

# Voices

Fall–Winter 2021  
Volume 47:3–4

The Journal of  
New York Folklore

*Our StoryBridge:*  
Engaging Folklore in  
the Digital Age

All New-York  
Whiskey Barrels

K's Ghost City:  
Haunted by  
New York's  
Vanished Sites

IN MEMORIAM  
Carol Gregson  
1925–2021

On a Wing and a  
Prayer  
Finding Poetry in the  
Cliché



New  
York **FOLKLORE**

## From the Director



New York Folklore has been publishing its journal since 1945. First titled *New York Folklore Quarterly*, it was published four times each year until the late 1970s, when it became *New York Folklore* and moved to a biannual publishing schedule. In 2000, the journal moved again to an altogether different format. Although continuing

as a biannual publication, the journal was redesigned, adopting a magazine format. *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore* remains a peer-reviewed journal. However, since 2000, it has included poetry, photo essays, short stories, and memoirs. This expansion has allowed us to appeal to a wider audience while remaining true to the intent of the journal, “to plow back the folklore of New York” to the people with whom it originated.

As we all move more fully into the digital age, New York Folklore’s concern has been to provide our full catalog to as many people as possible. Our catalog is substantial, as it represents more than 75 years of consistent publishing, with content that spans every corner of New York State. Although our content is available via several academic subscription services (EBSCO Online, ProQuest, Gale Group, Wiley), those sources are available only to those who have academic affiliations. More open access is something for which New York Folklore has been striving, over the last several years.

I am pleased to report that by the end of 2022, New York Folklore will have an online journal presence. Our most recent issues, and issue year, will be embargoed and available only to current members. However, all of our other issues will become increasingly available via our website. We have been working with the website design firm, NewWhyWeb, to develop an online search engine to make our content readily searchable and available online. As we digitize more volumes and enter them into the search engine, more of the valuable content of New York Folklore will be widely available. Early research from the 20th century is now historical material, providing a historical lens to New York’s folk cultural heritage. Current research can now be shared more widely. Digitization won’t be “all at once.” Over time, however, our full catalog will be available to students, researchers, community members, and anyone interested in the folk cultural expressions of New York State. I am very excited by the possibilities and the uses for the material. Please watch for a “launch” date. Once it is “live,” let us know how it works for you.

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*The Moon, like a flower  
In Heaven’s high bower,  
With silent delight,  
Sits and smiles on the night.*

## From the Editor



We saw the Strawberry Moon rise over Eldridge Swamp two nights ago. Just south of our home in Shushan, New York. At a place we had never visited. Nor knew of its existence. No interfering lights. No one else nearby. No other sounds. Only the chorus of frogs encouraging the moon’s performance.

Thanks to our friend Jack Metzger for sharing the moving experience. He called us out of the blue that evening. He had a surprise. If we were willing. We should grab a sweatshirt and water shoes, and follow him to an undisclosed location. Cars parked, we then followed him on foot, through a meadow and down the wooded path to a previously unknown rustic cabin retreat on the swamp’s edge. Climbing into kayaks, we paddled through the grasses and trees and lily pads of the swamp to the beaver dam, in the growing dusk of sunset. He then entreated us to stay a bit longer, climbing up into the crow’s nest of the cabin, to wait for the full moon to rise.

Eldridge Swamp is privately and publicly owned wetlands in Washington County just south of the Battenkill. This unique swamp forest is a rare boreal ecosystem, with the southernmost population of white spruce in New York. It is also an important wildlife habitat, home to deer, beaver, songbirds, owls, raccoons, fishers, and porcupines. The public lands are open year-round for recreation.

The Strawberry Moon was named by northeastern North American Native peoples for the full moon during strawberry harvest in June. This year of 2022, a so-called Super Moon was expected, due to the Moon’s close distance to the Earth. We were not disappointed.

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—William Blake,  
“Night” from “Songs of Innocence” (1789),  
originally produced as illuminated books, engraved,  
hand-printed and colored by Blake himself.



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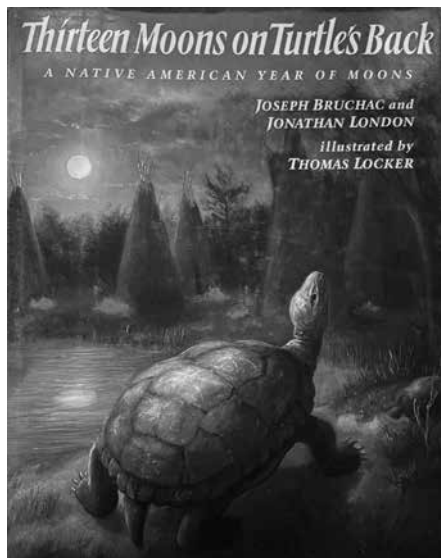
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Cover: The whiskey barrels are labeled after being filled. According to barrel-maker, Bob Hockert, the barrel being labeled in this photo is the one now at Crandall Folklife Center. Here, they are filled and officially entered into the distillery production log. See p. 20.



Here's a poem that came to mind while viewing the moon rise with Jack and Nancy. It is based on a legend and belief by many Native American cultures that each of the thirteen full moons of the year has its own story connecting it to the Earth and its seasons. We used to share this version with our children, found in a beautiful collaboration between local Abenaki storyteller Joseph Bruchac and poet Jonathan London (illustrated by Thomas Locker), in their book,



*Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back: A Native American Year of Moons* (Philomel Books, NY, 1992):

### Strawberry Moon

In late spring  
a small boy  
whose parents had died  
went hunting game  
down by the river  
where Jo-ge-oh,  
the Little People who care  
for the plants, live.

He shared what he caught  
with those Little People.  
In return they took him  
in a magic canoe  
up into the cliffs,  
taught him many things  
and gave him strawberries.

He was gone just four days,  
but when he returned  
years had passed  
and he was a tall man.  
He shared with his people  
what he was taught and  
gave them the sweetness  
of red strawberries.

So, each year, the Senecas  
sing songs of praise  
to the Little People,  
thanking them again  
for this moon's gift.

What wonderful reminders of the natural beauty, local legends, and bountiful harvest of our upper Hudson Valley region!

*This is an edited version of a June 17, 2022, blog post at [www.folklifecenter.com](http://www.folklifecenter.com)*

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# Voices

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# *Our Story Bridge:* Engaging Folklore in the Digital Age

BY JERYY. HUNTLEY, MLS, AND JANELLE A. SCHWARTZ, PHD

“My name is Russell Banks and I’m a writer, but this is not a story about me.” On September 6, 2019, internationally acclaimed author Russell Banks recorded his own true story about a singular afternoon he experienced 25 years ago in Keene, New York. He was at the post office, the proverbial water cooler for picking up the news in our small town, when he saw his

friend and fellow writer, Alex Shoumatoff, with 24 Rwandan refugees in the back of his pickup truck. “This is not a normal sight in Keene,” he admitted. A rural, mountain town with 1,100 mostly white residents, Keene sits in the heart of the High Peaks in the Adirondack Park of upstate New York. As Banks continued, these Rwandans “were of all different ages. Men

and women, boys, and girls, young and old, and Alex was taking them all out for pizza and asked me, ‘where can [I] get a pizza for 24 people?’” “I actually didn’t know how to answer him,” Banks recalls with a laugh” (Banks 2016).

It turned out that Shoumatoff, who is married to a Rwandan woman, had arranged for his wife’s extended family to



School buses in back of school, 1945, with Steve Feinberg, Milton Hartsow, Ernest LaPine, and Vincent Beede. *All images used with permission from the Keene Valley Library Association Archives.*

receive visiting visas to the United States; it was 1994, during the Rwandan genocide between the Hutus and the Tutsis, and as Banks tells it, the family of Shoumatoff's wife "were all under dire threat of being butchered because they were Tutsis." Shoumatoff managed to bring them to safety in New York—at the time, however, the United States was not accepting victims of the genocide in Rwanda as refugees. They couldn't stay in Keene.

This oral story, with its bullish, charming conclusion, is titled "Refugee Crisis in Keene" and can be heard among the many three-to-five-minute stories being recorded and collected as part of a grassroots oral history project, *Adirondack Community: Capturing, Retaining, and Communicating the Stories of Who We Are* (<http://www.my-adirondackstory.org/>). Sponsored by the Keene Valley Library, *Adirondack Community* is an ongoing local story project that collects and organizes audio stories and related photographs from Town of Keene community members through an online platform. Since the project's launch on June 15, 2019, to the time of this article's writing, online access remains free to its over 225 posted stories and 18 curated podcasts, with more being added regularly. By collecting the stories of our local region, from the old generations and the new, *Adirondack Community* has quickly become a shared and treasured resource, a valuable teaching tool in schools, and a powerful ameliorative in times of crisis. Debby Rice, a long-time resident of Keene, reveals that "on cold winter evenings in our harsh Adirondack climate, I often felt sad, so I'd listen to stories on *Adirondack Community* and hear about people in this community helping each other through multiple disasters and challenges. The stories warmed my heart and helped me get through two COVID winters" (Rice 2021).

