged shards of broken glass off the sidewalk. The yellow police tape had been placed to prevent pedestrians from venturing into the danger zone, compliments of our bravest and finest. That however, could not save New Yorkers from their own lack of good judgment, aka stupidity.

Despite the efforts of our public safety professionals with the "best of intentions" together with "the smartest people on the planet" sometimes we just can't save ourselves. Who knows? Perhaps the yellow police tape was placed to corral morons to enter the danger zone, those who craved best views!

There are limits as to how much protection can be provided to those who insist on remaining on the wrong side of stupidity. Stupidity is not a crime, but it can be deadly. If only they could have radioed above to ensure that the glass would fall only within the yellow taped boundaries!

One of the two cables supporting the cement buckets, designed to prevent them from swaying into the building as they descended, had become disengaged. That caused one of the buckets to swing into the side

of the building and smash numerous windows as it was being lowered. As soon as a construction crewmember figured that out they halted the bucket's decent and secured the loose cable.

I left the scene immediately, exceedingly perplexed by the hundreds of New Yorkers who had stood there gazing, face upward, literally exposing themselves to enormous danger. Could it be that they did not know they were targets of another possible barrage of glass guided by wind and gravity? How could that be?

New Yorkers are amazing people. Smart, innovative, hard working and strangely at times capable of incredibly stupid behavior defying the imagination. Certainly, there was not one among them who didn't realize the threat that they were imposing upon themselves. So then, what was it?

New Yorkers are very curious and will cast off "common sense" to witness unusual events. How often we see people running toward danger? Shouldn't they be running away from danger? Weren't people rushing toward the Twin Towers on that most tragic day to bear witness, taking pictures or just there to be able to tell others, if they survived, "I was there!"

Not all of them were looking to become heroes.

There's got to be something in human nature, a dark side that compels many to go into denial and witness the macabre and bizarre, despite risking their lives. And as it is with most events that life provides, New Yorkers will be there in great numbers, even if it's far from the smartest thing to do.

Hey, perhaps most were lawyers ready to pass out a few cards, ambitious New Yorkers seeking to capture

another opportunity! As I left the scene, I stooped down and pickup up a card, from a law firm, it read:

Dewey, Rob, Steele, Chetham and Howe, LLC

Chapter VI

Other Experiences

“Fraud Alert!”

Career change! Now, those two words strike fear in us all especially when laid at your doorstep without a customary invitation. If career change crashes upon you involuntarily, especially later in life, like 60ish then you’re in for a ride that for most is all down hill! And add to that, if your industry has vanished then you may want to dig a hole? It’s an extremely devastating, disheartening and extremely frightening life-changing event. Toss in a mountain of unpaid back taxes, unresolved divorce obligations, ruined credit and last but not least, there’s no jingle in your pockets, none! You’re in deep shit unless or until a new opportunity kicks in, one that’ll provide a means to re-invent yourself.

There are times when you are handed lemons and the sweetness of life turns against you. It’s easy to feel sorry for yourself and believe that you’re the victim of bad luck and circumstances that you had no control over. You believe that you have reached an irreversible dilemma and you’ll never get out of the morass and life sucks.

“It’s hopeless. How can I ever rebuild? What am I going to do? Shit, SHIT!”

That’s how it feels. I know. That’s where I was back in 2005. K Mart security guard job for \$9 an hour, sure? Here I come.

I had recalled my father’s advice from way back in the late 1970’s when his business had crashed and I had

been working for him for approximately ten years, helping him to manage and build his business, one that had evolved into a large film processing plant employing over 200 employees. We grew the family business, purchased the newest and best equipment, computerized the operation and reckless rapid growth resulted in a severely undercapitalized and “un-bankable” business with “cat shit” filling the business’s financial statements. Ultimately the business failed and I went adrift and left penniless, without a job and no business. Eastman Kodak sued my wife, and me for nearly a half a million dollars and I was tied up with a non-compete covenant that restricted me from selling film processing for nine years within a 75-mile radius of New York City. Tuff beans, eh? Toss in two little kids, the wife, a mortgage and that situation was quite a shit storm.

My father’s advice was,

“You have the ability to make a living. Put one foot in front of the other.”

“Great dad! Thanks a lot. That’s like telling me, ‘Life is just a bowl of cherries!’ Got the Dali Lama’s phone number, eh Pop?”

But, he turned out to be right. I know now what he meant. That was, just get on with it. Tap into your own resources and stop feeling sorry for yourself. Break your ass and point yourself in the right direction. Look for opportunities and you will find them. How right he was!

Between 1978 and 2005 I built several businesses in photo finishing, one hour photo stores, digital imaging employing sixty people and then with the advent of digital imaging in the consumer market I

put my business through bankruptcy and I went through another crash, no money six figure tax debt, no assets and no way out, so I thought.

Fast forward to 2005 when Aline and I were looking to buy a business, one that had similarities with the retail one-hour photo business, a retail service business, which had been our primary source of income since we'd been married. It had been a very lucrative business until digital photography replaced film in the consumer marketplace. Photography had become a computer driven business as the overwhelming majority of amateurs and consumers started to print their own pictures at home or simply store their images on discs, floppies or hard drives. One-hour photo stores were dropping like flies and in 2012 Eastman Kodak, "the great yellow father", as they had been known in the industry, filed for bankruptcy, something that had been unthinkable even a few years back.

Aline and I looked for independent fast food establishments, gourmet coffee shops featuring minimal food preparation and no cooking in New York City. They were all service businesses and that, in many ways, was similar to the one-hour photo business; purchase the raw materials, prepare, market and sell the hell out of it. Our plan was to provide excellent customer service, staff the business with motivated people and create a brand and build loyalty. We knew how to do such things, profitably. A well satisfied customer base could be built in a short period of time by providing excellent service, quality and value. That would yield substantial income without the cost and hassle of "carrying" huge

inventories and purchasing expensive equipment. The markups are very high in retail food service and low cost unskilled labor could run such a business with good supervision, training and controls.

We spent quite a bit of effort searching for such a business. Every business that had seemed to be ideal wound up having fatal flaws. The lease was too short, the business was too expensive, the seller wanted to be paid entirely in cash or there were restrictive covenants in the lease that were deal breakers for us. Other businesses had location problems; too many competitors or they were simply on the wrong side of the street. The most frequent deal breaker was that the seller was just plain full of shit.

One opportunity we had gotten close to forging was owned and operated by a woman who was a vicious liar and cheat. I spent several days watching her ring up sales at the cash register, with her approval, of course. I tallied the sales on a pad in front of her nose for an entire day. When she gave the cash to me to verify the amount that she had rung up she provided exactly \$1,000 more than she had actually taken in! I had seen her plop the money into the cash register during the day without her noticing that I had detected her "slight of hand."

Another potential seller offered what seemed to be a sweet deal until I had discovered that a major construction project was about to begin directly across the street from his establishment, a subway and PATH train hub on Fulton Street.

Then, at last we found exactly what we had been looking for. The location was perfect. The seller was honest and very accommodating. The help was hard

working and the food venue was highly profitable and required quick and easy preparation. The store was doing a brisk business and the hours were not overbearing, closing at 6 PM. The terms were very attractive requiring a small down payment with low interest notes to satisfy the balance. I spent four weeks working there from opening to closing and learned a great deal about the business from top to bottom.

Aline and I had agreed that it would be a great start and a bright future lay ahead of us. We were very excited about this opportunity; we took the next step and scheduled a meeting with the co-op board.

The building was a co-op, meaning a board of managers or directors had the right and obligation to review all applications for the sale of all the residences above the street level, as well as sales of retail businesses “on the street” in the building. We were confident that together we were well qualified, on every level, to purchase the business. We appeared before the board with every expectation that this would be a “done deal.” We were counting on it.

The board assembled in an apartment six floors above the store. Wow! It was huge. The rooms were oversized and complimented with high ceilings, maple floors, large windows and elegant furnishings. We were very impressed.

The board members introduced themselves. They seemed pleasant and welcoming except for one member who was grim and distant. Aline and I looked at each other and transmitted the same message. This guy, whoever he was, was going to be troublesome.

This kingpin was very tall, well into his seventies, wearing pajamas and slippers. To us, that signified arrogance and power. He appeared to be a Meyer Lansky power type, the old and physically fragile man who welded all the authority in the room. He projected the impression that he was extremely forbidding and disconnected as though we were interrupting him like he had much more important things to do. We were just a couple of losers who were looking to buy a little crap business, a coffee shop. we found out at the meeting that he was the board president, owner of multiple multi-million dollar units in the building. He was the decision maker, the deal breaker or maker.

We had provided all the documents they had required from us; financial statements, documents of citizenship, identifications, references, biographical essays and Aline's credit report as well as bank statements. This transaction was hers alone. I was there as a participant and advisor. My credit was what you'd expect due to the taxi liens, a few judgments and the corporate bankruptcy.

The "jolly old giant" took control of the meeting with sheer gall. He avoided eye contact with us and spoke as though he was the master of the house and did all he could to make us as uncomfortable as possible while his lackeys looked on keeping their mouths shut. We knew we were facing a very adversarial situation, duh!

He launched each question, as a lawyer, which is what he was. We felt that we were on trial rather than attending a gathering that was to cement benefits, an engagement a *quid pro quo*, a benefit for us all. He

plodded on and created an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust, projecting a sense of conflicting purposes between the parties.

"I see on your credit report a notice marked 'fraud alert.'" he mused.

He pointed his finger directly at Aline as if she had committed a criminal act! This was not a Charles Dickens novel but it seemed that we were about to be grilled.

He, as an attorney, knew that such a notation on a credit report was a warning, a flag that someone had stolen or had attempted to steal her identity. This was not a flag that Aline was a fraud, but rather a potential target of a fraud perpetrated by an outsider. Our adversary used this to malign her reputation and credit worthiness.

This villainous creep attacked her due to a gripe he had with the seller of the store, as we had learned after that ill-fated meeting. We were squarely in his line of fire.

I had told him during the meeting that Aline's credit score was sky high, as the credit report stated, and that she never even received a traffic ticket in her life. Further, I continued that he knew exactly what "fraud alert" meant.

He rebuked me by vehemently denying what "fraud alert" had meant. He was a low life and a liar. The other board members sat void of expression, in absolute silence like a flock of blind sheep.

It was apparent that we were not going to get their approval to purchase the business. Then I got it off my chest.

"You know sir, it's people like you who sit on a high horse and live life taking pleasure thwarting others, while knowing that it is adverse to your best interests and those of your colleagues and neighbors. As an attorney you have found a mechanism upon which to hang your hat and prevent my wife and I from pursuing what we are well qualified to do. We are hardworking people and can add much to the value of this building by providing a service for the community. But, because you are driven by your perverse agenda we're outa here empty handed except for the next opportunity that will surely come." A come it did, yes it certainly did!

We got up and left, saying nothing more, not to him or the flock. It had seemed as though the world was against us. We were back where we had started except our bank account was dwindling. We needed to find something soon as our options were fading. We were terrified and deeply discouraged.

Looking back at the entire incident, the board president did us a huge favor. Running that coffee shop operation, even with the ideas and imagination that we were going to pour into it would have been an exhausting and onerous operation with long hours and plenty of headaches. We would have taken on debt and been at the mercy of the board once again if we ever wanted to sell that business. Life is funny because something that we had wanted so desperately slipped through our fingers and it opened the door to our next big thing. Interesting how nearly every difficult situation, every misfortune, morass that assuredly seemed to be a major setback or

distress ultimately turned out to be a benefit. What a life lesson!

Within the following year Custom & Private New York Tours, Inc. was born.

~~“Darling, I’m about to be Arrested!”~~

While transferring thirty of our guests down to the Wall Street Heliport in a minibus my cell phone rang as we were passing Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue.

Aline called me with a most frightening message: “Darling, I’m about to be arrested!”

“What!”

“A police officer wants to take me to the police station for tossing a cigarette out of the van!”

This made absolutely no sense to me.

At the time, Aline was in a van with a driver about to leave to transfer all of our guest’s luggage to Newark Airport who were about to fly to Paris. To ensure there would be no tampering with the contents of their luggage, by the driver of the van, she accompanied him to the airport, keeping her eyes on the luggage.

Apparently, while sitting in the van with the driver, a shoddy and disheveled looking guy, and she a fair skinned well presented looking woman, a peculiar looking pair, were parked directly in front of a “high value target” The Plaza Hotel. This unlikely couple in an old rickety van, reminded me of a Cheech and Chong van, loaded with luggage, weighting the van down, raised the suspicions of a vigilant police officer. This occurred approximately two weeks after the thwarted attempt to set off a bomb in an SUV on West 45th Street in Times Square.

The officer had “probable cause” after Aline had failed to produce her ID as requested by the officer. He asked her where she was going and when she replied “Newark Airport” he retorted, “You’re going to the airport and you don’t have any ID?”