### **"A repository of community memory"**

In 2013, after visiting the Adirondacks season after season for most of her life, Jery Huntley bought a small cottage in

Keene Valley, New York, a rural hamlet within the Town of Keene. She retired one year later and now spends half of each year in Keene and the other half in Washington, DC. After a lifetime of volunteer work, intermingled with heavy family and career responsibilities—including work in the New York State Assembly and the US House of Representatives—as well as early career work as a school librarian and teacher in New York, Huntley found that her energy and skills would best serve our Keene Valley Library by providing fundraising assistance as a volunteer for their Capital Campaign. After the campaign's successful conclusion, she and Keene Valley Library Director Karen Glass talked more about the needs of the community and how best they could continue to work together. Like many rural areas across the country, the small towns and hamlets and villages of the Adirondacks (Keene included) suffer a twofold challenge: on the one hand, we continue to experience population declines among the younger generations due, in part, to a perceived lack of opportunities and a very real dearth of civic resources, such as affordable housing, childcare, and reliable internet connectivity. Many young adults from the Adirondacks who leave the region to pursue college or other endeavors often don't return. Attracting new, young professionals to settle in the region is equally problematic. On the other hand, the older generations, who themselves can often attest to a wealth of opportunity, experiences, challenges, and innovations in the region, are aging and passing away. Their rich cultural histories are being lost because their stories are going uncollected.

With this challenge in mind, Huntley and Glass developed the idea of an online story project, as a way to bring the library and its resources into the 21st century and strengthen our community at the same time. They would tap into the intrinsic durability of folklore and give it a digital twist. By highlighting, acknowledging, and celebrating the Town of Keene's myriad histories as a collective of individual lives lived, *Adirondack Community* would indeed

"capture, retain, and communicate the stories of who we are." The story project would seek to make the oral histories of our New York town simple to collect, shorter than their longer counterparts that otherwise sit neglected in archives, and easily accessible to the community-at-large. The project would meet their audience where they are: online. Incidentally, this project would also spark new interest in the library's extant and extensive archival resources: not only would it put historic photographs to immediate use as visual companions to the oral stories; it would also attract students, teachers, scholars, and the general public to (re)explore and add to the holdings.

Huntley and Glass immediately enlisted the help of local archivist Elizabeth Rogers, MLS, and together, they discovered that another local resident, Louis N. Bickford, PhD, had the answer for how to coordinate a dynamic digital collection of the community's stories. For over 20 years, Bickford has worked in the field of international human rights, and in 2016, he founded the online platform *Memria*, which develops partnerships with "community libraries, oral history projects, nonprofit organizations, philanthropies, and others committed to listening to each other," in order to help them "collect, manage, and share personal narratives and testimonials from people in their own voices" (<http://www.memria.org/>). With generous grant assistance from Humanities New York, the Glenn & Carol Pearsall Adirondack Foundation, and the Northern New York Library Network, *Adirondack Community* became a fully realized project of the Keene Valley Library in less than a year after its conception. In her role as volunteer, Huntley took over and still serves as Director for the project, assisted now by a dedicated group of volunteers. Members of the town also ensured the maintenance and growth of *Adirondack Community* by giving it sustaining financial support through at least 2026. Frank Owen, American abstract painter, fine arts educator, and another long-time resident of Keene, praises this Adirondack/New



Firefighters from numerous departments and towns try to save the Keene Valley Grocery.

York story project as “a rich gift to the community... in a real-time collection.” It acts as “a repository of community memory... a building block of memory being created and stored” (Owen 2020).

### “The specialness of this place”

The stories of the Town of Keene bridge many categories—from arts and culture to catastrophes, work, people and daily life, to outdoor activities and the natural and man-made environments in which we live, work, and play. The people who tell these stories are as old as 98 and as young as 13. We have come into our own as a town of storytellers and rekindled our drive to preserve and share community memory. “I love how I get to see my neighbors in a new light,” says

Katherine Brown, Director of the Little Peaks Preschool Program in Keene. “It just gives me a greater sense of the specialness of this place” (Brown 2020).

Rooted in the dynamic personal histories and goings-on of Keene through generations of residents and visitors, both year-round and seasonal, *Adirondack Community* champions storytelling culture. It reveals in what Owen demands is the exigency handed down in the town “to be able to tell a story—trance and enchant and challenge other people” from “various social classes, and groupings, and economic backgrounds, and histories” (Owen 2019). As Owen tells it:

My father-in-law, Adrian [Edmonds], was born in 1909, and grew up in a

culture of storytellers. That was the main entertainment. You read alone off on your porch... or in your bedroom. But socially... you were rated as to whether or not you were a good storyteller as well as a good listener. It was all part of your social identity. Adrian was an excellent storyteller and remembered mountains of stories. [When a] family came together, there would be stories. (Owen 2019)

Stories were a community affair, told at home after sundown around a wood stove, neighbors sitting in favorite chairs with their lanterns hanging on pegs outside the front door. They were told at the local tavern or roadhouse, and at hunting camp. Today they are told at the post office, the local tavern, and inside homes, as well as at the school, community center, and



Local firefighters were ultimately unable to save the Keene Valley Grocery, which was destroyed by fire on March 11, 2018.

and it was called “The Great Legacy of Charles Brodhead, The Surveyor.” And I thought to myself, “Charles Brodhead.” Well, I have a beloved, or had a beloved uncle named Charles Brodhead, and my grandmother’s maiden name is Brodhead. My brother’s name is Robert Brodhead Thomas, and honoring that name, my son is Asa Brodhead Thomas-Train. So, I got in touch with Pete, and I got in touch with my brother, who’s the historian of the family, and they each did their own research, and I learned that in fact I was a 12th-generation descendant of this Charles Brodhead. ... Then I learned further that Charles Brodhead, the surveyor, is the first recorded white man to stand on top of one of the Adirondack High Peaks... that was Giant Mountain... in 1797. [My husband’s] father had bought a house in Keene Valley in 1947. So clearly, he was the newcomer, not I. (Thomas-Train 2019)

In “The Morning Routine at Route 9N Bus Stop,” Olivia Dwyer transforms a precarious roadside bus stop into a nostalgic touchstone of childhood mischief and joy:

There were four kids in my family, I’m the second oldest. ... [At the bus stop in the 1990s] we came up with a bunch of games to keep ourselves entertained. We would kick sand that had washed downhill on Irish Hill Lane into the storm drain by the stop sign ... We’d kick rocks to the other side of the road ... And then there were a lot of 18-wheeler trucks that would drive by in the morning, and we’d all stand there lined up by the stop sign and just pump our arms furiously in kind of a fist pumping motion to get them to honk their horns ... and it’d be this loud blasting air horn, and then we’d jump around and cheer. ... And then, as we got a little bit older, the kids stopped getting as excited or as orderly about catching the bus, so we’d always be running late. ... And, of course, sometimes someone would scream “Bus!” and there was no bus there, and they’d just be laughing hysterically by the time everyone ran out. ... My mother still lives in that same house at the bottom of Irish Hill Lane, and her delivery box for the *Press Republican* [newspaper] is right out there at the corner, so every

medical clinic, and in libraries, at the gas pumps, in grocery and hardware stores, and on trails and roadsides. Stories endure as the chinking that fortifies our everyday. They remind us of where we have been and inspire us toward where we can go.

Betsey Thomas-Train presents an endearing provocation to the debate of familial roots in her story, “Who Is the Newcomer?” She and her husband moved to Keene in 1981, raising three children here. Her story opens by revealing her husband’s

family’s long recreational history in the region, with her husband “spending every summer here from when he was a baby” (Thomas-Train 2019). As a result, Thomas-Train (who grew up in New Jersey, on the shore) always felt like the “newcomer?”—until serendipity flipped her script:

I was walking down the street one day and passed the library and saw a poster for part of the Monday night lecture series in the summer. This was a lecture to be given by Pete Nelson,



time I'm visiting her, and I go out to get the paper, I pass that same spot and I'm reminded of all the time I spent on this patch of pavement with my siblings (Dwyer 2019).

In "The Valley Gro: Rebuilt with Community Love," another Keene kid, who has since grown up and is currently the special education teacher and varsity softball coach at our local K-12 school, recalls the horrific day when her family's (and the town's) grocery store burnt down—and how the community rewrote this tragedy into a regenerative tale of "love and kindness and support":

My name is Sunny Reed, and our family business is the Valley Grocery [in Keene Valley, New York]. The Valley Grocery was started by my grandfather Richard Hall and a group of other

entrepreneurs. My mom has worked there as long as I can remember, and when [her dad] passed away, she took over as the owner. On March 11, 2018, after a long day of skiing at Whiteface [Mountain], I got a phone call about the Valley Grocery being on fire. ... There [were] billows of smoke and flames coming out of the windows and out of the roof, and I embraced my mom with a long, heartfelt hug. ... There were eight different fire departments that were involved in this miraculous dance of fighting a fire. ... The fire was caught between a flat roof and a new pitched roof that was put on, and it just kept circulating. ... It took many hours and many firefighters. ... [Valley Grocery was] closed for 11 months and one day, and on the day of the reopening, there was a line of community members, about 30, with their Valley Grocery bags waiting outside for the doors to open (Reed 2019).

Recounting another story of community catastrophe and repair, Linda Deyo, also a lifelong resident of Keene, tempers dread with levity. It was August 28, 2011, and Tropical Storm Irene was blowing through town:

My partner Tom and I were hanging out at my home ... watching the water rise in the backyard from the heavy rains. ... We moved our cars up next to the road and quickly moved items of value or importance upstairs in both the house and the garage. We packed a getaway bag in case we had to leave. ... Then there was the matter of the horses. ... the barn cat Belfry was in the overhead hayloft, and I thought he would be safe there. ... The water was now waist-high in the backyard. We then went back into the house, put on dry clothes, got a beer for Tom and a glass of wine for me, and waited and



Interior photo of the damage from the Keene Valley Grocery fire.

watched the water rise. It wasn't long before we knew we had to leave.