"I'm here to ensure that the luggage arrives safely and securely at the airport. I am not flying anywhere. My husband is taking the people who own this luggage to the heliport to be transferred to Newark airport. We are in the private tour business. Let me call my husband. I'm sure he has ID."

"Where do you live? What's your zip code? What's your phone number?" he asked her.

When I received Aline's phone call I was about three blocks down Fifth Avenue. I left the bus, told my guests that I would meet them at the heliport and that I had to take care of something of urgent importance. By the time I reached the van the officer had left, after Aline's answers to his questions had satisfied him that she was "legit."

We all live in stressful and frightening times. Certainly, New Yorkers need to be alert and smart. The police officer absolutely did the right thing. In this world we all need to carry photo ID and not toss cigarettes onto the street, if you are crazy enough to still smoke! Vigilance is the order of the day. I give kudos to the NYPD officer and to all those who protect us.

New York City in a Blizzard

Blizzards, earthquakes, hurricanes, avalanches, tsunamis and tornadoes are extremely uncommon in New York City. But, we do have plenty of horrible weather. It's very rare for our weather to threaten our lives and property until Sandy, one of the worst storms in American history that somehow our government officials refused to label as a hurricane rather it has been labeled "a super storm." This disaster has gone down as the second most costly and damaging weather event in American history, second only to hurricane Katrina.

Predicting weather in New York City is, at best, difficult and very iffy. Typically, weather here is very changeable and bizarre! I have never cultivated a love of meteorology growing up in an age before satellites and the onset of sophisticated weather forecasting technology, which is still an inexact science. It's been a long time since I've heard weather forecasts from Carol Reed, the CBS TV weather reporter from way back in the late '50's. In a town where you can dip into a subway station, purchase an umbrella on the street for as little as three bucks, why bother to track the weather. Hurricane Sandy was a game changer, big time. We have to get serious about storm surge technology and solutions. It will be interesting to see how our governments and businesses handle that inevitable problem!

New York City was blessed with huge blizzard in January of 1996 but most wouldn't agree with my assessment. According to the official weather bureau records, 20.2 inches of snow fell on Central Park and over 30 inches were reported in some of the outer

boroughs. At the time, I was living on West 57th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenue. This was the first time I had the opportunity to experience such an astonishing event. In New York City blizzards pose more inconveniences for those who live in the hinterlands and the outer boroughs because the major mode of transportation in Manhattan is underground. Building owners and managers clear sidewalks in front of buildings a mandated responsibility. City snow removal services are most often quite good with emphasis always in Manhattan first because the streets are straight and flat and the money is here where it's made and spent.

It had been predicted just prior to the storm that we were in for a possible record breaker, the largest snowstorm, or at least nearly the largest in New York City history was on its way. It turned out to be number four; March 12-14 in 1888 was the second, December 26-27 in 1947 was the third largest and The Blizzard of '06 (2006) kicked in as the largest at 26.9 inches according to statistics maintained since 1869.

It was late afternoon when the first evidence began to descend. I recall my parents talking about the blizzard of 1947 for years. In those days we were not equipped to remove snow as efficiently as we are now. It was always the granddaddy of all blizzards in their generation. This time we were ready. I do recall that there were elders talking about hearing their predecessors, when they were children, talking about "the blizzard of '88", 1888! Sure, their parents must have been born between 1890 and 1900 because my parents were born in 1920 and 1922. So, my

grandparents must have heard their parents talking about that disaster. Horses are not ideal for snow removal and the demise of the telephone and electric service for weeks must have had lasting impact locked in their heads. There must have been a catastrophic loss of life and property back then. I'm so glad I missed that one.

After the snow, thick, fluffy and very dense, had stopped falling, the '96 blizzard had laid claim to the City. I dressed up for the occasion with long johns, gloves, earmuffs, boots, scarfs and a hat, "the works" and ventured out around midnight.

I had entered a time warp, a surreal landscape of white glaze, silent and still. Not a car, taxi, truck or bus was in sight. The noise of the City had completely vanished and there were only a few people out there. A few horses were visible with mounted police officers keeping a eye on the City, a completely new and different vista in front of them unlike anything they had ever seen before. Two men were cross-country skiing down the center of 57th Street, dogs roamed unleashed and people were knee high in snow taking pictures. The city had fallen into a weird quiet that may never have occurred before. It was the quietest, purest, most beautiful and pristine backdrop that had ever occurred in Manhattan since the Lenape Indians ruled this island.

It took me back to a time, a time that I could only have imagined, read about or seen in old black and white noir movies, or photographs. No image, no photograph, could have captured the silence I had experienced. The quiet amplified the sites, as it is said of those who have a sensory loss such as hearing or

blindness, providing their other senses with enhanced acuity.

Gazing at fifty story buildings towering above with nearly no one in sight, the void of moving vehicles, the lack of the incessant blasts of horns and sirens was dreamlike and had provided me with a surreal experience as if I had landed on another planet. Without the odor of fumes spewing from countless exhaust pipes, the absence of bleating sirens, a City standing still as though it was 1888 but without the recurrent sound of the clip clop of horse hooves, the frequent and ever present cadence of people's hasty gaits always complimented a frenzy and commotion not seen or heard in our lifetimes.

This urban landscape was a kaleidoscope of 20th century steel frame buildings rising into the haze of the old world, a world gone by. It was mesmerizing. How fortunate I was to experience this wonderment, knowing that the switch would flip by morning light and the City would inevitably trudge back to normal. I was glad about that too.

This snapshot of a slow paced, quiet and peaceful New York City was a treat for those who were fortunate enough to step outside, into the past, if only for one brief moment. The experience was truly well worth the effort. I do hope to slip back in time again some day. Until then, I will enjoy the City that I love, just the way it is.

Hopefully, some day, I'll be talking about the blizzard of '19 with a wide-eyed little child who will hear me, another old man, recalling the blizzard of '06!

“I remember that, yes I was there. Were you here too little one? Surely, you’re too young to remember. You would have loved that one.”

Back to the Future with a Metro Card

We all have "uneventful" days now and then, even in New York City. Recently, I had an amusing idea, a whacky out of the ordinary thought on an uneventful day for me in Manhattan.

I had "launched" two tours that day, a Chinese and a Spanish language tour one at The Gramercy Park Hotel and the other at Le Parker Meridien in midtown. Starting out, by subway, from West 97th Street I emerged from the subway at the Flatiron Building on 23rd Street where Broadway and Fifth Avenue intersect. From a quiet Upper Westside neighborhood I surfaced from the subway realizing I had entered a vastly different environment compared to where I had started, one adorned with historic late 19th century and early 20th century buildings, The Flatiron (1902), The Metropolitan Life Tower (1906), The Fifth Avenue Hotel (1909) and a park that once was Manhattan's town square, Madison Square Park where a cottage belonging to President James Madison once stood.

There the pace of life was highly energized and urban characterized with throngs of pedestrians hurrying along the sidewalks, briskly crossing streets, car horns beeping and people going about their day. The streets were filled with traffic; much more congested than The Upper Westside void of the slower sluggish gait typical of uptown neighborhoods, pedestrians seemingly laden with too much time on their hands.

It was my first transformative experience of the day. I had entered a different time, space and place, a vast contrast from what I had experienced when I had left my home in the morning.

A short walk to The Gramercy Park Hotel took me past the church where Eleanor Roosevelt had been baptized, whoopee, and a few blocks from where cousin Teddy was born and raised. I walked past the home of Dr. Valentine Mott MD, founder of The New York University School of Medicine, who died suddenly on the evening of April 15, 1865, Good Friday, upon learning of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It is an elegant townhouse located on Gramercy Park West. A beautiful collection of middle 19th century townhomes can be found there including one owned and occupied by James Harper, publisher and mayor of New York City, elected in 1844. I peered through the iron fence at Gramercy Park, the only park in Manhattan requiring a key, bearing a statue of John Wilkes Booth's brother, Edwin, New York City's most popular Shakespearian actor in the mid 19th century. Samuel Tilden's home, the unsuccessful Presidential candidate in 1876, stands on the south side of the park and New York City's first cooperative residential building stands on the eastside of the park guarded by two knights in armor.

I turned the corner at Lexington Avenue and recalled that I was gazing upon the home of Cyrus Field, the genius behind the laying of the first successful Trans-Atlantic cable over a century ago. Technology has come a long way since then, if he only knew.

I had entered another contrasting neighborhood, older then the one I had witnessed when I had emerged from the subway at the Flatiron Building. I entered the middle 19th century while at Gramercy Park. The evidence was abundant, rich in history, beauty and wealth. I took a short walk down Irving

Place and spotted the home of Washington Irving and Pete's Tavern where O'Henry had written "The Gift of the Magi" a classic short story with a well known ending one with a classic twist.

After I left The Gramercy Park area I dipped back into the subway and stepped out at 57th Street and Seventh Avenue. As I exited, Carnegie Hall came into view, City Spire, Carnegie Tower and Metropolitan Tower, a span of architecture that covered an entire century and the excavation of a building currently under construction and marketed as One 57, due to be the tallest residential building north of the equator, but only for a short time. Why? Because there are four others under construction within a stone's throw of One 57 (located at 157 West 57th Street) that will each be taller. Check back in a few years' folks and see for yourself.

Within the span of a fifteen-minute subway ride I was transformed from the mid-19th century to the next turn of two centuries and literally seeing the future in the making.

The changing palette is extraordinary and the contrast is incredible. To the immediate east of Carnegie Hall are three huge late 20th century structures, Metropolitan Tower (716' tall 1987) and Carnegie Hall Tower (778' tall, 1991) and City Spire (814' tall, 1987) and they appear to be touching each other. Three huge siblings casting shadows on the music hall but never diminishing its glory; setting a backdrop that illustrates the incredible process of change that has always defined New York City.

After I completed my mission, I got back on the subway and was off to The West Village to capture a

photograph I needed of 66 Perry Street, the fictitious home of Carrie Bradshaw of "Sex and the City." Incidentally, the home was on the market as of this writing for \$9.9 million. I suppose it would be worth a lot more if it were not a favorite stopping place for sightseers, ya think? This time, the clock wound back to the early 19th century. The streetscape appeared as it had back then, over 200 years ago. Various architectural styles such as Federal townhouses, traditional brownstones, neo-classics, Italianate adorned townhouses with tall second floor windows, a la "*piano noble*" meaning noble floor, cats sitting on windowsills gazing indolently, the bark of an agitated dog and others engaged in quiet conversation between several passers by.

In New York City change has transformed the urban landscape, layer upon layer providing evidence that the past keeps a sacred place here always peeking at us. All it takes is just a small dose of imagination to transform you back in time. You can see it, feel it and experience it if only you try.

It's just one of the magical benefits of Manhattan and most of the City as well.

Our neighborhoods, rich in personality, depth and character possess impressive personas and histories that are visible, vibrant and beautiful.

Moving through the streets, one neighborhood suddenly drops off and another greets you. It's a walking historical slide show, one that's rich in architecture, culture and nostalgia. Your eyes and sensibilities provide the switch if you just think it. It's like traveling to many cities, one after the other, through time, all co-existing in one tightly knit space,

a quilt, a mosaic blended together forming a vast composite in space and time.

I was immersed in a world where everything happened a million times before. But it was the conscious desire to experience the City more passionately with reverence and reflection that had made a usual day so exceptional.

Perhaps tomorrow will be filled with a new and different type of excitement. If not I'll just grin and love it as a *flaneur* or *promeneur* in Paris, gazing at it all and inhaling the City's endless wonders with joy, deep admiration and awe. Ah, New York City!

Chapter VII

So Now You Know

Mannahatta, My O' My. Have You Changed!

My name is White Feather and I am peering into the distance from behind a clump of rocks I imagine the future. No, it couldn't be true. My people, my ancestors, have lived here for over four hundred generations and I have been told that this has will be written in the white man's history books.

We have never disturbed the beauty and abundance of this place given to us by The Great Spirit. We have maintained our land, rivers and forests and our wealth and we have given back to the land, never abusing it but always sustaining the resources with the tools we could muster. We have always protected and respected the great gifts we have been granted. We have lived off this rich and plentiful land, the great river and our rich hunting grounds for many generations. We have always been provided with all we need, more than we have ever wished for. The waters have always provided an abundance of food and the land has sheltered and delivered sustenance, shelter and tools for us.

We've dwelled here peaceably, as a family, a great nation, free from the diseases and weapons brought here by the white man. We have always produced our food, hunted, fished, clothed ourselves and provided shelter for our families on this "island of many hills" and believed that we would always do so.

Who would ever change this island? We have never imagined that would happen. Why would anyone ever

want to change a perfect place like the island, Manna-hatta?

Our years are measured by generations, not by events or inventions. We lived in a world that remained unchanged and for us that was good. As Lenape's we've always been content, self-sufficient and pleased to find a way of life that inspired us one built upon strong kinships over many generations. We have always been closely connected with the land. We have been entwined in a symbiotic relationship with the land and waters. We always believed that this relationship would go on forever.

Our dear departed have been interned in the land and they "live" on through our sacred relationship with the soil. No one owned the land. It was ours to enjoy, live and work upon as a great people, a glorious nation. We were all attached to it in spirit and it was deeded to us forever in life and the afterlife; bound by a bond of close spirits, inseparable and everlasting.

We took good care of one another. We sought no material gain, only the gifts of the land and waters all derived from our labors and faith in our creator, "The Great Spirit." We had no need to change a thing, just to carry on, endure and nurture the land replenishing and restoring the soil. Truly, it was our support system and that was pure and good. We have always loved this island and it had been our home; a safe and secure place to raise our children and teach them the ways of their ancestors building their futures as our forbearers had helped us to built ours.

We are proud people with strong and proper values with environmentally responsible customs and beliefs. We know of no other way. Love, truth, justice

and peace are our eternal guidelines. We are a caring people embracing love and concern for our families and neighbors. With pride in our communities with sacred principles we have always defined our way of life and our great nation.

The island of Manna-hatta, the Lenape Indian word for Manhattan, means "island of many hills." Now, nearly 400 years after the first European settlements were established here, thirteen short generations ago, it is the most geologically transformed urban environment on earth, created in such a relatively short time; a heartbeat in the history of mankind.

How would those Lenape's feel if they came back today? "Culture shock!" That's an understatement. How interesting it is to imagine, after the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620, that this transformation had not yet begun. In less than 400 years, look at what time has wrought? How incredible it is to consider that this little island, only twenty-three square miles, seventeen percent of which is landfill, has become "The Island at the Center of the World" (a book written by Russell Shorto) truly, the fulcrum of modern civilization.

"If you want to see the world, come to New York City." Come and visit Manhattan and experience the world's most fascinating, diverse and innovative place. Celebrate the world, "the melting pot." We forcibly replaced the Lenapes seizing their treasure one that is truly beyond belief. And if there are any Lenapes out there, please return and become a part of our great diversity. We owe you an immeasurable debt of gratitude. Join us and continue to build this great

place with us. May love reign in your lives and families for generations to come.

Neighborhood Names, More than You Know!

Is there a troll of neighborhood names? Could it be a secret that someone is paid by the City to sit in a closeted office, in City Hall, appearing promptly at 9 AM, taking their place behind an old oak roll top desk, wearing a translucent green head shade beneath an old copper lamp cranking out names of New York City neighborhoods for \$65,000 per year plus about \$40,000 in annual benefits, sick days, personal days, maternity leave, family leave, annual physical leave, five personal days, paid vacations and a free flu shot annually?

Certainly! With all the new neighborhood names cropping up these days, this official is grossly underpaid for all the good work that is done. The list never stops growing. How do we measure the value of the work that this commissioner does? The benefits to the City are enormous, sure!

“The Commissioner of Neighborhood Identifying Classification” Division or The NIC, works for the Division of Streets within the Department of Transportation under the authority of The City Council, managed by the Manhattan Borough president who is in the pocket of The Mayor. What does all this effort add to the significance of our town? Nothing that I can think of!

How boring it was when just a small handful of neighborhood names dotted the City supplementing the names of the five boroughs. Space became scarce, we were confined and living closer to our neighbors. These enclaves, or neighborhoods acquired unique character and they have been anointed with names that help define them.

What's in a name? Neighborhood names can serve merely as a label or a destination creating a sense of belonging, an identity, and a test for a cabbie, who may barely speak English, which by the way has become less and less important. Or can a name be a destination name created by astute real estate developers who create a sense of "value" in neighborhoods. "Take me to DUMBO!" These names serve as a sense of pride for people, who proclaim, "Now I live in Bococa, an amalgamated name for three neighborhoods, Cobble Hill, Borum Hill and Carol Gardens!"

Isn't it a little insane, or just a little New Yorkish? We, as New Yorkers, have always sought to find new ways to describe ourselves, as our City constantly changes, adapting and revising itself; necessitating redefined locales with odd and unusual place names.

Place names of the past won't do. Old names, in many cases, no longer reflect the current venue. "Hell's Kitchen" is now known as Clinton, nothing to do with Hillary or Bill, but rather De Witt Clinton, the inspiration behind the street grid (1811) and the Erie Canal (1825). Some have labeled that neighborhood Midtown West in recent times. The Financial District is "FiDi" to the hipsters, trendy and up to date. Not everyone would agree with that new name, most New Yorker's, no doubt, never heard of FiDi! The Flower District, what's left of it, was "Floma", meaning flower market located on and west of 6th Avenue in the high 20's. There's a place known as Viaduct Valley, where the terrain takes a dip between 116th and 134th Streets from Broadway to Amsterdam Avenue or you can get away with "ViVa" the more Latino mode of

that expression. The Photo District or the Flatiron District is also known as "The Fashion District" but not as much as it was when conventional photography had its hayday. Perhaps, it should be the Digital District, or how about "DiDi?" South Harlem has anointed itself; "SoHa" and you guessed it, North Harlem, "NoHa" and "SoCa" is a new label for Inwood in northern Manhattan, translation; south of Canada. The long dreaded South Bronx or Mott Haven has a new label too, "SoBro" for south Bronx, not bad, eh? And now West Chelsea, you can call "Wechee" if you like. Interesting, we have an Upper Eastside and a the Lower Eastside but no "Middle East." Instead, we have Murray Hill thanks to the Murray family who were owners of huge tracts of land, back in the 19th century. They were residential developers who built neighborhoods adjacent to Turtle Bay. The British perceived that the bay on the East River, which is not a river but a tidal straight, was shaped like a turtle, along "Blood Alley" another neighborhood, where slaughterhouses reigned where the United Nations complex stands. Interesting that the world's principle peace keeping institution stands on what was once known as "blood alley" ominous, eh?

Neighborhoods have been given names of prominent former New Yorkers such as Carnegie Hill, Hamilton Heights, Washington Heights, Stuyvesant Heights, Bed-Sty, a shortened Bedford-Stuyvesant, Ft. Greene, a Revolutionary War General, Nathaniel Greene, who coordinated Washington's retreat after the disastrous Battle of Brooklyn. Williamsburg is named after the surveyor of Williamsburg. Other less known neighborhoods such as Clinton Hill, Farragut, the

Admiral, Morris Heights, Bedford Park, Astoria (Astor), Douglaston and on and on. Jerome Avenue in The Bronx is named after Winston Churchill's grandfather, Leonard Jerome! Oye, let's not get started with street names, we'll never get finished! Nomad is a fairly new anointed name for Madison Avenue in the upper 20's to 30's. Some of the old run-down hotels are lavishly restored and restaurants, high-end furniture stores are popping up too.

It's too bad many New Yorkers simply cite the name of their borough as their home eliminating the pride or shame of their space place, their neighborhood. I am never satisfied with the borough name as an answer of a person's home place because boroughs are quite large and have numerous and distinctly differing neighborhoods. Saying you live in Queens or Brooklyn or any other borough tells very little about precisely where you live. Why say you are from Queens when you could be a resident of the more desirable Forest Hills Gardens, Jamaica Estates or historic and diverse Jackson Heights? Why not say Jamaica Estates, or North Shore Towers?

Residents of Queens had better be careful because Queens is the only borough not recognized by the U.S. Postal Service as a proper mailing address. Your postal address must have your neighborhood name if you expect to receive mail in Queens. No one addresses a letter or package to Manhattan, New York, because the name of the borough happens to be New York. Our friends in The Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island can do so too, use their borough name for mail purposes, so why not Queens? Do you feel sorry for Queens? They had better know where they

live; their neighborhood name or their tax bills may go undelivered as well as their refund checks. Queens is the largest borough, 110 square miles, and certainly, Manhattan and Brooklyn have more residents and businesses receiving mail addressed to the name of their respective borough, so why not Queens? I'm not going to waste my time on that one folks. Go ahead, get back to me! ☺

There are three Greenwich Villages now, once called The Ninth Ward then changed to Greenwich Village. Now we refer to that neighborhood as: The West Village, Greenwich Village and The East Village. Alphabet City claims to be part of The East Village but we'd better check with our imagined Commissioner of NIC. It may become The East East Village down the road. I've always wondered why the Avenues were named with letters instead of names similar to Lexington, Madison or Park. I give my clients a tip in order for them to remember the order of 3rd Ave, Lexington Ave, Park Ave, Madison Ave and Fifth Ave; 3 Little Pigs Make 5, east to west, get it? It had occurred to me, Ave ABCD, actually means Assault, Battery, Coma, Death! Not anymore! That neighborhood has come a long way and is one of Manhattan's most vibrant, exciting and amusing places. It's pretty safe now too but still a bit scruffy!

If I were the Commissioner, I'd choose names that reflect what's going on now, not what went on in the past. For example, Midtown would be Midcity, uptown and downtown signs would be changed to Downcity and Upcity, because they are no longer towns. We're a city! But, nostalgia kicks in and people want to cling to the past, even in a City that constantly

lurches to the future. Greenwich Village is not a village so it should be known as Greenwich, period! The Lower East Side aka LES should be China-les; the Chinese have virtually taken over the most of the neighborhood. Little Italy needs to be renamed Tiny Italy, or Tintaly, with three blocks of restaurants and souvenir shops, many are currently owned by Chinese shopkeepers. Do Italians own “Happy Family” and “Lucky Gift” or are they owned by Chinese? Guess! One very cleaver Chinese storeowner named his store in Little Italy, Tony’s Gift Shop. It’s a dead giveaway because all the employees are Chinese! He should hire Italians but they don’t want to work for Chinese besides there’s a measure of distrust and resentment on both sides. Little Italy’s inhabitants are less than 10% Italian.

Battery Park City is another example of a neighborhood whose is a vestige from the past. The only batteries you’ll find there are Duracell and Eveready because the “batteries” of cannons are long gone except recollections of a distant past where people were assaulted and “battered” aka assault and battery. Batteries of cannons were the name anointed by Ben Franklin.

How about Times Square? That used to be Longacre Square before Adolf Ochs, publisher of The New York Times back in 1904 convinced his pal August Belmont, the man who built and owned our first subway back then, to name the 42nd Street station, Times Square instead. Hey, Herald Square, aka Bowtie Square, due to the shape of that “square” was named after a newspaper too, a competitor of The New York Times, fair and “square” but Times Square ain’t

square it's more like a triangle so I guess it was fair and "triangle." Or since it was a subway stop perhaps "fare and triangle" makes more cents, as in 5 cents was the fare.

Williamsburg, I'd change to Barburg for obvious reasons, on second thought, maybe Condoburg or Condomburg would be even better. How about Barcondocondumville? Coney Island would become Coney Peninsula because that's what it is now, a peninsula. Turtle Bay should be changed to No Turtle Bay, Spanish Harlem to East Harlem, Greenpoint to Warsawpoint, still a bit of the old Polish neighborhood remains, and finally Kips Bay should be renamed The Middle East because that's actually where it is, in between The Upper Eastside and The Lower Eastside.

No one knows exactly how many neighborhoods exist in New York City as boundaries are constantly changing. Ethnically there's a constant ebb and flow and borders are, in many cases, ill defined. But, we do know that wherever New Yorkers call home, it's their neighborhood and they all contribute to making our City the most diverse and fascinating place I know of. Got any names you'd like to offer? Call 311 and ask for the Commissioner of NIC. Stay on the line because you're bound to get a busy signal or "Please hold while I serve another caller" or you'll hear the ubiquitous, "I'm either on the phone or away from my desk."

For those born after 1995, a busy signal is a repeating beep sound that indicates that the phone number that you have "dialed" is in use and the person you have called does not have an automated answering device,

a digital retrieval system, call waiting, call forwarding, voice mail or an alternative party to accept your call. But keep trying. In truth they're either helping a client or discussing last night's Yankee game. Perhaps their phones should be placed in the bathrooms along with their desks. That way a lot more work would get done. Ya think? Eh, who knows? You just can't take this stuff too seriously.

Wait! Even tho' the Sign Says "WALK"!

While living on West 60th Street, just off of 9th Avenue, I had walked through the intersection of 59th Street and 9th Avenue hundreds of times.

This intersection is not typical because Ninth Avenue traffic flows one way southbound or motorists can turn right at 59th Street. There is no street east (left) of 9th Avenue at 59th Street because a co-op complex occupies the ground, a park, where 59th Street east of 9th Ave would have been.

I had noticed a disturbing problem regarding the synchronization of the traffic lights and the walk and don't walk signs at 59th Street and 9th Avenue.

Essentially, if a pedestrian crosses 59th Street and the traffic light is green permitting vehicles on Ninth Avenue to proceed, drivers can choose to make a right turn onto 59th Street. That's very hazardous for pedestrians who are crossing 59th Street. At such times the walk/don't walk sign should be in the "Don't Walk" mode. But, it wasn't synched and the "Don't Walk" mode was set when it should have been in "Walk" mode, when all traffic was halted at a red light. Obviously, this was a very dangerous situation.