The water had now reached the top of the front porch. It was coming up faster than I had ever seen it. There were trees, huge white pines, floating behind the house. We secured the two house cats upstairs, and took our two large dogs and left for my son David's nearby house on much higher ground. As we were leaving, we spotted our neighbor, Gary Manley, sitting in his truck with his dog. ... He had a bewildered look on his face. He wasn't sure where to go. So, we said to follow us, and we all went up to my son's house and spent the night there. None of us slept well. We got up early and walked back to the houses. The foundation of my house on the riverside had collapsed. Three feet of water had gone through the house, rearranging all the furniture, and covering everything with stinking flood mud.

The addition we had put on was torn away from the older portion of the house. The woodshed and all it contained was torn away from the garage. The river side of the garage had collapsed and fallen down. ... Most shocking of all, the barn was totally gone. It had been ripped off its foundation and floated away, ending up in pieces in the Gallagher's yard. There was no sign of the barn cat. ... Ironically, my partial glass of wine had floated around the living room and came to rest on the living room windowsill covered with mud. ... The Resuscitation Annie doll used by the fire department had floated down and was in our pasture. We put Annie on our now useless lawnmower, which had also floated there. The next few days were spent cleaning up what could be salvaged. I had the help of family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers. ... The good news was that the barn cat had made it out of the barn as it fell apart and had somehow managed to climb up a huge pine tree. We coaxed him down. He was fine (Deyo 2021).

Then there are stories of personal triumph, such as Tommy Biesemeyer's "Olympic Dream Fulfilled," which details his experience in 2018 as a member of Team USA for Alpine skiing:



Alan Washbond and Ivan Brown with their bobsled, during the 1936 Winter Olympics.

Far and away, my most memorable moment from my career was the opening ceremonies from the Pyeongchang Olympics. I cannot avoid sounding cliché, so I won't. It was an honor, a dream come true, and it gives me chills talking about it. There is not one moment that I can pinpoint to illustrate the opening ceremonies. It was the whole process. ... It was the first time I felt like I was an Olympian (Biesemeyer 2019).

And Charity Marlatt's remembrance of her father, Alan Washbond, who was an Olympic American bobsledder 82 years

earlier. He won gold at the 1936 Olympic games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, and protested Hitler at the same time:

Of course, the very first thing that happens at the Olympic games is the Parade of Countries, and all of the participants from the United States were determined that the flag would not be dipped in honor of the tyrant, Adolf Hitler. So, my dad would tell with great pride that that never happened. They never dipped their flag, and they never looked his way either (Marlatt 2019).

We meet Charles Lindbergh on the other side of a muddy handshake with an unsuspecting golf caddy from the local Ausable Club in Paul Martin's story, "Who Was That?":

When I was about 12 or 13 years old, I started caddying at the Ausable Club, as many boys did from the area. ... Mrs. Jerome Hunsaker, from time to time, used to come over in the morning and ask if she might have two of the young boys to come over and work in her flower garden. Her husband Jerome C. Hunsaker was head of Aeronautics at MIT and used to summer at the club every year. Well, one particular morning she happened to get the two Wilson boys, Kenneth and Wesley; they were two farm boys. They lived on the Crawford farm down at the intersection of 9 and 73, and they liked going over there. ... At about 10 o'clock, Mrs. Hunsaker came out on the porch and yelled, "boys, boys, come up please." So, off they go and they're standing there with their hands dripping with mud and she yells, "Charles, Charles." And out comes this tall gentleman with receding hair, very thin, big smile on his face. And she said, boys, "I'd like you to meet Charles Lindbergh." ... When they came back to the caddy shack, I was just coming in from the round that I had been [caddying for] that morning; it was about one o'clock in the afternoon. And Wesley Wilson comes up to me and he says, "Paul, who the hell is Charles Lindbergh?" (Martin 2019).

And, in one final example, *Adirondack Community* collected the story of CorrieAnne Stoner, titled "Even Here: A Discussion of Race in the Adirondacks." Stoner is currently completing her senior year at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, and majoring in Criminal Justice. During the 2017–18 academic year, however, she was a cashier at the Valley Grocery and a high school senior at Keene Central School. She was "the only black female through all [her] school years," and her classmate Miles Warner was "the other student of color." Together, they gave a presentation one fall evening in the school's auditorium to over 300 adults

and students; it was centered around an incident involving Stoner's self-described "dear friend," who is white and had graduated the year before:

One thing growing up that was incredibly clear to me was that there was almost no one in my community that looked like me within the K–12 school. ... Growing up around Black jokes and always hearing them was kind of a frequent part of conversation. Early on I became kind of desensitized. ... I had never been one to speak up on the race issue. ... Senior year, a dear friend of mine, who had graduated the year before me, kind of became the headline by accident. She made a grave error, being too comfortable with the language she'd use regarding people of color and the jokey humor she'd picked up within the very safe place of Keene Valley.

She used it at the school that she was at, and it became the breaking point for an already hurting local college campus facing a huge issue of race. I watched as her face was plastered across the campus and the news. People sending her and her family death threats. The community, who I'd always seen as loving, kind of turned on her. Mostly, adults came at her with like hatred and anger. However, I noticed that a lot of my friends and peers and angrier people in the town stayed kind of quiet on the subject. A lot of them didn't know what to say. This was someone just like them. Someone who had been loved by the community. ... So, I decided instead of yelling about it, it was time to talk about it.

I wrote a letter to the town that blew up overnight. It grew into a much deeper discussion, talking about what was happening at Keene Central School. ... It talked about how we must face the issue of race that was happening within the Adirondacks and the communities around us. I think that, over time, it has led to allowing the classes after us to really feel comfortable. I can see it. They're kind of social justice warriors and much quicker to talk about it and fight for different causes. Our presentation had 300 people in attendance who were all eager to see change and work towards a change. People are, I feel like, in the Adirondacks, feeling more and more empowered, especially to

talk about their experiences as people of color and the change that they want to see. The energy has definitely spread from Keene Valley to other surrounding communities. Every time I return and see the organizations that are popping up to fight the diversity issue, I can see that the movement is growing. I truly think that it will take time and possibly even another generation; but I also truly believe a change is going to come, even here (Stoner 2020).

What all these stories and more have in common are the sincerity that undergirds their recollections and the cumulative pride of place exposed through both ordinary and extraordinary details. From one individual to the next, these stories ultimately reveal the strength, resilience, humor, and happenstance of a community. They tell of a community's character and its desire to acknowledge its past and grow into its future.

### **"Everyone's story is important"**

Less than six months into the *Adirondack Community* project, Jerry Huntley realized the intense value in what had been created. Coupled to its goals of story preservation and dissemination, *Adirondack Community* had opened a new and vital avenue into fostering inclusivity, empowering intergenerational voices, and cultivating empathy within the community. So how could this same opportunity be extended to towns and cities across the country? From this question, *OurStoryBridge* was born.

With community support and the Keene Valley Library's continued sponsorship, as well as grants from Cloudsplitter Foundation, the Adirondack Foundation's Lake Placid Education Foundation, the Glenn & Carol Pearsall Adirondack Foundation, and the J. M. McDonald Foundation, *OurStoryBridge: Connecting the Past and the Present* (<http://www.ourstorybridge.org/>) launched to a national audience on September 29, 2020. Huntley founded and built this free, online resource as a model and a tool kit, in order to encourage communities to produce their own



crowdsourced story projects. “We all have a story to tell, many stories,” declares the *OurStoryBridge* website:

Life is a narrative, woven out of experience and emotion. Think of *OurStoryBridge* as the loom on which the fabric of your community’s narrative comes together. Each thread, each story binds the fabric tighter and tighter, creating intricate linkages between individuals, groups, organizations, events, environments, locales, and more. In other words, *OurStoryBridge* offers a user-friendly framework on which to mount your community’s story project; but the shape this project takes and the content it captures and communicates remain yours to construct. We want to help. *OurStoryBridge* will guide you through how to collect the nuanced histories of your community, to preserve its stories and pass their characteristic wisdom from mouth to ear by going digital (*OurStoryBridge* 2021).

Using *Adirondack Community* as the template and ongoing proof of concept, *OurStoryBridge* offers a comprehensive, do-it-yourself resource, one that is iterative

and empowering to any community wishing to create a story project of their own. This includes a downloadable User Guide to help plan, implement, and sustain individual digital story projects, which itself delivers a detailed planning timetable and covers personnel, budgeting, grants and fundraising, partnerships, technology recommendations, how to recruit storytellers, and how to collect, process, and post stories, as well as approaches to communications, marketing, and public relations. This web-based resource also includes how-to videos to complement the User Guide, as well as FAQs, links to the story projects of individual communities, downloadable sample documents, and a popular Teacher’s Guide—complete with story selection chart, story summaries, and sample assignments. As of the writing of this article, the User Guide has been downloaded over 500 times, the website boasts over 180 new users per month with over 3,700 unique visits since its launch in late 2020, the e-newsletter has over 950 subscribers, with more added each day, and the project itself enjoys a robust following on social media.