A major hospital is located on 59th Street one block west of 9th Ave and The John Jay College of Criminal Justice as well as numerous elementary, middle and a high school too. As a result, there are lots of children, college students, doctors and nurses, professors as well as elderly people who visit people who are being hospitalized or those who are trekking to their doctor's offices. There are many who slowly lumber to the hospital for treatment, less able street crossers, as we all know. And, of course, there are hoards of

others, many with young children in strollers, and last but not least, dog walkers such as I. What to do? Hum?

I called 311, the phone number established by Mayor Bloomberg to report complaints regarding graffiti, items of interest or importance such as the out of synch walk and don't walk signs on 59th and 9th.

I was referred to the DOT, Department of Transportation and began a seven-month journey punctuated with tenacity, patience, frustration and a diehard commitment to provide a necessary benefit for dogs and of course fellow citizens too. After numerous letters, written confirmations, case numbers, reference numbers and phone calls to and from the DOT I received a letter stating, "The problem had been resolved." That was pure fiction! Nothing had changed. Another dose of tenacity was needed. It really pissed me off. I was more determined then ever to see this through.

How could they have sent me a letter that the problem was resolved when it wasn't? Why seven months? How many people had crossed that intersection, in harm's way, before the DOT finally took care of it? How many people were "near hits" due to the inexcusable inaction of the DOT? Do you want to kill a person? Call the DOT and tell them to change an incorrectly synchronized traffic light and in about seven months, they might, if you stay on their ass while sticking to it. Unbelievable! Eventually, it was fixed and every time I pass by I smirk and take pride that in that little corner of the world, I made a difference.

Running a City like this must be a nightmare. The point is this: because some citizens do something, say something and are pro-active we have a better chance of making New York City better and safer.

Always look both ways, and when the sign reads "WALK" because you never know who, if anyone, including the City is looking out for you! People often cross streets without looking because they rely on the accuracy of mechanical devices that may just provide information that could kill them. Why? People install them, people who "work" for the DOT. I must admit however there are nearly 12,000 traffic signals in New York City and the overwhelming number of them work just fine but don't be the one who crosses the street without looking, you never know!

One mistake . . . and you're "road pizza", and that's not the kind of pizza New York City is famous for!!

Shop Smart!

You can purchase just about anything in New York City. Those who sell merchandise or provide services such as retailers, wholesalers, street hawkers, newsstand clerks, artisans, crafters, scammers, food vendors and all the rest provide limitless choices. "Caveat Emptor" buyers beware! In New York City you are, to some, prey, with open season here, where the unscrupulous ply their trade, side by side with the righteous.

You can get "screwed" "rooked" "ripped off" "taken" "snagged" "tagged" "flipped" "gipped" or "beaten down" in a heartbeat. How would you know? How can you find out?

As Sy Syms, the late founder of a defunct retail clothing chain, chanted its mantra, "An educated consumer is our best customer." You have got to do your homework or you'll find out the hard way. "The Big Apple" can be rotten to the core. Here's how to ensure that you're getting your money's worth and avoid being cheated.

Some vendors of electronics such as video, audio and photo equipment, binoculars, iPods and similar items perceive people as targets for "highway robbery schemes." So, "you better shop around!" Independent stores located in tourist areas such as Times Square have a reputation for being "tourist traps." Many of my clients have purchased cameras sold at approximately 40% less than the going price in Times Square at B & H Photo located at 34th Street and 9th Avenue, which is closed on Saturdays. P. T. Barnum, a New Yorker of circus fame, built his emporium and circus business on the mantra, "There is a sucker

born every minute.” There are exceptions, be one! Sometimes, there are two or even three born every minute! In Times Square they swarm like flies!

Be aware of the old “bait and switch” scam. That’s the oldest “trick in the book” used by unscrupulous retailers who display cameras, computers and the like in brightly lit store windows at incredibly low prices to lure you in. Once you express your interest to a sales clerk in a specific item with an unbelievably low price that you saw in their window, they tend to “push” a “similar” item extolling its superior benefits and espouse the flaws or defects of the item featured in their window. It’s called “bait and switch”.

I have spoken to many visitors who have lamented their disappointment by purchasing the right item at the wrong price or vice versa. Don’t be impressed by the “Licensed by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs” sign, displayed in their windows. This has no more value than the Parent’s Magazine Seal of Approval, or the Better Business Bureau sticker either! It’s worthless and provides no protection whatsoever. Don’t even go there, the DCA is asleep except on payday! Try Consumer Reports, friend’s recommendations and your brain. Tripadvisor is a good source too; it’s all about what customers have written. That should work follow your instincts and use your brain!

The Department of Consumer Affairs is mandated to regulate sightseeing guides too. I have never seen or heard of an unlicensed guide getting snagged by a City official nor have I ever been asked to whip out my license. I’ve written letters to the Mayor that we, licensed City of New York guides, have demonstrated

our competency as far as knowing a minimal amount of information needed to get a passing grade giving us the privilege of paying the annual \$50 fee for the license. They allow out of town guides and unlicensed locals to take work away from licensed guides in front of their noses. Those who are supposed to enforce the laws do not and who might that be? Hum? The cops don't know this, I've even asked a few, huh?

Let's allow cops from elsewhere, who are not licensed in New York City to make "collars" here too. hire out The City allows unlicensed out of town guides to work here so why not firemen, police and others too? Sure, when hair grows on my palm!

Rise Up! The City employees couldn't care less if you are "hustled" or scammed. Who's paying them to not protect licensed New York City sightseeing guides and tourists? Good question! If you have a problem, sure, run down to 42 Broadway, fifth floor, and complain to a DCA employee! Whether they're awake, have a pulse or see if their eyes are open.

Fill out some forms and get on the plane, train, bus or car back home, minus the \$750 that you paid for a \$250 camera or money for a tour with an unlicensed guide who doesn't know The Chrysler Building from The Empire State. Adios amigos! Your fault! It's too bad but you should have known better! Honestly, there are exceptions at the DCA but don't waste your time. As George W. Bush said, "Fool me once shame on me! Fool me twice, ah ah shame on a a a duh me?! He should be our next commissioner! "Scammers Wanted Dead or Alive" Vote for Dubbyah (W)! "Bring 'it on! Eehaa!" Wanted Dead of Alive! Eh, he's a nice guy, I have absolutely nothing against W, really!

Souvenirs! That's another story that requires a little common sense before you plunge. Canal Street is the best place to buy "I Love NY" T Shirts, hats, knock off bags and watches, all made in, you guessed it, downtown Ka-Ching, Asia

Be careful about buying those high-end knock-offs because that's illegal and they're made by young children who work long hours for pennies. You could get arrested for buying Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Channel bags or Rolex watches. I've seen it happen! The NYPD have their hands in the pockets of some of these luxury brand companies who are determined to "protect" their brands. I've heard from a very reliable source. Very! Currently, The City Council is considering passage of a law that would impose up to one year in prison and a one thousand dollar fine for buying such "swag." The prison sentence doesn't bother me but the \$1,000 fine has me shakin'! Shakin'! A year in prison! They're out of their minds!

If you are suckered into a basement or a sequestered room behind a store or even a van, with blackened windows parked on a side street, by rouge vendors, most often Asian, to buy "knock-offs" then you are taking a big risk!

I know of an experience when police arrested several tourists, women from Belgium. They spent the night in jail, got into a whole bunch of trouble, not to mention a ruined vacation. Canal Street, sure, go for the bargains, but be careful, that you are taking a big chance on buying the knockoffs! Besides, if you love that stuff so much, buy the real deal! You only have to pay for it once.

Recently I walked into a Coach store in Columbus Circle and saw a gorgeous leather attaché case for my computer. It was priced at \$368. I told the saleswoman if she could knock off 25%, I'd buy it. She knocked off \$100, 27%! Just ask! What have you got to loose?

Another example: I provided a tour for fourteen teenage girls from Greenville, SC and during our tour we were walking around Times Square when one of them asked where they could buy a real New York hotdog on the street. I took them over to the nearest vendor and asked him,

"How much is it going to cost all these young ladies for a 'dog?"

"Three dollars each." he replied.

"Look buster, I'm a New Yorker, got it? We ain't payin' three bucks. Try again."

"Okay, two fifty."

"Your getting close my friend."

"Okay two"

"Okay ladies line up."

The point is this . . . ask!

Barter with vendors on Canal Street. You usually can save money. Besides, what's the harm of trying? Do everything you can to appear and speak like a New "Yawka". If they perceive you as a tourist, then your chance of cutting deals gets a lot slimmer. "They see you coming!" I've seen this in action and my intervention has resulted in big savings for many of my guests. Vendors know when you're a New Yorker. They get it, most of the time. Practice saying "cauffee" and "becauuze"! Tawk, the tawk and wawk the wawk.

They're the biggest scam artists on the planet in the opinion of some green-eyed newbies.

Macy's is an excellent place to make a purchase. The quality is good, the selection is huge and the world's largest store has built its reputation by offering their customers very good value. If you get screwed there you're deaf, dumb and or blind. Go to your room! Try to "catch" Saks, between 49th and 50th Streets on 5th Avenue, when they are running a major sale. The staff is very predatory because "they work on commission" only, period.

If you have tons of money, don't like money or just love to get rid of it than Fifth Ave north of 46th Street, Madison Avenue, New York City's Rodeo Drive, Soho, The West Village and The Meatpacking District is the place for you! Was Rodeo Drive, named to drive money from your wallets as if you were at a rodeo, eehhaa! All the prestige brands have set up shop there, the quality is "high-end" and so are the prices, insane. So, if paying top prices is not a factor for you then bring a fat wallet to Madison Avenue loaded with plenty of plastic and you'll go home feeling a lot lighter. Talk to your money, and say "Bye bye!"

Buying books on the street can be a great bargain. The best streets to buy books are Broadway, on the Westside of the street, from 72nd Street up to and past Fairway toward 80th Street and on Sixth Avenue just south of where a Barnes & Noble once stood, south of 8th Street in "The Village." Street vendors sell hard cover best sellers for much less than Barnes & Noble and there's no tax either! Street vendors will tell you it's included in the price. Sure it is, they're

knocking off 8.875% and mailing their checks to Albany, sure! Do we care? Nah!

The best book street vendor is Charley whose shop is on the sidewalk in front of a liquor store on Columbus Avenue between 67-66th Street eastside of the block. He's been there for decade with about six huge tables. there must be thousands of books, great deals, old Playboy magazines, art books, classics, you name it. He has an old van with Jersey plates. He always has a hat and a cigar clenched between his teeth and a folding chair. At night he covers his inventory with tarps straps down the tarps and heads back to Jersey. Nice guy, a real fixture undoubtedly in his late 60's.

Watches: Take 57th Street, where Tourneau is located, and subtract 10 and that equals 47th Street and the discounts, in some cases, are huge. But, if you buy used merchandise, be very careful. Get the factory and warranty documents if you're purchasing a watch that is nearly new. Compare the serial number on the watch with the serial number on the guarantee certificate. You could save 50% or more on a slightly used watch compared with the retail price for a new one. Watches are like used cars, their value drops like a rock. "Just be smart!" Pretend you're a New Yorker! Shop around; put together some comparative prices. Don't flaunt your love for any item. Play the game, such as: "I have another one that's very similar to this." "It seems just a little too big." "It's a bit over my price range."

Diamond Jewelry: The Gemological Institute has created a classification system that grades diamonds as to weight, color, flaws, clarity, table (depth), etc. If you are seeking a specific size and type of diamond

then go to 47th Street between 5th and 6th Avenue and visit a number of vendors. Bargain with them because the first price is not the “last price” as in “give me your last price first” which is an old Jewish bartering expression. There’s a big difference between the first price and the last price, your money! It’s the culture. Let them know that you’re shopping around. If you return, let them know that you are ready to buy but you’re still somewhat apart in price. You like “the goods” but the price is a bit over my budget, thinking or head.

Ask, “Do you want to do business right now?” That’s a question diamond vendors will generally ask you! Try to take control of the conversation; it’s the way to go. They’ll come down, be patient. If you come back they will assume that you’ve shopped around and coming back is a sure sign that you haven’t found anything better at a price that closed the deal. Try to inject the element of competition meaning, there are other “goods” out there you’re considering. Don’t seem anxious, play poker! Use your wife or significant other and apply the “good cop bad cop scenario.” She’s anxious and you’re not. Say things like, “What do you need it for?” “Let’s call good ol’ Harry (the jeweler) when we get home. He’s been good to us.”

Never accept the first price offered in an establishment that can cut the price. Never make your buying decision in the first store you enter if you are buying an expensive item, especially a “blind” item like diamonds. Watch out for shills. That’s someone who works for the vendor, stands on your side of the counter, pretends to be a customer who praises the merchant as an honest and fair trader.