The logistical goal of *OurStoryBridge* is twofold: capture stories before the storytellers are gone and get students involved in and proud of their community, using media accessible to both young and old. Because more than two-thirds of the storytellers for *Adirondack Community*, for example, are over the age of 65, the stories told are readily adopted into school curricula at both the secondary and collegiate institutional levels. Brad Hurlburt, a social studies teacher for grades 9–12 at Keene Central School, recognizes the impact this “wonderful tool” has “in connecting [his] students to their neighbors ... giving them a much deeper sense of and appreciation for their community” (Hurlburt 2020). The stories enhance classroom lessons by providing students “with firsthand historical knowledge, including models of local civic engagement” (Hurlburt 2020). Likewise, *Adirondack Community* stories have been taught in courses at Paul Smith’s College and Clarkson University, and *OurStoryBridge* now partners with the University at Albany (Huntley’s alma mater) to offer credit-bearing internship opportunities to those completing their Master’s in Information Science.

On September 29, 2021, *OurStoryBridge* celebrated its one-year anniversary, with several communities across the country already developing their story projects. The first project to adopt the *OurStoryBridge* model was *Our Bear River Valley Stories: Our Heritage in Story* (<http://www.ourbrvstories.org/>). Based in Tremonton, Utah, and sponsored by the Tremonton City Library in the Bear River Valley, *Our Bear River Valley Stories* started gathering stories in December 2020, and released their website on January 27, 2021, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. They invite participation through their website, with the inviting call, “We’ll see you at the Story Bridge!” With over 30 stories collected to date and posted with associated pictures, this new project has helped focus national attention onto *OurStoryBridge*. “Everyone has a story, and everyone’s story is important,” says Debbie Carter, Assistant Librarian at the Tremonton City Library. “How amazing it is to be

able to hear the stories of these people and know ... the impact it will have on future generations. ... We can't wait until we get to our 500 stories!" (Carter 2021).

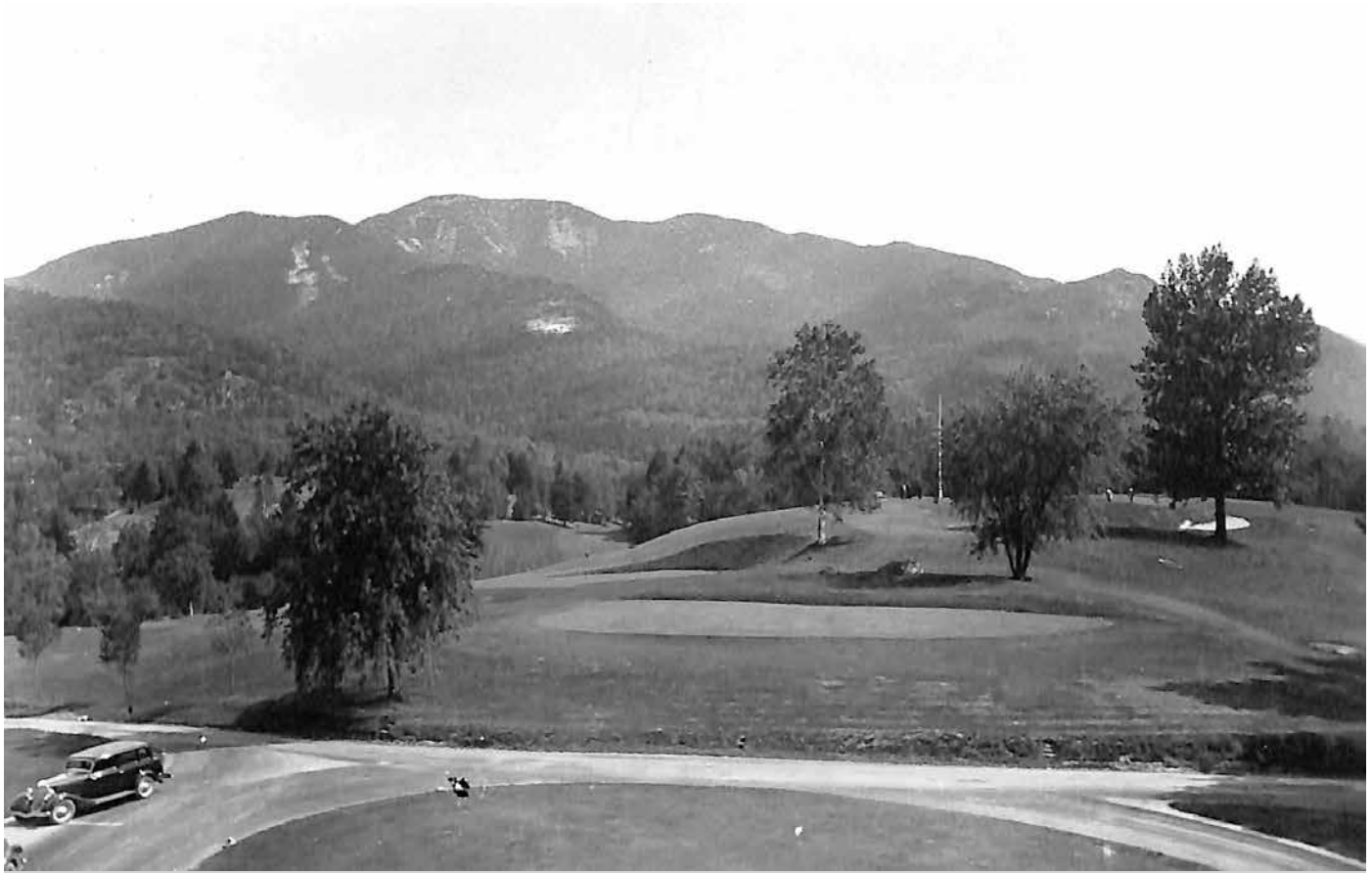
With rapid succession, two more *OurStoryBridge* projects launched in summer 2021. One circles us back to the Adirondacks, to Lake Placid, New York, where the Lake Placid–North Elba Historical Society revived a 2017 project, *North Elba Narratives: Telling Tales Oral History Project*. (<https://www.lakeplacidhistory.com/programs/>), using *OurStoryBridge* to ensure its success. Another can be found over 3,400 miles away, in southwestern Alaska, in the Yup'ik Tribal Village of Igiugig, on the southwest end of Lake Iliamna, Alaska's largest lake. *Niraqutaq Qallemcinek* ("Bridge of Stories") (<https://www.igiugigstorybridge.org/>)

is the digital story project of the Igiugig Tribal Library and embodies the idea that "we grow stronger when we share our stories" (Salmon 2021). During a 2021 Web-Junction webinar with Huntley and Carter, A. J. Gooden, Supervisor of the Igiugig Tribal Library, attested to this new digital model's ability to "directly support Igiugig's mission to connect generations through stories, preserve local knowledge, and revitalize traditional language" (Gooden 2021). To support Yup'ik language learning, the collected stories of the village's rich social and cultural histories are being made available in Yup'ik as well as in English. Both Gooden and Carter also reveal how easy the *OurStoryBridge* methodology is to use and how forgiving its process is to collect stories from even the most nervous of storytellers.

By promoting confidence and celebrating spontaneity, *OurStoryBridge* uncovers the natural storyteller in all of us. With additional projects launching and being planned in California, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, as well as more in both Alaska and New York, *OurStoryBridge* has proven itself the juggernaut of crowd-sourced, community-building story projects. Its quick adoption and endorsements from libraries, historical societies, and issue-oriented organizations throughout the United States, such as the Adirondack Mountain Club and John Brown Lives! in New York, affirm that there is deep historical value in this endeavor and many captivating stories to be told. Moreover, *OurStoryBridge* has engendered a fast-



Ausable Club, 20th century.



Ausable Club golf course, with Giant Mountain in the background.

growing network of community stories across the country, demonstrating the relevance and resonance of all stories beyond any one community's border. In 2022, resulting from its tremendous growth, *OurStoryBridge* incorporated as its own non-profit organization with the blessing of the Keene Valley Library. Enhancing the folklore that brings us and keeps us together, this project is helping to engage and capture the indelible voices of Community.

### **Coda: “We grow stronger when we share our stories”**

Remember the story about the golf caddy unknowingly shaking hands with Charles Lindbergh? As it happened, the most stunning detail from that particular story was not Lindbergh. In what reads as coincidence-turned-fate, when Tremonton, Utah, began collecting their community's stories, the first ten of these stories were recorded by Hunsakers, a name shared by the aforementioned story from

Keene, New York. Further research, with the help of Hunsaker descendants, revealed that a collateral ancestor of Jerome C. Hunsaker (the MIT aeronautical engineer who spent his summers in Keene) was Abraham Hunsaker (1812–1889). Together with Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Abraham and his wife Eliza left New York and traveled west in covered wagons. After the death of Joseph Smith, Abraham Hunsaker and his wife continued onward with Brigham Young and helped to start the Church's settlement in Utah—making the Bear River Hunsaker storytellers descendants of Abraham Hunsaker, who in turn is related to the Keene Hunsakers. Imagine the surprise of Hunsaker descendants and general listeners alike when they learned of this familial connection in New York from an *OurStoryBridge* project in Utah!