Follow your instincts. "If it walks like a duck . . ." then that's what it is so, get the hell out of there. Most often, if a buyer gets screwed it's just as much their fault as the vendor's. "It takes two to tango." Do your homework before you buy and remember, these merchants are more anxious to make the sale than you are to buy. You can walk around all day and buy nothing. Your life doesn't depend on spending your money.

The point is, find the bottom price or a price you are willing to pay once you've done your homework. Respect their need to make a profit. Generally, you can sense when their price has hit bottom and if your homework reveals that the comparisons you've made have convinced you that you've gotten a good deal then make the right decision. After your due diligence you should be able to sense the right deal.

If you are seeking an expensive diamond then ask for the gemological certificate and get some comparison prices. If they're honest, why shouldn't they accommodate your request? If not, "bye-buy"! Then, use that information as a tool to make comparisons up and down the street. Remember, you're not buying insulin. You can always live without a piece of jewelry especially if you're unsure about the article or price. Remember, if you don't buy, you're stuck with your money and then you've lost nothing.

Crime, Way Down and “How”!

Any city, large or small, thrives, shrivels or dies, based on its crime rate. All other things being equal, even a city with a well-educated populace, good affordable housing, an effective school system, adequate and available medical care, a competent government, clean streets, nearly void of street trash, etc. will be doomed if the crime rate is off the charts. If a city's tax base flees in large numbers and public and private investment dives into an abyss then that city is going south. That results in further reductions of vital services and a continued hastening of a downward spiral that creates a city that goes straight to hell in a hand basket.

In fact, crime was so high in New York City a generation ago that The Statue of Liberty had both hands up and the tablet that she was holding was put under lock and key! ☺

The chasm for New York City occurred between the 1950's to the early 1990's. There was no foreseeable way out. The City was on the verge of bankruptcy in 1975 and was forced to turn to Washington, D.C. for help; loan guarantees of Municipal Assistance Corporation bonds, not hard cash. Albany, the seat of our state government, didn't love us either, even though New York City is the #1 cash cow for the State. Taxpaying citizens fled New York City in droves seeking refuge in the suburbs where schools were generally much better, streets were safer, taxes were lower, in many cases, and the quality of life was far superior albeit much less exciting. This mass exodus exceeded over 700,000 people, the largest migration

out of New York City in history except, by percentage, when the Brits invaded New York City in 1776.

"The Bronx is Burning," "Fort Apache," The Taking of Pelham 123," are just a few of the movies that depicted this City's downfall. The Con Ed Riots, The Son of Sam, murderer of innocent young couples randomly, terrorized the City, putting a grip on New York City that was already under siege by street thugs and criminal elements. Failing schools, illegal drugs ruled, street crime soared and the City's coffers ran dry. These and other horrors of daily "life" left people trapped in an urban environment that was living on the edge, a cesspool of squalor, crime, corruption, madness and mayhem.

The Con Ed Riots, the night of the most arrests in the history of New York City exemplified a City gone wild as thousands of marauding desperados seized the "opportunity" as an invitation to loot, plunder, burn neighborhoods, destroy businesses and unleash their frustrations that had been climbing for many years. Pent up anger and resentment spilled over into a ferocious frenzy especially in The Bronx, parts of Brooklyn and Harlem most of all. New designer drugs, made "on the cheap" were given to adolescent drug sales force necessitated by their insatiable appetite for their daily drug "fix".

Street gangs roamed, street gangs ruled. They used the subway to transport themselves to the best neighborhoods pillaging and targeting wealthy citizens who were not to be found on the streets in their own neighborhoods.

Places that had previously attracted the wealthiest and taxpaying solid citizens on the planet could not

have been lured back, even if their apartments were free for the asking.

Streets were strewn with massive piles of trash. Abandoned cars remained on the streets for months providing housing for rats and vermin. Most of these “car-cases” were shells, without wheels, or seats, missing fenders and various parts that thieves removed and sold to buy “junk” “horse” and “H” the lexicons for heroin.

It was a vicious cycle, a daily bill of fare, defining an urban landscape that would not be tolerated today. Nowadays, we have mustered the tools to prevent this. We were, a City out of control, without any prospects for the future.

Discipline was a “joke” in the public schools. Kids did just about whatever they wanted. Teachers and administrators had their hands tied by mandates restricting the means to impose discipline resulting in diminished expectations; plunging results and morale plunged to the lowest levels in memory. Most children in ghetto neighborhoods learned little or nothing. Only a precious few had the good fortune of receiving a decent education in the dwindling number of good neighborhoods, ones with balanced, stable homes, where good parenting was the norm.

Massive layoffs, by the City administration, were implemented across the board. Services diminished to appalling levels, firehouses were shut down, education, sanitation, police, health and hospital, public assistance, referred to as “welfare” back then were all terribly underfunded, mismanaged and understaffed. Our Transportation infrastructure was a disaster. Potholes were ignored, graffiti was

everywhere, public trashcans were overflowing, and parks were unsafe and poorly maintained and in deplorable condition. Much of the City was a no man's land. Sanitation Department agents ticketed storeowners for littered storefronts and sidewalks. The agents were under pressure to raise desperately needed cash. Perhaps a quota was imposed to ticket the City to death to get it back to fiscal health. It was clearly a scam of desperation created by Mayor Abe Beame who urgently needed to raise revenue in a City starved for cash. I had experienced this personally as a tax paying, storeowner on West 23rd Street who was providing employment for some hard working New Yorkers. I went nuts time and again when I was issued summonses by Department of Sanitation agents many times who saw a piece of paper on the sidewalk in front of my store after I had just swept the sidewalk! It truly was a City on the verge of complete collapse, pure and simple.

The establishment of "Big MAC" was the significant breakthrough that had created the solution. The Municipal Assistance Corporation, under the guidance of Felix Royhaton, with Federal guarantees in place sold billions of dollars of bonds providing urgently needed funding for the City to operate, improve its credit rating and enabling the process of rebuilding the future of New York City to go forward. President Ford, who had refused to support the federal loan guarantees, as expressed by the Daily News headline, FORD TO CITY, DROP DEAD, finally "got it". New York City was the best "investment" the Feds could make because if this City went "belly up" then other municipalities throughout the country

would have tanked too. The federal government provided guarantees, not money. The United States without a solvent New York City! That's just not possible.

The 1980's were a major disaster. Crack and crank were both big hits on the illegal drug-shopping hit parade. In the late 80's and early 90's Mayor "Do Something Dave" Dinkins finally did something about crime but it was too little too late. His administration was beyond rescue. Although he had hired 5,000 additional cops, due to his stalling and indecisive nature and he laid the red carpet for Rudy to take the reins. It was not possible to get all those cops trained and on the streets before his run for a second term as mayor. Deservingly so, he has the singular distinction of being the first African American mayor of New York City and the only mayor of a major American city to lose his bid for re-election. Good job, dapper Dave! Nice threads man, nice tennis game. Not my favorite mayor, that's for sure!

The Crown Heights Riots exploded and became a violent and horrid stain on the City. As Dinkins stood by idling and turning the other way we experienced a leadership void. No decisive action had been taken. The situation was out of control and a city that's not in control is a recipe for disaster. What the hell was he thinking about?

The riots were triggered by the accidental and tragic death of a young black child who was killed by a young Hasidic Jewish man, Yankel Rosenbaum, due to his car striking into the child during a parade memorializing Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubvaitcher Rebbe. A black man, Limerick Nelson,

stabbed Mr. Rosenbaun to death at the scene igniting a riot lasting three days. This was the final straw for Mr. Dinkins and it propelled Rudy Giuliani into City Hall. Surprisingly though, without Staten Island, having the largest Italian-American population of any county in The United States, percentage wise, whose overwhelming number of votes were cast for Giuliani then he would not have succeeded in defeating Dinkins. With all that was going on it took Staten Island to save New York City from an administration that was hopelessly incompetent. I can't imagine what life would have been like here under another four years of the Dinkins administration. Smile Dave, your neighborhood is safe now! He did the best he could. Imagine, without Staten Island, "the forgotten borough" Giuliani would have lost and perhaps never run for mayor again. This renaissance, the one that New York City has been experiencing began in 1993 and without Giuliani it never would have happened. New Yorkers owe Staten Island a huge debt of gratitude and New Yorkers don't even know it. That's why I love Staten Island!

On January 1st 1993 Rudy took over the reins at City Hall. He began his administration by focusing on crime reduction. His administration took back the City back from criminal elements, the street punks and the mafia who controlled unions, sanitation, construction, trucking and much more. He launched this City into a new era, a renaissance that continues to this day!

William Bratton, the former Police Chief in Boston, a vigorous advocate of an innovative new policing concept featured in The Atlantic Monthly, on March

1982, "Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities" by Catherine M. Coles and George Kelling provided the framework of a new anti-crime strategy.

The key elements of the crime initiative were these:

"Community policing" a more direct approach, closer and more effective communication, applied concern that compelled the police to change their habitual routine of cruising in cars. More police were assigned to foot patrol, projecting themselves as caring citizens, connectors and protectors in their respective communities. They learned what was going on from the locals, where the trouble was and who the culprits were. They got to know the residents and they experienced the communities "up close and personal." Over time, they had earned the trust and respect of their own communities and used all the valuable information they could muster to target crime in a way that had never been done before on such a large scale. It was brilliant, efficient and effective. Their assets were applied in the most effective way, making the difference and uplifting the City.

The police focused on "quality of life" crimes such as; public urinating, smoking and selling marijuana in the streets; alcohol consumption in public, jumping over the subway turnstiles, 170,000 incidences per day, aggressive panhandling, loitering, "squeegee boys" hostile men and boys who wiped car windshields with dirty rags for money, solicitation of prostitution on the street, etc.

Police Commissioner Bratton converted numerous buses into portable police stations and streamlined

the paper work process for arrests as well. Approximately one-third of those who were arrested, for quality of life crimes were either carrying illegal weapons, illegal drugs or were wanted for “priors.” They were removed from the streets and they paid the price. Truly, the City initiated “The Tipping Point” as expressed in Malcolm Gladwell’s book bearing that title.

Governor Pataki signed legislation that stiffened sentencing laws for convicted criminals and all but eliminated the “suspended sentence first offense” refrain that resulted in the incarceration of thousands of criminals the got them off the streets providing further dramatic reductions in crime. Those criminals, removed from the streets, sent a message to their ilk that they would be next. We had suddenly become a City that just wasn’t going to take it anymore. The chant, “You do the crime, you do the time” replaced the mantra “first offense, suspended sentence.”

Another factor that complimented these efforts was the legalization of abortion in The United States in 1973 (Roe v. Wade) although in no way was that the intent of the court’s decision. By the early 1990’s many children, who would have been born, many from impoverished and incompetent parents in blighted urban ghettos, never experienced the breath of life. Certainly, Roe v. Wade was not decided on the basis of reducing crime however, there are statistics that confirm that this ancillary effect of the Supreme Court’s decision was a sidecar and remains an incessantly controversial issue.

Another leg of the strategy was the improvement of the streetscapes, vitally important for an aggressive and effective anti-crime initiative.

If you enter a city riddled with graffiti, marred by empty beer, malt liquor, vodka bottles, littered with trash, and an abundance of vacant stores and abandoned cars, large unleashed dogs roaming the streets, hookers plying their trade conveying the impression that no one cares and no one was watching and that's a recipe for disaster.

However, on the other hand, if you find yourself in a city that is clean, has no graffiti, no "broken windows" an absence of unbundled piles of trash and a well maintained environment with freshly planted flowers, trees and potted plants, tables and chairs placed in numerous streets intended to reduce vehicular traffic and increase space for foot traffic and quality of life, relaxation, etc. then the right message is received. The message is this: Someone cares and is watching and this city is in control not the lawless elements! All of the above provides a major deterrence to criminal activity according to Keller and Coles.

Take a look at the images of New York City in the 1960's '70's and '80's and have a look today. The difference is huge. The level of voluntary compliance and civic pride in the City has soared and the crime rate has plunged to the City's lowest levels in history.

It is unfortunate that more cities throughout the world have not adopted these policing strategies. With the crime reduction in New York City by over 75% due to the efforts of Mayor Giuliani, Mayor Bloomberg, DeBlazio, Police Commissioners Bratton

and Kelly, the NYPD as well as the body politic, New York City has enjoyed a spectacular renaissance, one that hopefully will continue for many years to come.

One hopes when New York City falls on difficult economic times, such as we experienced again in 2009, our leaders will not permit a backslide by attempting to balance state and city budgets by slashing funding for those strategies that have gotten us out of that mess a generation ago. Investing in crime reduction is a self-liquidating investment. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Crime robs us all and that includes the coffers of our vital government agencies.

Sure, you can save money today by slashing budgets. However, when the tax base flees, businesses close, unemployment rises, some people become desperate and do stupid things that will, in the long run, cost us much more blood and treasure. The lessons of the past are clear.