The delightful, performative capacity for *OurStoryBridge* to uncover just how immediately stories connect and strengthen us doesn't stop there. In fact, it is clear that

connections like these are only just beginning to emerge. As a result of the exposure that Huntley gained through her work on *Adirondack Community* and *OurStoryBridge*, she was contacted by a woman who had researched the Huntley family and its connections to Schroon Lake, New York. In a flurry of emails exchanged in February 2021, between Huntley, her son Jay, and Susan Repko (editor of *I Remember Schroon Lake*, a collection of childhood stories written by her mother, Leona Huntley [1922–2008]), the Huntley family history wove through descendants who came to the United States from Scotland via England in the early 17th century and ultimately revealed a common 7th great-grandfather, Aaron Huntley. This led to the discovery of John Huntley, who married Jane Bennett Curtis, whose father William Curtis emigrated to the United States from Essex, England, around 1632, thereby making him a 9th great-grandfather to Huntley's son, Jay (néé John). While Huntley herself bears no biological relation to

this evolving family tree (having kept the surname of her ex-husband), she seems to be her own divining rod for dowsing and unearthing stories. Her son next inquired with his mother about one of her contemporary Keene Valley neighbors and *Adirondack Community* storyteller, William Curtis, V. Could he be related to the 9th great-grandfather William Curtis? Curtis, already in the middle of a genealogical project of his own, is now researching this possible relation. And so, the story continues, as it comes full circle to—and creates a bridge between—the founder of *OurStoryBridge* and the very histories she is helping to collect.

For more information, email [createyourstory-project@gmail.com](mailto:createyourstory-project@gmail.com) ▼

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Since the writing of this article, *OurStoryBridge* has incorporated as an independent 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit and is excited to be assisting more and more local projects across the country.



Jery Y. Huntley received her Master of Library Science at the University at Albany, but her career took a different turn after her early start as a school and public librarian. She moved back to Albany to work for the NYS Assembly, then headed to Washington, DC, for a position in the US House of Representatives. This led to opportunities in environmental lobbying, issues management, 20 years as a trade association CEO, and volunteer work as a trainer in meeting facilitation and with Habitat for Humanity International. She lives in Washington, DC, and Keene Valley, New York, and her volunteer work now includes *OurStoryBridge* and *Adirondack Community*, political campaigns, and the DC and Essex County Medical Reserve Corps for COVID-19 test and vaccination sites. Photo courtesy of the author.



Janelle A. Schwartz brings over two decades of experience as an interdisciplinary educator, program developer, and creative consultant to her work as a freelance project strategist, writer, and editor for JAS Creatives. She received her PhD in literature and the history of science from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and has published widely on literature and ecology, social justice, the Adirondacks, pedagogy, natural philosophy, and more. She taught literature and environmental studies at Loyola University New Orleans and Hamilton College, and founded and directed the Hamilton Adirondack Program, a place-based, experiential semester. She also helps 8th and 12th graders at Keene Central School tell their stories. When not working, Janelle can most often be found in the garden or in the woods, leading the search for the friendly forest yeti and bog behemoth with her young daughter, husband, and dogs. Photo courtesy of the author.

# Searching for Good Rooms

BY DAN BERGGREN

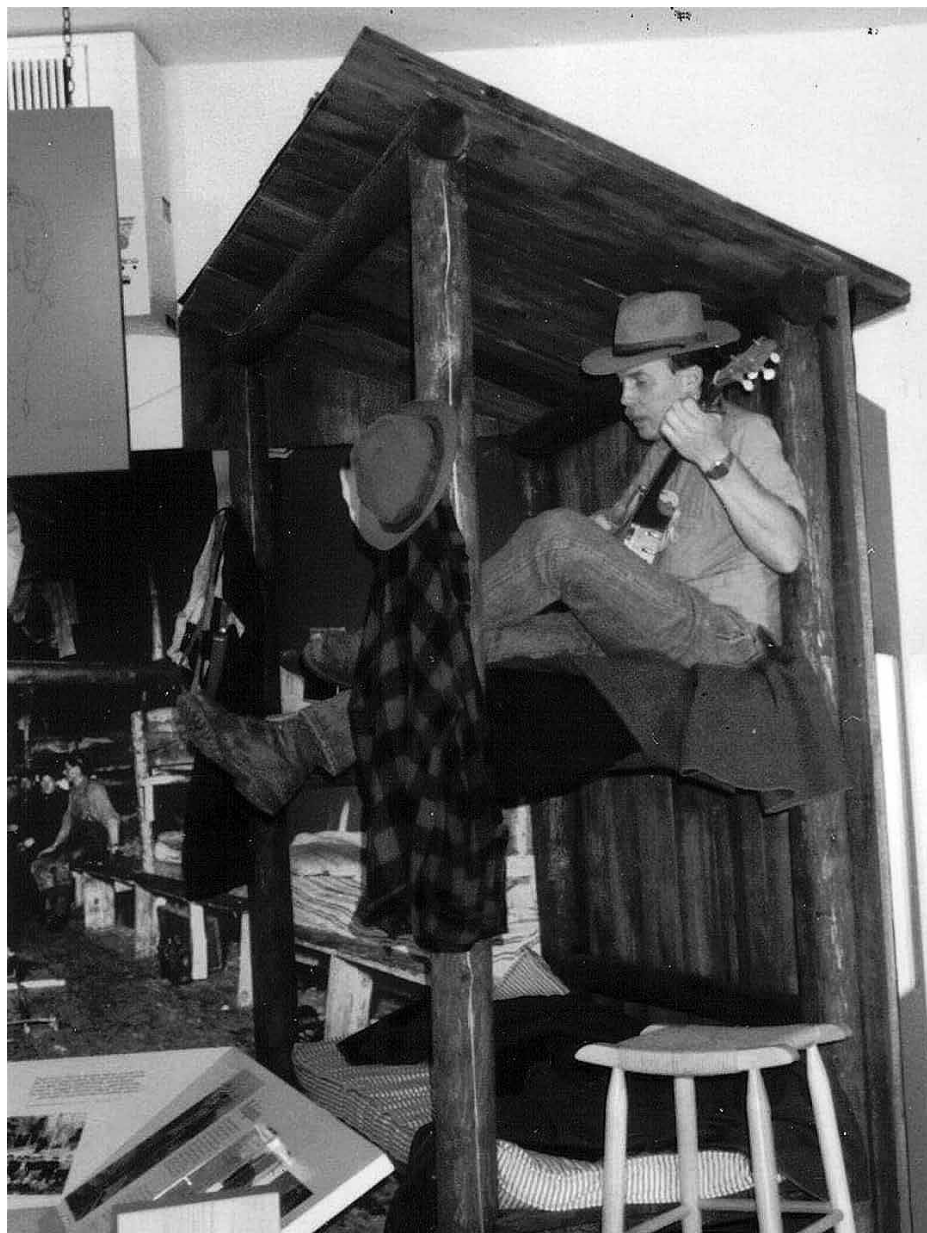
## Act I

Musicians love good instruments, and they love to play them for receptive people. Audiences love to be entertained and for the length of a performance, the musician, instrument, and audience share the same space. This is the story of some of those spaces.

*Scene 1*—As a teenager, my homework was done in my bedroom at a large desk. Next to the typewriter was an old tube radio that could tune in distant AM radio stations for all the hits of the day. Needing more work-space one night, I shoved the radio closer to the wall and stumbled upon a basic principle of acoustics. The music sounded fuller when the radio was next to the wall. Proximity to that flat surface boosted the bass. Since lower frequencies radiate in all directions (compared to the more directional higher frequencies), the bass was being fortified by bouncing off the wall.

*Scene 2*—“Why do you own so many \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the instrument)?” asks the musician’s spouse. “Don’t they all do the same thing?” Yes, they all make music, but each has a different voice—just as people do. For example, a string (or vocal cord) vibrates, causing a wooden box (or throat and head) to also vibrate; that amplifies the sound and gives it a particular tonal quality, depending on what the box is made of, its size, shape, and age.

*Scene 3*—“Everything okay in here?” asked the YMCA lifeguard as she opened the steam room door. “I thought I heard something funny.” I told her that everything was fine. Cocking her head, she listened for a moment before closing the door and turning her attention back to the swimmers. I started humming again, one note at a time, trying to find the resonant frequency of that tile-lined room, the note that would sound louder than the others. Just like the body of an instrument, rooms are containers of space and have their own acoustic properties, for example: size and shape, what the walls are made of and if they’re parallel, whether the floor is carpeted or not, and if the seats are empty or full. Whether an audience notices



Dan singing at the Adirondack Experience logging exhibit in the mid-1980s. Photo provided by the author.

or not, all of this affects the sound and how we perceive a performance.

## Act II

I’ve had the good fortune of making music in a wide variety of spaces from huge outdoor festivals to cozy libraries, historic coffeehouses, and elegant churches, from the intimacy of a living room house concert to the harsh acoustics and lighting of a school gymnasium.

*Scene 1*—Two of the grandest rooms for singing and leading audiences in song are the

Troy Savings Bank Music Hall (1,180 seats), completed in 1875, and the 1891 Fredonia Opera House (444 seats). These 19th-century rooms are themselves beautiful instruments, expected to serve audiences with their exquisite acoustics, not with microphones, amps, and speakers. The only way to ruin such good sound today is with excessive sound reinforcement.