Investing in the City is the path to prosperity and the failure to "fix broken windows" leads to the inevitable failure of urban life. Let's hope that history doesn't repeat itself and that our governments, our courage and will to invest has provided the means to propel New York City to continue moving forward reaching greater even more impressive quality of life standards raising our living standards, productivity and love for each other and our great City.

Food Shopping, Manhattan-style

Many times people who do not live here have asked me a peculiar question: "How do you go food shopping in New York City?"

It never occurred to me that would evoke so much curiosity. What's so strange or unusual about buying food for your pantry in New York City? After some reflection, I realized that we do not buy our groceries like most people who live elsewhere.

Typically, people from other locales drive their cars to big box supermarkets to buy enough food and household needs to last a week or so. That's just not possible in Manhattan unless you have a car and a place to put all your provisions. When you leave the supermarket you'll need to have four pairs of arms to load and unload your bounty. Modern day food carts are frequently equipped with brakes with locking wheels when the cart is beyond close proximity to the supermarket. Even if you drove to your local supermarket you would not be able to wheel your goods to your car due to those self-locking cartwheels.

The risk of putting your vehicle in front of your home in New York City, typically a building that is some distance from a parking lot, may cost you a parking ticket, \$115, and the combined cost of your food bill together with that parking ticket will make you wish you had eaten out more often, as some fortunate New Yorkers do. You would have wished you had eaten most of your bounty on your way home saving you the trouble of figuring out how to carry it all! Hey, with 24,000 restaurants in this town many folks apparently still can afford to eat out!

New Yorkers limit what they buy to all that they can carry. Therefore, New Yorkers shop for food almost on a daily basis. Buying all your weekly necessities at once is out of the question for most people. Rather, most New Yorkers often bring home what is needed until tomorrow plus staples such as milk, coffee, salad, bread, ketchup, eggs, etc. It's about "fill-ins" on a day-to-day basis. As a result of logistics, I see young people using granny wagons; those foldable steel caged wheelies to move their food from the market to their door. I have one but I hate using it because it makes me appear older than I am. I feel that it's an assault on my effort to guise my age. Honestly, it's time for me to just get over it.

Often one food store doesn't "carry" everything needed or one store or another has better pricing or selections than the store that sells a favorite brand of whatever.

My neighborhood, 97th Street off Columbus Avenue provides many choices. For example, if I choose to buy my daily needs and go south to 96th Street I'd pay more, a lot more. For example, a one-liter bottle of Canada Dry Club Soda is priced at \$1.69 on 96th Street whereas; on 100th Street a two-liter bottle costs \$1.25. That's a 63% difference in price!

Prices vary quite a bit from neighborhood to neighborhood. These disparities are based on retail rental rates, competitive pressures, the diligence of shoppers comparing prices, the distance from their homes and the motivation to walk a few blocks out of their way to save some money. Retailers perceive what they can get for each item and charge the highest price people are willing to pay without

suffering a significant loss in business. As with running any business isn't that what they are supposed to do? Most New Yorkers will not run around their neighborhood buying watermelon in one store and club soda in another. That strategy has increased since the great recession of 2009, which, as I understand, is still with us, for many, in 2018.

I have become much more conscious of food prices since 2000 and have saved a bundle. Don't believe the statistics that flow out of Washington regarding inflation. All you have to do is your own price check and gasp at the prices that you're paying now compared with what you were paying a few years ago. Washington tosses out more bullshit than a Texas rodeo.

Whole Foods, had been terrific food merchandisers, with new stores opening throughout the City, had a huge following. Their prepared foods are pretty good, the quality and selection of their products is unbeatable. But, their organic buzzword eliminates such items as Oriole cookies, Heinz Ketchup and Hellman's Mayonnaise. Whole Foods is organic and they're purveyors of "green" minded food. Their wares are displayed very impressively and are thoroughly organized. They have the longest lines and the fastest check out system I've ever seen. It's truly amazing how fast they get people out of there. Express lines flow in lightening speed, most often; aided by staffers who direct shoppers to the next available register together with a spectacularly high tech system that generates order and efficiency. Medium size boiled and peeled shrimp are about \$17.99 a pound whereas on Canal Street they're \$5.99

a pound, but once frozen. I generally buy shrimp, if I have the urge, only when I happen to be in the Canal Street area. You can also get three live lobsters there for about \$21.00. Lobsters hate Canal Street. They think they're worth more than that! Now that Amazon has taken over the prices keep dropping, the lines move even more quickly and the entire operation seems to be running more smoothly. The delivery end of the business is on the rise and Amazon has integrated their Internet business with their presence on the ground. I love Amazon!

Big Box stores have just started invading Manhattan. What took so long? Perhaps it's zoning laws, the high cost of space and the recognition that there's not enough parking to enable the high volume of customers who need to park. Without a car, how much can a Manhattanite carry from store to their home? Perhaps that is what has prevented the building of big box stores in Manhattan in the past.

The average purchase per shopper, per trip, is unlikely to meet that type of retailer's business model, therefore, big box stores exist in the outer boroughs where real estate is far less costly, with ample sized parking lots that take up vast amounts of space. Costco has a few stores, in Brooklyn and Queens, not too far from Manhattan. They opened one in East Harlem a few years ago, east of Pleasant Ave. It's about four long blocks from the Lexington subway line. Word is that their sales are reaching surprising proportions and I'm a bit shocked! I thought, who's going to shop there? People from out of Manhattan will not drive here because they've got the same stuff in the outer boroughs and Manhattanites are nearly

90% carless, on a per family basis, the lowest percentage of car ownership of any county in The United States. Costco is far from stupid and they must have done their homework. Apparently, there are enough folks who live in Manhattan with cars that are attracted to what they have to offer. There are also plenty of gypsy cars waiting for customers who need a lift with their goods back home.

The prices at the big box stores are terrific, the quality is up there and the selection is quite good. However, unless you need to buy huge bulk quantities of spaghetti or corn chips, etc. then this is not the place for you. Besides, where is the average Manhattan resident going to put all this stuff? The bathtub or terrace, if you have either one it may work. Those are the only places I know of to stash all your stuff unless you park your bootie all over your apartment. My wife stows our backup tissues, coffee capsules, bottled water, paper towels, etc. under our bed.

Fifth Avenue, Tribeca, Park Avenue, West End Avenue, older uptown prewar buildings, Central Park West and Sutton Place residents have extra space, but they also have lots of money therefore, Costco is not their likely shopping choice. Next time I'm seated next to an odorous person on a bus or subway I'll just suspect that they have food and cleaning products stored in their tub. I'll be kind and keep my mouth shut, change my seat, or stand near a woman who's overdosed with cheap perfume that was probably purchased at a big box store, right here in Manhattan. In most cases those folks who live in cavernous apartments don't do their own food shopping

anyway. They hire their “help” to do that for them. Chances are they don’t have much food at home. That’s what restaurants are for! No doubt, restaurant owners send their employees to Costco to stock up their shelves, eh!

I have taken the subway, two trains, then got on a bus, walked about five blocks, a one-hour trip to get to Costco in Queens. Getting back is a different story. When I exit the store, with my wagon filled to the brim, I look around for an old TLC (taxi and limousine commission) “black car” for hire, taxi or van and get a ride back to Manhattan for about \$20. The cost of the ride, factored into the savings is well worthwhile and the Latino music in the car is a big plus. Red tassels swing and sway around the perimeter of the front and rear windshields. I also love the little toy dog with its head swinging and swaying as we move along dodging and dipping into the potholes. I love doing this. It’s so New York City!

Fresh Direct, an on-line grocery purveyor provides a terrific service. Set up your account online, enter your order on their website and it’s delivered directly to your apartment in a refrigerated truck within your two-hour requested time frame and delivered in sealed corrugated boxes. Their slogan is “Only Our Customers Are Spoiled.” This service is perfect for hungry New Yorkers who love delivery and the convenience. That’s how we live, “delivery”! You can get anything delivered in New York City, anything, anytime!

For me, one of the best “games in town” is Associated Supermarket on West 100th Street. If you spend over thirty bucks you can have your order delivered with

you as you leave the store, in a wheeled cart pushed directly to your front door at no charge by a happy young lad who appreciates your \$5 tip more than you can image. The prices are terrific because at 100th Street, the only way to survive, for many of the nearby residents is to grab “ghetto pricing.” When it comes to money nobody is stupid and the poorest among us are no exception.

Many small food stores, particularly in lower income neighborhoods, provide excellent service. Korean delis are consistently the best, offering excellent service, wide selections in clean and well-kept establishments. They use their limited space efficiently and with science. Their stores are spotlessly clean, well stocked and they are open for long hours. Some are open 24/7. There is always fresh hot coffee, excellent “salad bars” both hot and cold. Thousands of New Yorkers take home a pound of food ready to eat daily. The best one in the City, that I’ve seen, was located at 5th Avenue between 18th and 19th Streets in Manhattan. It was an amazing place, textbook perfect and a great attraction for visitors too. What a shame that it’s gone, boo hoo!

Who needs a kitchen? What’s a kitchen? I think my aunt has one. Kitchens exist for people to talk to each other, right; they’re the new living room. Someday kitchens will disappear in New York City, it’s inevitable. Eventually, they’ll become sub-rentals for those who can’t afford to live here; in the kitchen they’ll go. Or perhaps closet space, which makes a lot of sense too. The day will surely come in Manhattan when we’ll be sleeping like horses, standing up!

Gourmet food stores such as Zabar's on the Upper Westside, Citarella and Dean & DeLuca, provide phenomenal selections, great food and more than 100 varieties of cheese. That's more than you'll find in France! Prepared foods and exotics are abundant too, however; you'll pay a hefty price for all the choices and terrific quality. They're worth the price if you're a real gourmet, have lively taste buds and abundant cash. Check out the Food Market at Grand Central Terminal at the Lexington Avenue entrance at 43rd Street. That's the place for those with thick wallets.

And then there's Fairway, the leader in big New York style grocery stores with price, quality and value all up there. It's excellent! There are two on the Upper Westside, one beneath the Westside Highway at 128th Street with ample parking boasting a huge selection. The deli department is first rate and they have a "cold room" with varsity jackets hanging outside the door to keep customers warm as they roam for fresh fish, juices, milk, meats, etc. Now there's a Fairway in Red Hook, Brooklyn too and it enjoys a huge volume of business. The original is on Broadway at 75th Street, you can't miss it. Walk in and experience a place that's unique, "Like no other."

Chelsea Market, a major draw has marshaled the fuel that changed the Meatpacking District, is not only a place to eat but also to hang out, shop, drink, people watch and kill half a day. Check out the fish, sushi and lobster, but don't inhale in that store if you hate the smell of fresh fish. Grab a few shrimp and try eating with your eyes open, after you've paid for them buster! Ahhhh! The Meatpacking District is now a hangout for the "rich and famous" and others who

seek to find mates, matches, fast lane friendship and love. The clubs, bars, rooftop scenes and restaurants have grown like weeds. Perhaps the name of the 'hood should be changed to the Pack Meeting District! We do things differently in New York City and no matter how you slice it; we have choices that are unbeatable. You, unlike your wallet, may fatten up a bit too! Bon Appetite but one bus or subway seat per customer! Consider that New York City consumes the equivalent of a fifteen-mile long freight train filled with food, daily. *Mangia, fres*, munch, dine, chew and swallow New York! Burp!

Why Did New York City Get so Big?

Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore and other major east coast cities have not achieved the size and impressive stature that New York City has by any measure.

Why have they and all other east coast cities had far less impressive growth compared to New York City? Most New Yorkers seldom ask themselves that question. It's amusing to hear people's perception as to why this City has grown so large and so fast, faster than any other city on earth except perhaps artificially made cities such as Dubai. New York City's population of 60,000 in 1800 grew to 3.3 million in 1900. That has never happened before anywhere, ever!

Why did New York City become so indispensable, globally important, unique and significant? It became exceedingly productive, diverse, innovative, powerful and dominating. Why? Generally, it all boils down to three key reasons:

First, the geography, nature made and revised by man. Second, the roots of our culture built and established primarily by the Dutch, the first settlers who arrived with a money mission. Third, the plethora of immigrants, each with their own cultures, skills, ideas and capabilities contributed creating fusion, a "melting pot" for a young growing city, immigrants, whapping diversity! The combination of these factors resulted in gathering many of the best and brightest. Not just the poor and downtrodden creating new lives for themselves who broke their backs and did all the heavy lifting, but in addition, they built a City far greater than the sum of its parts, the result of countless souls over time.

Sure it was the harbor, deep rivers on both sides of Manhattan with a protected harbor surrounded by Staten Island, Brooklyn, Governor's Island and New Jersey forming the Upper and Lower Bays, Buttermilk Channel and The Narrows, an inlet providing additional shelter from harsh ocean currents were all major factors.

At first, most trade was conducted on the East River because The Hudson River, formally The North River, was subjected to much stronger winds from the west posing grave threats to small sailing ships.

The South Street Seaport became the busiest seaport on earth prior to the arrival of larger and heavier steam powered ships. Sailing ships were lined up in the upper bay and waited, at times, waiting an entire day for the opportunity to drop their anchors and unload their cargo, reload and sail away. Fortunately, The East River's depth was sufficient to accommodate the shallow draft of sailing ships and the relative safety of the gentler west winds, due to the ideal placement of Manhattan. Heavier steam powered vessels favored The Hudson River, due to their deeper drafts and the ability to weather more powerful west winds, not buffered by Manhattan's land mass. Ultimately ships were made of iron or steel powered by engines that were capable of withstanding powerful currents unlike the "Tall Ships."

The harbors alone could not ensure this City's spectacular growth. It was The Hudson River that provided New York City with the only "super highway" a wide navigable river that provided access to the interior of the continent. In many ways, that

sealed the deal because New York City is the only city on the east coast that has that incredible advantage. That made it economically attractive for New York City entrepreneurs to gather and transport the treasures, found in the hinterlands far from our harbor safely, far less costly then over land and far quicker and in vastly more abundant volume then any other city on the east coast.

By saving enormous time and money transporting huge amounts of goods, beaver pelts, the commodity of choice, could never have been transported over land in such volume via land compared with The Hudson River, prior to the age of railroads! No other city on or near the east coast could have competed with New York City for that reason alone. As a result, goods from the interior were shipped to New York City via The Hudson River enabling us to become the port of export of beaver pelts, agricultural products, cotton, coal, timber and much more. The cost to transport goods over land was approximately \$30 per ton versus \$5 a ton shipped via the river and the time, until the dawn of railroads, required to move goods on land was up to thirty times longer.

The completion of the 362-mile long Erie Canal completed in 1825, at a cost of over \$7 million, handed New York City still further far reaching access to what was then known as "The West."

Thomas Jefferson thought the scheme was sheer madness. Having purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 at about twice the price to construct the Erie Canal was the greatest real estate deal in American history. Jefferson had failed to recognize the significance of this "big ditch" as the

enormous asset and catalyst for growth that it had become. It gave us reach as far as the nation had spread, at the time, an incredible, daring engineering and commercial achievement. Poor Tom just didn't get it!

You name it; beef from Chicago, fresh water fish from the Great Lakes, coal, wheat and all goods, manufactured, captured, fished, logged, trapped, mined or harvested came directly to New York City and that gave rise to the need for financial, insurance, legal, brokerage and transport experts and infrastructures with a wide variety of skills and labor needed to make it work. Hence, the immigrants poured onto our shores to build, fix, fashion, create and feed a growing city. This was a boom like never before. Conversely, this export business colossus, The Erie Canal, anointed New York City, the logical place for imports too. We had become the busiest commercial port in the nation and the rest is history.

This City didn't blossom; it burst at the seams, exploded, providing new wealth, opportunities, and enormous new challenges that other urban centers never dreamed possible on such a huge scale. The confluence of numerous languages and cultures were thrown together; living and working in a never before pluralistic city was another first for "Gotham" and indeed the world.

The Dutch culture injected the human factor that gave rise to New York City's growth as the primate city on the Atlantic surpassing London in wealth near the end of the 19th century. They came, not for religious freedom as the Pilgrims and Puritans of Boston or the Quakers of Philadelphia, two cities whose primary

objective was not commercial but rather the establishment of peaceful monolithic societies where freedom of religion had been their vital linchpin. The Dutch, came here establishing New Amsterdam, as they had named it, arriving under the sponsorship of the mighty Dutch West India Company. Their goal was to make money, and money they made, enough to provide an annual return of 10% for their investors year after year. This was no Ponzi scheme. It was capitalism at its best, at the time, imperfect yes but plowing forward as never before.

Henry Hudson, an English explorer hired by the Dutch West India Company, ventured up the river that bears his name, on September 12, 1609, in search of "The Northwest Passage" to India and China and he knew that what he had found was something far better than for what he had been hired to discover.

"A thousand ships could find safe harbor here," he had penned in his diary. He laid claim that his discovery of the harbor and the river was the best example of being off the beaten path but on the right track.

As he continued to sail up the river that bears his name, he noticed that the water continued to remain salty, ocean water, and that the depth of the river continued to maintain its depth as well. He was certain that at every next left turn, around a bluff or beyond the next mountain, the Pacific Ocean would reveal itself.

The Dutch have always been a liberal and diverse culture, imperfect at times, but nevertheless a driving force never losing sight of their mission. They

welcomed those seeking refuge, a home, and an escape from oppression, poverty, despotism and tyranny. The Dutch were an inspiring source of action and resolve playing the major role, spearheading Europe's leap out of the Dark Ages and into the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. They contributed to the annihilation of many dogmatic religious beliefs, staid and superstitious, ideas that they had discarded as antithetical to their values and beliefs that were deeply imbedded in their psyche. They fervently tossed out the driving forces thwarting scientific advancement, research and discoveries for over 1,500 years. They were not impassioned attendees of churches, as many other European cultures, most notably those from the southern regions of Europe supporting church beliefs and dogma as the centerpiece of their lives and existence.

It took the Dutch thirty years to build their first church in New Amsterdam! The concepts of liberalism, diversity, reason, innovation, pluralism, entrepreneurial drive and spirit together with their pioneering temperament, crafty, entrepreneurial and inventive ways still remain the cornerstone of New York City's culture.

The Dutch loved to make money, but that was not all. They loved to play hard too. They were liberal, we still are, diverse, we still are, entrepreneurial, we still are and we, as a culture, do not run to church on Sundays in droves either, although in a city as diverse as this there are large sectors of our society that cling to a path of devout observance of their religious beliefs. The encouragement of our diversity,

entrepreneurial spirit and liberalism is certainly not at cross-purposes with religious beliefs.

We have continued to maintain our focus on this world, “the now” and not in pursuit of other worlds or hereafters as the fulcrum of our lives and very existence. The Dutch, emphasized, the here and now, not akin to other societies who sought domination of life’s purpose, preparation for the afterlife.

The capital of culture and finance in this country is where the East River and The Hudson River wrap around Manhattan and that will never change. It just keeps getting better, bigger and more spectacular all the time!

Want to see the world, come to New York City!!

From Zigzag to Straight and Flat!

Manhattan is very easy to navigate on foot, north of 14th Street. For the most part, the majority of streets, north of 14th Street, are numbered in consecutive order, parallel and perpendicular, surprisingly flat and straight. How did that happen, on this “island of many hills”, Manahatta, as named by the Lenape Indians?

The streets that lie below 14th Street are, for the most part, not numbered nor are they parallel or perpendicular due to their construction prior to the Grid Plan, or Commissioner’s Plan, enacted in 1811. Below 14th Street one needs to know the street layout and that’s a very complex task. In order to get to where you are going you may wind up walking in endless circles if you’re a novice or even an average New Yorker!

The West Village and The Lower Eastside in the Canal Street area are, by far, the most confusing terrains to navigate in Manhattan. For example, you’ll find Little West 12th Street and West 12th Street separated by Gansevoort, Horatio and Jane Streets, a labyrinth that would divert a mouse searching for cheese. You may walk on West 10th Street and find that you’re south of West 8th and 9th Streets. These twists, turns and meandering streets were created by 17th and 18th century road builders and mandated by city ordinances that had allowed paths to become wider roads around boulders and rocks, depressions of earth and mounds or hills that would have been too costly to remove in an age void of modern mechanical road building equipment. Thus, due to the limitations of road construction technologies, layout and design

were quite daunting back then. Therefore, the Dutch and English did not create streets following a pattern or plan. It would have entailed too much trouble, money and toil.

As if life was not difficult enough back in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries with all the grime, crime, grit, overcrowding and stench of New York City, it was a nightmare trying to navigate. With so many immigrants, vast numbers of new arrivals, speaking so many languages, huge challenges communicating directions to each other, became a terrifying and nearly impossible task!

Imagine, an Irishman telling an Italian woman how to get to Laight, Desbrosses, Lispenard or Frankfort Street while standing on the corner of Mulberry and Grand. With people from so many countries, speaking different languages, it must have created havoc. Imagine, stopping a fellow New Yorker and asking them how to get to Desbrosses Street when your pronunciation would have been totally misunderstood. This was not an age when people pulled out a map, GPS or Google map.

Enter The Grid Law of 1811. The mandate called for surveying and planning the streets of the future. It defined their widths, routes and provided for a few exceptions from 14th Street north to 155th Street. Imagine what a political hot potato that it was. A law created to carve up properties and plan streets through owner's property, without reasonable compensation was asking for big trouble. It was such a hot button that the City insisted that the Albany legislature take the authority to write the law and

pass it to remove this hot potato from the hands of locals.

Essentially, the plan was the brainstorm of Mayor DeWitt Clinton and future governor of New York State. The commissioners laid out very short blocks, narrow side streets, wide north-south avenues, and intermittently wide two way traffic east-west streets to facilitate cross town traffic such as 96th 86th 79th 72nd 59th, 57th, 42nd 34th 23th 14th and so on.

Blocks were intentionally planned to be short thereby creating more corners because corner properties are worth more money, providing more light, superior ventilation and two views all very beneficial features especially in an age when air-conditioning and electric lighting did not exist.

Streets were numbered sequentially to facilitate communication among the masses. People's directional queries were answered with the dab of a pencil, a number written on a piece of paper and the street in question was provided and those who had been lost were guided by numbers in order rather than random street names were not able to find their way. That's all it took, at a time of enormous language barriers and frustrations. It was a connective mechanism for the immigrants and it facilitated communication making it less frustrating and consequently much more effective.

The law mandated roads to be flattened, rocks and mounds of earth had to be removed before streets were paved; that's why most of the hills that were on this island are gone. For the most part, they're all gone and that made Manhattan the most geologically transformed City (at that time Manhattan was the

entirety of New York City) on the planet. You can still find plenty of hills laden with huge clumps of Manhattan schist, known as outcroppings, located in parks especially in Northern Manhattan. In certain parks such as northern Central Park, with a most notable example can be seen along Central Park West between 103rd and 106th Street, Morningside Park, Riverside, Highbridge, Inwood and Ft. Tryon Park, Marcus Garvey Park are all located in northern Manhattan. There are huge outcroppings protruding through the soil known as. In fact, Central Park was planned to end at 106th Street however the rocks were so huge that it had been decided to extend the park to 110th Street instead because the cost, sweat and toil to remove the rocks would have been too much to endure.

Next time you take a walk around town, imagine what New York City had been like four hundred years ago and brilliance of the great transformation that has been conceived and achieved that enables it to work so well today.

As you travel the world compare our street grid with other major cities. Despite a few glitches, our Grid Law is perhaps the most forward thinking and innovative geographically favorable urban roadway plan on earth.

Way to go New York City! Just try to be a little patient when driving into those narrow cross-town streets. Hey buddy, lay off the horn too! No doubt many pregnancies ended, or nearly ended on side streets behind garbage trucks! My daughter was nearly born on 77th Street between 2nd and 3rd Avenue back on February 22, 1973. It was a close "caul".

Parking Signs are Rocket Science

Recently I encountered a couple of tourists standing on the sidewalk in midtown Manhattan appearing to be a bit confused. That's nothing new. They stopped me as I walked by and asked me,

"Are we allowed to stand here?"

"Why do you ask?"

Their reply, "There's a sign there."

Pointing directly to it, one of them continued,

"That sign reads, 'No Standing'!"

I thought they might have been goofing. But no, there were serious! After all, there wasn't a sign that read no sitting, slouching, leaning or laying down.

If you have a PhD, are a fortune teller, dice roller, win at three card Monte, yeah right, bingo and the lottery then you have a shot at free parking in New York City. Throw in a brother-in-law who's a judge in traffic court, a cop who was the best man at your wedding and for closers, toss in your first born child, which some may actually want to do in order to avoid paying a parking ticket and you may, just may, park free. With your fingers crossed, a dream and a prayer, you'll walk away from a stiff fine for not understanding the signs posted down the block where you parked your car that was summarily removed by a 300 pound man employed by the DOT's parking violations pound. There's no doubt that the cost of so-called public street parking in New York City has soared over time. On a per square foot basis, the cost of a parking spot exceeds the cost of an apartment rental. Currently, metered parking is 50 cents for ten minutes on Columbus Avenue off of 97th

Street. That calculates to \$2,110 by the month for a space that's six by twelve feet.