*Scene 2*—Thanks to a friend’s suggestion, I investigated a room in rural St. Lawrence County. At the crossroads of the small community of Heuvelton is a building built in



the mid-1800s, by Irish immigrant John Pickens: a general store on the first floor and an opera house upstairs. After checking with the merchant downstairs, I walked into this unassuming gem with its clean, spartan look, stepped onto the stage, and sang to the empty room. Its simplicity and richness were striking. Whether loud, soft, upbeat, or relaxed—it sounded as if I were singing inside a cello. Several months later, I had the experience again—only this time, with an audience that sang along on the choruses.

*Scene 3*—An Adirondack lean-to is a three-sided structure with a pitched roof, suitable for several campers to spend the night in sleeping bags. In another era, after a day of hunting, a guide might have stood at the opening of such a structure and regaled his sportsmen with some tall tales. I've sung in several lean-tos, but the one at Great Camp Sagamore seems to act as a perfect bandshell, like a megaphone amplifying the sound, directing it out to folks gathered 'round the campfire.

*Scene 4*—Speaking of Great Camp Sagamore, its Playhouse is another room that deserves attention for its outstanding acoustics.

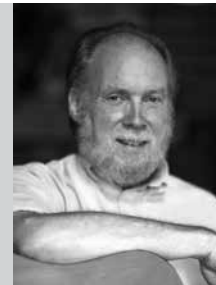
Called The Casino by the Vanderbilt family, this was where guests gathered to sing along with the piano and gamble at cards, ping pong or billiards. The ceiling is pitched, and the walls are logs, causing sound to be more diffracted (spread out) and diffused (uniformly distributed), compared to a room with flat walls and a ceiling parallel to the floor. This design and the resulting excellent acoustics are also found 20 miles away at Big Moose Chapel. These two rooms are among the finest places you could make or hear music.

### Act III

Designing and building a concert hall to bring the joy of live music can cost hundreds of millions of dollars. In 2017, the Elbphilharmonie was completed in Hamburg, Germany, at the cost of 866 million Euros (US\$936 million), and it holds an audience of 2,100 people. But much pleasure can also be found in unexpected places not created for performing or listening. Although I continue my search for good rooms, I also treasure memories of music making in places designed for other purposes: a hot and dusty hayloft where neighbors gathered for a

concert; a maple sugar shack filled with the steam of sap being boiled down to syrup; a gallery space surrounded by all kinds of works of art on its walls; a one-room school house now serving a historical society; a kitchen with all the cook staff after a fine meal; a makeshift shanty in a museum logging exhibit; a very large and odorous concrete parking garage, singing one last song with friends. I think the last note may still be ringing. ▼

Dan Berggren's roots are firmly in the Adirondacks, but his music has taken him throughout the United States and abroad. Dan has worked in the woods with a forest ranger and surveyor, was a radio producer in Europe, professor of audio and radio studies at SUNY Fredonia, and owner of Sleeping Giant Records. An award-winning musician and educator, Dan is also a tradition-based songsmith who writes with honesty, humor, and a strong sense of place. Visit [www.berggrenfolk.com](http://www.berggrenfolk.com) to learn more about Dan and his music. Photo by Jessica Riehl.



## Correction to “Bilingual Folk Storytelling: Pura Belpré and *Perez and Martina*” by William S. Walker (*Voices*, Spring-Summer 2021)

In my article, I reported that Belpré first told a version of this folktale at a Christmas program in December 1922. Further research has shown that the “Perez the Mouse” story that she told that day was likely not the one she would later publish as *Perez and Martina*. “Perez the Mouse,” or “El Ratón Pérez,” was a character from Hispanic folklore. Part of oral tradition, he first appeared in print in the books of the 19th-century Spanish author Fernán Caballeros. In 1877, Caballeros published the story “La Hormiguita” (The Little Ant) in *Cuentos, adivinanzas y refranes populares*. This tragic courtship tale of an ant and a mouse was a direct antecedent to the story Belpré would learn from her grandmother and later publish as “Perez and Martina.” The character of El Ratón Pérez appeared in other tales as well. In 1894, the Spanish writer and Jesuit priest

Luis Coloma made up a story about him in which Pérez played the role of tooth fairy. Written by Father Coloma at the request of the Queen of Spain for her son, the future King Alfonso XIII, the sentimental tale offered religious and moral instruction. Pérez not only delivered a beautiful, diamond-encrusted case in exchange for the young king's tooth, he imparted to him a life lesson about the brotherhood of humankind and the need to always pray for the less fortunate. To this day, in most Spanish-speaking countries, “El Ratoncito Pérez” is the name for the tooth fairy. This story by Luis Coloma is likely the “Perez the Mouse” tale Belpré told during the Christmas program. An English-language translation was published in 1914, and reprinted in 1918, both of which are in the New York Public Library's collection. (1) Consequently, it now appears that Belpré's

first public telling of the story of *Perez and Martina* was in May 1924, not December 1922.

~William S. Walker

Note:

Luis Coloma, *El Ratón Pérez: Cuento Infantil* (Madrid: Administración de Razón y Fe, 1911), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36558/36558-h/36558-h.htm>; Padre Luis Coloma and Lady Moreton, *Perez the Mouse* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1914), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/29447/29447-h/29447-h.htm>; Fernán Caballero, “La Hormiguita,” from *Cuentos, adivinanzas y refranes populares*, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Cuentos\\_adivinanzas\\_y\\_refranes\\_populares/8UCwAEACAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&prints=ec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Cuentos_adivinanzas_y_refranes_populares/8UCwAEACAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&prints=ec=frontcover)

# Eating Bitterness

BY MACKENZIE KWOK

My favorite subway station in New York is the Canal Street Q station. I love that it is the first stop in Manhattan on the ride from Brooklyn, after crossing the Manhattan Bridge, where everyone catches their breath to look out the window. I love that it's in Chinatown, right around the corner from vendors selling knockoff Louis Vuitton purses. I love the store directly up the stairs, the window adorned with bags of all sizes in the shape of chickens. I love the sign on the window that reads, "Look at all my chickens."

The Canal Street station also has me on edge, especially lately. I don't recall the last time I peered over the platform edge to see if the train was on the way. Not since Michelle Go was pushed. Not since an Asian friend from my run club mentioned that he'd had a knife pulled on him at that station. Not since spa workers in Atlanta were killed. Not since a man uttered, "*ni hao, sexy*" to me on a dark walk home one night.

Let me be clear: I don't feel personally targeted. I do not feel that there are racist men out to attack me. I do not even live in a historically Asian neighborhood, around which many of these anti-Asian hate crimes frequently take place. Still, I have learned to keep away from the edge of the subway platform, to dress boyishly when I am out alone, to keep quiet, so I do not stir the pot.

In Chinese, there is a phrase, 吃苦 (*chi ke*). It means "to eat bitterness," to endure hardship, to carry on, to persevere. My great-grandparents, Kao Tsao-Yuan and Loh Mei-Chun fled Shanghai for Hong Kong in 1949, before settling in the Bronx in 1960. They crossed through Ellis Island amid intense immigration restrictions from Asian countries. Leaving Shanghai was their bitterness to eat, as was navigating a new country.

In February 2020, I went to a comedy show in Brooklyn. During a moment of

audience interaction with edgy humor, the host asked what my ethnicity was. I said "Chinese." She said "Stay away from me. Coronavirus made me racist." I didn't know what to do in front of an audience that, to be fair, was also getting roasted. I didn't say anything, but I pretended to cough. I did not stick up for myself; I just went along with it. This, to me, was eating bitterness. By not resisting the joke, I was swallowing my discomfort through a joke and a smile.

I eat bitterness when I take care to stay by the wall, or toward the middle of the platform at Canal Street. I eat bitterness when men in cars comment on my body, and I stay silent, hoping they'll leave. I eat bitterness, knowing that I am safe, yet wondering if I will be singled out as a lone Asian woman to the wrong person with hungry eyes.

Sometimes, when I tell people about being followed, they will tell me I am strong. That's what eating bitterness is, after all: a sign of grit and strength. But to me, being called strong is the most bitter taste to chew. I do not stay silent out of strength; I do so out of protection for myself. I do so out of anxiety, even fear.

I wrote a song for Annie Lanzilotto's *Tell Me a Story* salon, a recurring Zoom talk show that creates community through storytelling. She asked, "What is breaking your heart most today?" I said, "Being called a strong woman." Eating bitterness and being told I'm noble for it. I wrote this song called, "The Bitterness I Eat." The first verse goes like this:

*I'm not strong, it's just I have to be  
Thirteen years of mediating  
Man, it's getting heavy.  
What do you want me to say  
When I'm followed down the street?  
Thank you for the bitterness I eat?*

The full performance can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xSDVx9pfV0>

There is much bitterness now, following the Sunset Park subway attack and more deaths in Chinatown. As New Yorkers are well aware, life goes on, not because we are brave but because we have no other choice. When I am on edge, sliding my hand into my pocket and feeling for the sharp edges of my kitten knuckles lets me feel relief. So does keeping away from the end of the train platform, or covering myself with baggy clothing at night. I don't want to live in fear, but I have these little lines of defense, just in case.