Let's say, you're in the City, looking for a place to park, in midtown, and need to run into a tuxedo store or pickup a package, a cup of Joe, whatever, and after twenty minutes of circling the block you decide to take a shot. You call the retailer; tell him you're about to run in and that you'll be double-parked. You want to grab your tuxedo, post haste and you have their full cooperation. After all, you're their customer. You find a spot alongside a truck parked directly in front of the establishment. You check your rearview mirror, side view too, look ahead and behind, check for meter maids and you're in the clear, or are you? You've read the sign. That took only about four minutes to read, and you don't see any No Double Parking signs but there are No Standing, No Idling and Snow Emergency Street signs. There's no snow so that's not an issue, No Commercial Traffic, and there are Do Not Park, Driveway signs and not a hint of Don't Even Think of Parking Here signs. There are no Don't Honk \$300 fine signs so honk, it's free and legal! You dash out, running, trip on the curb, weave through the foot traffic on the sidewalk, enter the store, present your receipt, are greeted with a smile, and the clerk retrieves your tux in record time. You provide your fastest scribbled signature, say your good-bye as you dash out like you're running thirty yards in the Super Bowl and as you see your car a Traffic Cop appears who has already written a ticket, this time with the benefit of a computerized handheld device. You know, the kind that's got the data bank that just happens to have your vitals. Total elapsed

time from exiting and returning to your car, fifty seconds! Not bad, but not quite good enough!

You confront the officer and she cites the violation as number 46 of the violations code without taking her eyes off the citation as she enters your license plate number, digitally, the time of day, location, date and other unknown evidentiary data into her hand held device. Worst of all, judges' love these devices, they're never wrong!

'What's 46?' you exclaim at a roar just slightly below a shout!

Well, she was not about to provide an answer, it's one of those, "see you in court" moments. I'll tell you what it is, here and now, right off the NYC.gov website:

"Standing or parking on the roadway side of a vehicle stopped, standing or parked at the curb; in other words, *(that's my favorite part, in other words)* "double parking". A person may; however, stand a Commercial Vehicle alongside a vehicle parked at the curb at such locations and during such hours that stopping, standing and parking is not prohibited when expeditiously *(and who's the judge of what is expeditiously?)* making pickups, deliveries or service calls, *(What's a service call? Servicing what, who and how, hum?)* provided that there is no unoccupied parking space or designated loading zone on either side of the street within 100 feet. "Double parking" any type of vehicle is not; however, permitted in Midtown Manhattan (the area from 14th Street to 60th Street, between First Avenue and Eighth Avenue inclusive). Except where otherwise restricted, midtown double parking is prohibited between 7 am and 7 pm daily except Sundays. (See Code 47.) *(Where's that? I guess directly after 46 and before 48. How many codes are there?)*

Now that clears it up, right! And to think that I've been driving in New York City all my life and I never knew that! Who writes this stuff and how are we supposed to know it?

As has been said, "Ignorance is no defense for breaking the law!" Fine: \$145, next case. Oh yes, and don't forget about the other ticket for using a handheld phone while circling the tuxedo shop, "bingo" another \$115!

Who stops to measure 100 feet? Who decides if a delivery or service call is "expeditious" and what if the curbside space suddenly becomes vacant while you're doing your thing, like an urge to go to the bathroom? Every motorist, even from "Jersey" is supposed to know the geographic boundaries of midtown, "inclusive" right? You want to be a smart parker? Put your car in a lot and chances are that statistically you'll save a fortune and next time, buy the tuxedo from Amazon and it'll be shipped to your door!

I just love when people from the hinterlands, you know, Jersey, Connecticut, Long Islanders are just passing through in a new Mercedes, BMW or Lexus and circling the block twelve times looking for a parking spot in a City where the parking signs might be written in Mandarin, the third most widely spoken language in the City by the way, just to save a few lousy bucks!

How about the possibility that your \$105,000 car getting hit by an adjacent motorist who is attempting to park and you didn't have a De-Fender, that rubber drape that protects your precious rolling stock and your "wheels" get chomped?

"Oh Shit!! I should have put it in a lot. Honey!"

"You're damn right you cheap bastard! It serves you right!"

"Yes, Honey, and where were you when I was circling the block for half an hour searching for a spot?"

"Don't blame that on me dearie. You made your choice. It wasn't my fault!"

"Since when did you crawl under a rock? You have a mind and a mouth! Well, "mind" that's an assumption but there's no doubt about your fat mouth, dearie! The one time I would have appreciated your advice you clam up!"

"Don't talk to me like that, it's your fault. Pay the ticket and next time, try a parking lot, you penny pinching creep!"

"I'm outa here! I'm not spending this evening with you! We're going home."

It was just another enjoyable night on the town for a pair of losers. That's the fun of it all!

Put the "wheels" in a lot, save time and spend your money on fun! Eat, drink and be merry. Get a life, not a spot, you cheap millionaire, accountant, dentist, pharmacist or doctor. Why are some people so well, hey, you fill in the blanks.

I don't even want to go there because well, I found a great spot. I live in Manhattan, and am totally carless, not clueless! Wana avoid a parking ticket, don't park and don't drive!

Numbers? Go Figure

There are several hundred Walgreen's Duane Reade drug stores throughout the City established back in the 1960's by Eli Cohn and family, locals. Their first store was located on lower Broadway, between Duane and Reade streets. I've been shopping at those stores for years and was reasonably pleased with the service except that the stores were always understaffed; there are seldom enough cashiers, consequently lines are too long and New Yorkers, most of all, being in a hurry, just hate to be kept waiting. I can't understand why large retail operators in New York City, who stock their stores with thousands of items and pay extremely high rents fail to recognize the wisdom of staffing their stores better than their competitors. If they did then the increased payroll of these low paid employees would be a great investment driving customers to their stores and away from Rite-Aid and CVS.

Several years ago Walgreen's, a huge national drug store operation, acquired the Duane Reade Drug chain and what happened seemed to me the best example of middle American trying to "pull it off," retail engineering, in New York City, just like they do in Poduck.

For starters: I immediately got the sense that the New Duane Reade management just didn't know how to do business in New York City.

For example, on the first of many occasions, I was handed my receipt, about 18 inches long with all kinds of "deals" values and specials. That had was such an annoyance for me. Stuffing all that paper in my pocket and together with my change transformed

me into a messenger! Then and there, the cashier told me,

“Have a nice day and be well.”

The next time I made a purchase, upon my departure the cashier said, “Be happy and have a nice day!”

It was painfully obvious that a high level manager had instructed the cashiers to say two nice things to each customer, or “guest” as they refer to shoppers these days upon the customer’s departure. We’re not customers any more, we’re “guests.”

Don’t you love standing on line at McDonald’s, in need of an iced tea or diet coke when hear the cashier say, “Next guest please!” Since when are we “guests” at McDonald’s? When did that kick in?

So, I asked the cashier at Duane Reade if their manager had instructed the cashiers to wish each “guest,” after making their purchase, two nice acknowledgments, not just one. She told me yes, with a smirk.

After that encounter, I noticed that all the cashiers in all of the Duane Reade stores were doing the same thing. Why are the “managers” of Duane Reade, now imported from the mid-west by Walgreen’s? They’re so off the mark when it comes to New Yorkers? To us, it’s such an obvious effort but they missed the target.

Another piece of news brought to you by Walgreen’s, is that they raised their prices, sky-high. Just who are they kidding? What a sham or shame, both! The cost of my purchases at Duane Read is far more costly then at Rite Aid directly across the street. The price differential is obscene.

Now here’s the kicker! On one recent evening I went to the Duane Reade behind my building to buy a few

items. I approached the cashier she seemed pleasant and eager to help me, her next “guest.” She rang up the sale, \$25.41 and the “games” were about to begin. I gave her two \$20 bills, \$40 bucks. Then, noticing that I had a \$5 and a single I told her that I was replacing one twenty with the \$5 and the single dollar bill. But, she had already entered in to the register that I had tendered two twenties. Therefore, the cashier was not able to have the cash register to calculate the amount of change that was due me!

She was noticeably miffed and very confused. She froze, stared into the cash drawer and absolutely could not calculate my change!

“You can’t provide me with the change without the register doing the calculations?” I asked, amazing!

Then she blurted out, “69 cent right?”

“No!” I said.

So, she called for help. The other cashier had just completed her sale and was hastily summoned to assist.

“This guy is giving me trouble! He’s a real problem!”

The other cashier came to our rescue, or so I thought. I recited the transaction, the amount of the sale and the exchange of one of the \$20 bills to a \$5 and a single, \$26 in total.

She reached into the register and withdrew a \$10 bill, a \$5 and a \$1 dollar bill and handed the bills to me. I believe she was totally lost, didn’t use a calculator, one was on the counter, apparently provided for such purposes.

Why did this happen? First, it is apparent that a Fortune 500 company that either has a deficient hiring process and these young ladies seem to be the

best they can do. Why? Do they really have to settle for such candidates who are sorely deficient in basic mathematics? The cause lies squarely on the shoulders of our public school system and lousy parenting.

Whether it's the curriculum, the teachers themselves, or the inability to teach effectively due to disciplinary problems or parents who are not keeping their eyes on their children's scholastic lack of achievement, I just don't know.

The real question is how will this City and this nation compete in a world where we have slipped down to a very disturbingly low rank of scholastic achievement? Compared with Asian and Northern European countries in particular we are a sinking ship! How will those jobs that require much better educated people be filled? Perhaps the gap between needed skills resides at the bottom of the ladder and the ability to fill highly skilled jobs is much easier.

How sad it is that finding cashiers in this day and age apparently is a major problem and with a budget of \$19,200,000,000 is just not enough for New York City's Board of Education to prepare our children well. I believe that another ten billion or so wouldn't make a bit of difference except it would create more waste and could under educate about another 500,000 kids.

Therefore, the next time you become a "guest" standing in front of a retail cash register, make sure that you get the correct amount of change. It's very sad because everyone with the ability to learn is entitled to learn. We, as a nation, deserve a failing grade for "screwing" our children, disabling their

futures and the future of our country. Something must be done.

And now, the answer you've been waiting for: Did I return the excess money given to me? Yes, and the only reason was because it was not my money. Never mind the rationale that the money should have come out of the cashier's pocket because she deserves to learn a lesson, how to calculate change without an amount tendered key. That's not my responsibility. Perhaps I should have kept the \$16 to "teach her a lesson" but she's not my employee nor is not my child I would have violated my own principle, "if it's not my money I have no business taking it."

A Few Parting Thoughts

Hopefully you have enjoyed this tour as much as I have putting it together for you. No doubt, you have learned a lot about New York City; trivia, how we live, our cultural traditions, history, folklore and beliefs. You've learned something about how things get done here, how we have evolved and grown creating this vibrant, forward thinking, movin' and shakin' global city.

Perhaps you have a new sense of New York City and a better understanding of us, a multi-cultural City that breaths life into everything it does. We are not the arrogant, rude and crude society that we have been known for in the past largely due to the entertainment that is fed to the masses on the media, books, movies, etc. Time has created a more lovable, admirable and productive society one that embraces the world.

New York City has evolved into a place where kindness abounds and innovation is found everywhere. Creativity thrives; artists of all types, researchers, teachers, musicians and doctors heal, nurses sustain us, fireman save, tour guides guide and together we all have given perhaps the greatest abundance of gifts that the world has ever known.

We are prideful, connective, demonstrative and inquisitive. This is the place to come, to play, work, love, think and expand our lives in endless new and distinctive ways. It's a place to try new things, conceive new ideas, open minds and hearts and become a part of the greatest City the word has ever known.

We are the “yes we can” City and we boldly go forward with a willingness to try new ideas, take well thought out risks and give new ways a shot.

Visit us for the first time or come back again and if you do then you will take back something big, very big, love for a place that you will always yearn to return to again and again. Join over 60,000,000 visitors, who came here in 2017, an astonishing record breaking number and enjoy this City, better than its every been! Feast yourself and breath in the world’s largest and most spectacular playground for young and old that the world has ever known.

And more than anything . . . “Home” is the best word that I can think of to describe New York City. No matter where you’re from there is a neighborhood here that will have people that speak your language, food that tastes like your native faire, customs and culture that you were brought up with is found here. Truly, New York City is still, and will always truly be “The Melting Pot!”

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The mind, heart, wisdom and wit of a genuine New Yorker will immerse you in the Big Apple. You'll laugh out loud! Don't lend this book. Let 'em buy their own."

"So much interesting trivia and factoids, I loved it, read it twice! Why else would I have bought two copies?"

"My grandchildren read the book and couldn't stop talking about it. We all laughed together and got into some deep discussions. They ages are 12 and 9 and 6."

"I just saved myself a few bucks! It's cheaper than taking a private tour with Custom & Private New York Tours. The more copies you buy, the more you'll save!" So I decided to take my savings and 'book' a tour! Great decision!"

"So many stories, experiences, opinions, laced with politics, and lots of great New York stuff. Perhaps you should find a seat in the store and read till you fall off the chair. This is the real New York City.

"I laughed my ass off, got my haunches up and decided that I'm moving to New York City." A. Lincoln, Mark Twain, Spartacus, P.T. Barnum and Sam Schwartz.

"This speaks volumes about a passionate and witty authentic New Yorker. It's informative, entertaining, fun and most amusing. Get your copy today!" Cliff Strome, NYC Licensed guide. ☺