I pray that the Chinatown community, that Asian American elders, parents, young adults, and children are not called "strong" for going about life after hate crimes. We are unsure and afraid. "Text me when you get home" has another layer of concern to it. I pray that our community is met with the gentleness and softness that we deserve, instead of being called "resilient." We can eat bitterness, but I am tired of it. I would like something sweet. I would like to be able to lean over to see if the Q train is coming again. ▼

Mackenzie Kwok is a Brooklyn-based folklorist who is passionate about the everyday rituals that make us human. Mackenzie earned a MPhil in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge (2019), and a BA in American Studies and Folklore from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2018). She works in communications, marketing, consulting, and community engagement in New York's folklore field. She is also a singer/songwriter, a basketball fan, a runner, a fashion enthusiast, and an excellent cook. Photo courtesy of the author.



# Ted Williams: All the Elements

BY JOSEPH BRUCHAC

**Writer, storyteller, healer, athlete,** and crane operator—in many ways, Ted Williams was an original. In other ways, he was also the inheritor of more than one tradition from his Tuscarora people.

Born in 1930, on the Tuscarora Reservation near Niagara Falls, New York, Ted's father Eleazar Williams was a Turtle Clan sachem and an Indian doctor whose reputation as a healer was widely known. His mother, Amelia Chew, served as the Clan Mother of Ted's own Wolf Clan.

Ted Williams, in the 1970s, would begin sharing the medicine ways he'd learned from his father and such other Tuscarora healers as "Mad Bear" Anderson (who Ted referred to as "Very Bear," a better translation of his Indian name).

It is true among the Tuscarora, as in every Native American nation, that volunteering as a warrior to defend one's nation is deeply respected. Following that long-honored path, after his graduation from high school in 1948, Ted joined the military. Although he seldom spoke of it, he served with distinction for four years in the 82nd Airborne as a paratrooper during the Korean War.

Music has also long been a part of Tuscarora life. Ted's own immersion in it began after leaving the military. With the support of the G.I. Bill, he attended the Knapp School of Music in Chicago, playing trumpet in a small band jazz. If you read his work closely, you can see the influence of jazz in his verbal phrasings and improvisations.

Then, there is the Tuscarora—and, overall, the Haudenosaunee—tradition of high athletic achievement. Iroquois people have long excelled at running, lacrosse, and all sorts of Native games, which are little known to the outside world but still played on Iroquois reservations. In the early half of the 20th century, a Tuscarora man named Frank Mount Pleasant gained fame at Carlisle Indian School, where he

starred in track and field and football. He competed twice in the Olympics and was the quarterback of the famous football team that featured Jim Thorpe. Mount Pleasant was also one of the first quarterbacks to use the forward pass as an integral part of the game. After graduating from Dickinson College, Mount Pleasant went on to a career as a coach, including being the head football coach at the University of Buffalo. (Mount Pleasant's coaching career was cut short by the First World War, during which he served as a first lieutenant in an African American battalion.)

Although Ted Williams did not gain fame in football, he was a dedicated athlete for his entire life. As both an amateur and a professional, he won numerous championships in archery, before turning in his later years to disc golf, for which he won five world championships.

There's also another more modern tradition among Haudenosaunee of doing work in construction—such as the celebrated history of Mohawks and other Iroquois men (and women) doing high steel work. In Ted's case, he found that he had a talent in the highly skilled occupation of being a crane operator. It became the profession that he followed from 1954 until his retirement in 1990.

The Indigenous tradition, though, that comes most into play in the writing of Ted Williams is storytelling. Those who knew (and almost always loved) Ted knew how much storytelling was woven into the fabric of his life. You could not be around him for more than a few minutes before he started telling stories—often about the people he'd grown up around on the rez. Stories have always served at least two purposes among the Haudenosaunee. On the one hand, they are entertaining—which ensures that they will be listened to and remembered. On the other hand, they contain lessons—teachings

that might otherwise go unnoticed or forgotten. And that is how Ted's memorable stories—whether written or told—always were.

I'll never forget, for example, a story Ted shared with me. When he was very young, he said, he was told that no one ever suffered from tooth decay. That was because of green snakes, a harmless little snake the color of the grass. Every child was told to catch a green snake, gently bite along its body from its head to its tail and then say thank you and let it go. He'd never done that himself. Green snakes had pretty much disappeared by the time he was a child. Maybe because of all the pollution in the rivers. But he'd always wondered if that was true. He was on the Six Nations Reserve one day and knew that just over the hill a bunch of elderly Cayuga men were living. They were old enough to have been kids when green snakes were still around. So, he decided to go ask them if they'd ever heard of that practice. "But" he said, "I never did ask them." Why was that? "Because when I got halfway down the hill, I could see them. They were all sitting under a hickory tree and cracking the nuts with their teeth."

His first book, *The Reservation*, was published in 1976, the year the United States was celebrating its bicentennial, somewhat of an irony when one considers the fact that the American Revolution might never have succeeded had it not been for the uncelebrated support of Ted's Tuscarora ancestors who brought food to the starving armies of General George Washington at Valley Forge.<sup>1</sup>

Ted's book can be described as a classic of Native writing for more reasons than one. Not only is it an intimate glimpse into the world of a northeastern Native community in the second half of the 20th century—at a time of great challenges and changes and determined

resistance—but it is also wonderfully readable. Its accuracy in its depictions of everyday Tuscarora people going about their lives is matched by the gentle humor found on just about every page.

I'll also never forget my first encounter with Ted's writing in a 1970s issue of *The Conservationist*, where his story of the annual hunting contest on the reservation between the "Old" (married) and "Young" (unmarried) men was first published. That story and all the others in *The Reservation*—such as his telling of how his Tuscarora relatives and neighbors tried to resist the illegal taking of their land by New York State—remain just as fresh, meaningful, and readable today as when the book first came out almost half a century ago.

His second book, *Big Medicine From Six Nations*, published in 2007, shortly after his passing, was no disappointment to anyone who loved his first.<sup>2</sup> It was even more intimate and unpredictable than *The Reservation*. Ted's own wonderfully quirky life is often a focus of his anecdotes, ghost stories, and musings on following the Longhouse way, as he "tried to keep track of Einstein's way, too." To get a sense of the wild ride, *Big Medicine from Six Nations* takes you on; all you have to do is read the dedication page:

This book is dedicated  
to the Little People  
and to all the False Faces,  
and to all Benevolent Entities of this  
and all other galaxies  
and to the Periodic Table

It then opens with a "Dear Readers" note followed by a "Prelude to the Prelude," then followed by a "Prelude to the Thanksgiving Address," that leads into

Ted's own version of the "Words Before All Others," (as the Thanksgiving Address is referred to among all of the Six Haudenosaunee Nations). It's a heartfelt and explicated mixture of English and Tuscarora, that is about as new and old as those sacred words can be. It's full of the straightforward love and inclusive respect that was part of everything Ted Williams wrote.

The Thanksgiving Address is also how he ended *Big Medicine from Six Nations*. Its last paragraph is as good way as any to end this essay about Ted Williams' extraordinary life.

"If we have forgotten any Elements and left them out, let them speak for themselves, for all the Elements are more Divine than we are, being as they are unable to tell a lie or have ulterior motives." ▼

#### NOTES:

1. Williams, Ted C. 1976. *The Reservation*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
2. Williams, Ted C. 2007. *Big Medicine from Six Nations*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Joseph Bruchac is a writer, musician, and traditional Native storyteller whose work often reflects his American Indian (Abenaki) ancestry and the Adirondack Region of northern New York where he lives in the house he was raised in by his grandparents. He is the author of over 120 books for young readers and adults, including the award-winning volume *OUR STORIES REMEMBER, American Indian History, Culture and Values through Storytelling*. Photo by Eric Jenks.



# Historic Preservation in Far Rockaway

BY NANCY SOLOMON

**It's hard to believe** that it will be 10 years this fall since Superstorm Sandy struck New York. I know that many of you have clear memories of that day and the following weeks, and we all hope that you have recovered, although we also know that "recovery" is never complete after such traumatic events. I thought I would share with you a little of my story, as it relates to the bungalows of Rockaway, which are featured in the award-winning documentary film *The Bungalows of Rockaway*.

As I heard the rain pounding on our windows of our apartment in Roslyn Heights, I found myself thinking of bay houses and bungalows, among the most fragile structures on the South Shore. When I was finally able to go out, I saw blocks and blocks of my neighborhood covered with tree branches, a visual scene that was replicated throughout Long Island. We were fortunate because we live on high ground in a brick building. When power was restored the following Friday, we were able to see the heartbreaking damage of thousands of homes along the South Shore and, of course, the destruction of much of Far Rockaway. Like many of you, we tried to help as best we could.

One week after Sandy hit, I received an email and a phone call at my office from the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHP), based in upstate Waterford. A few months before, we had submitted a National Register nomination for the bungalows of Far Rockaway, located on Beach 24–26 streets—bungalows originally built in the late 1920s, with few changes in the following years. After much fine tuning of the application, it was scheduled for a formal vote for December 13, 2012. However, with

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Superstorm Sandy, the nomination was in limbo, as most of us suspected that the bungalows were severely damaged. I was asked to go there and report back with photos and observations.

One of the immediate effects of Superstorm Sandy was the isolation of the Rockaway Peninsula, including Far Rockaway. Residents fled if they could, but many could not. At the same time, outsiders were not permitted to go there unless they had a direct connection to someone who lived there. I was able to obtain a letter from NYSHPO that asked the authorities to allow me in. Then, there was the problem of gas for my car. As you may remember, gas supplies were also cut off for most of Long Island. Fortunately, I was given some gas from bayman Bill Hamilton, who was using his boat's gas to help people. I was very fortunate.

I knew that there were several bungalow owners who stayed through the storm, and most likely needed supplies and food. I called Richard George, founder of the Beachside Bungalow Preservation Association and resident of the bungalow district, to ask him what I could bring. He shared that he had set up an outdoor barbecue, so that he and his neighbors could cook and eat. Off I went to Fairway Market, where I found chicken, burgers, and other perishables that could be cooked and served.

When I arrived, I fully expected to see water in the streets, bungalows that had been pushed off their foundations, and a dangerous situation overall. Taking Nassau Route 878, I was one of only a few vehicles on the road, no doubt in part due to the gas shortage. In addition, most of the traffic signals were out, which made for some interesting driving. Finally, I arrived, just in time to provide food for lunch for the neighborhood. It was a heartwarming scene.

For those who have not met Richard George, he is truly a pioneer and largely responsible for saving the bungalows. He knew something that is extremely important: sand dunes can work. He also had set up enough grills to feed over 100 people at a time.

As I parked my car on Beach 24th street, I was struck by how everything looked the



Far Rockaway Bungalow on Beach 25 Street. Photo by Nancy Solomon.

same. No water in the streets, no bungalows off of their foundations, no windows missing. Sure, there was some visual remnants of how high the water had risen, and some debris here and there, but overall, it was an amazing sight. Why were the bungalows spared, I asked? The answers were varied, but here's what I think happened.

In the early 1990s, the local residents began planting beach grass at the end of the street near the boardwalk, so that eventually a dune would emerge. When I first started the historic survey in 2005, the dune was about 4 feet, just enough to prevent water from flooding into the street. By the time Superstorm Sandy struck, that dune was higher than the boardwalk. As a result, perhaps, the water veered west.

Another factor could be the location of the bungalows. The east end of Far Rockaway is just a short distance to the Rockaway Inlet. Through my research into storms and hurricanes, I have learned that the closer one is to an inlet, the less likely there will be a storm surge. As water hits an inlet, so I've been told, it will be pushed to the west on the west side, and east on the east side.

The other reason for the lack of damage could be the design of the bungalows themselves. Most are one-story, with low attics, so that windows are low to the ground and the

structure is more firmly situated. Sometimes, less is more when it comes to storm damage. Over the following weeks, I received calls from FEMA and the National Park Service, who wanted to see the bungalows and the bay houses that survived. The staff of these large agencies were as curious as I was as to why the bungalows showed little damage. From that point on, they recommended that residents begin planting beach grass to create dunes, a scene we saw happening throughout coastal communities in the following months.

And so, on December 13, 2012, the bungalows were recommended for listing on the New York State and National Register of Historic Places. We were very happy to see this. As some of you might recall, a similar community at West Meadow Beach was also listed, only to be demolished in 2004. We were glad to see that NYSHPO came to recognize that bungalows are important and worthy of preservation. ▼

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# Bob Hockert's All-New York Whiskey Barrels

BY ROBERT HOCKERT

*Editor's Note: The Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library was gifted a used oak whiskey barrel late last year to add to its Folk Arts Collection. And this is no ordinary barrel. It is the first, all New York product, both the whiskey and the barrel, since Prohibition. Here's the whole story, told to us by Bob Hockert, Master Cooper of US Barrel:*

To get a better idea of just how this came about, first one must understand how the business, US Barrel, started. I actually started in the summer of 2004, when I left my job in Manhattan to “retire” at our home in Wilmington, New York. A lifelong woodworker, I founded a company called Adirondack

Sauna, LLC, to fill a void in the availability of tradespeople in the Northeast, specializing in traditional Finnish hot rock saunas. Curiously, as soon as I did, I began getting calls wondering if I was the person who had built their “barrel” sauna. It turns out that a gentleman from area produced a simple cylindrical



According to Bob: “These are the very first “tight” barrels I made. They each hold about 650 ml, are made from *Q alba* white oak, charred inside, and were used as an initial test for flavors. These were not made from New York oak and were obviously too small for any production, but are, arguably, the first barrels coopered in New York since prohibition. *All photos courtesy of The Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls, New York.*



Bob Hockett's employee, Justin Bidelspach, with the first of the two 5-gallon, all-New York oak barrels during coopering. This stage is known as "raising" the barrel, wherein the staves are set on end, bound in place and ready for steaming.

"barrel" sauna many years prior, and folks were looking for replacements, etc. I eventually began brokering a true, coopered barrel out of the Midwest to fill this void, but was unhappy with the quality of the product. After some design and engineering, I began building a true, bent stave, fully coopered barrel sauna from Northern White Cedar, shipping them coast to coast. These were, indeed, true barrels, 8 feet in length and 6 feet in diameter, and I became, unknowingly at

the time, as a "slack cooper," a cooper who builds barrels to keep water out, not in.

One winter, I was at a fundraising event in the Hudson Valley at the request of a friend, with a full-sized barrel sauna on the trailer in tow behind my truck. Leaving the event, I was waiting at a stoplight when a gentleman frantically ran across traffic to the truck and asked for a business card. I gave him one, drove off, and never thought anything

about it. The next day he called and asked where I got the barrel, and I told him I built it—to which he said, while it was obvious that I built saunas, he was more interested in where the barrel came from. I explained that I built the barrel myself, and he promptly explained I could not have, as there were no coopers in New York State. I explained that he was wrong, that I had built it and dozens more, sent him to my web page to see the photos of them being built, etc.

After about 30 minutes, I finally had him convinced and asked what this was all about. His name was Angus McDonald, and he was the master distiller at Coppersea Distilling. He had been looking for years for someone to build him barrels for his distillery. I explained that I didn't do "tight work," that I didn't work in hardwoods, and told him that I wasn't interested in the investment of time, energy, and money to learn a new discipline in coopering. After all it's not just like going to the local school and learning how it's done.

I asked why he was so interested in having *me* build barrels, and he said it was because he wanted to have an all-New York product. The grain, the water, the bottles, the labels, the barrel, and even the wood for the barrel all would be from New York. I respectfully declined and thought that was that.

The next day he called again, and asked if I had changed my mind, and I said no. He called the day after, same story. Every day for a month he called, and finally, I caved.

It took some time and effort. I started small, *real* small, and built a tiny little, 650 ml fully coopered white oak barrel, 3-1/4" in diameter—you can hold it in the palm of your hand. I filled it with water, and it was totally tight. I'll never forget that moment—I was hooked. I built a couple more, sent them to him; he filled them and entered the data into the distillery production log—we were on our way. There were two problems, though—they were obviously too small to be of use



Copy of photo from US Barrel Facebook page. According to Bob, "That's Angus McDonald doing the heavy lifting and me steadying the barrel during the ceremonial filling..."





Justin and Bob with the first, fully completed, 5-gallon barrel for Coppersea. In the background, there is a 1-gallon to the right of Justin, and a 650-ml to the left. The photo was taken on July 14, 2014, and it was just 10 days later that the two barrels were filled at the distillery. Bob notes, "We were on an extremely tight timeline, as there were rumors swirling about that someone else was about to release an all-New York product in July of 2014, as well. As it turns out, the rumors were off, and it would be another five years before anyone else did the same."

in production, and they were not made from New York oak.

The plan I had was to start small, learn as I went, source the New York oak along the way and move to larger barrels. I figured if I could build tight little barrels, the precision needed to do so would scale naturally into the larger sizes. The next step up was a one-gallon barrel, which also worked perfectly, and then on to a five gallon one. By the time one gets to this size, some serious machines are needed, however. It took some time, but I built the equipment needed to go all the way to a 30-gallon barrel. I also found a good source of wood from a mill just outside of Hudson, New York, and an excellent machine shop in Plattsburgh to help with the machinery.

My one employee, Justin Bidelspach, was now well versed in the art of coopering, and after some time, the two of us produced a pair of perfect, all-New York, charred white oak (*Quercus alba*) barrels, perfect for making whiskey. On July 24, 2014, I drove the two barrels to the distillery, had a little photo shoot, filled the barrels, and made a tiny bit of history.

Eleven months later, they were emptied and refilled for another round of aging. I temporarily lost sight of what was going on, as we were now incredibly busy in the world of whiskey. It was in the summer of 2017, during a delivery of barrels to Coppersea, that I saw the two original barrels sitting in the distillery, empty. As I had never billed them for

these barrels, I decided that one should remain at the distillery, and one should come back to the cooperage. I brought one back and lent it to a local distiller, Gristmill Distilling, in Keene, New York, for use in an experiment. Upon completion, it was taken back to the cooperage in Wilmington, until reaching its new permanent home at the Crandall Folklife Center. ▼

Robert Hockert is a Master Cooper and owner of U.S. Barrel LLC, founded in 2004, as a family owned and operated cooperage, handcrafting a wide range of products for distilled spirits and brewing industries, using only sustainable harvested Northern grown woods.

# K's Ghost City: Haunted by New York's Vanished Sites

BY KATHRYN ADISMAN

INTRODUCTION AND AFTERWORD BY STEVE ZEITLIN AND MOLLY GARFINKEL

*Anyone who has lived in New York for any time soon becomes aware of “Ghost Sites,” places too soon relegated to memory. As part of City Lore’s Place Matters project and the Census of Places that Matter, we struggle with how to think about and address vanishing sites, especially during this COVID-19 era. Our longtime friend, writer Kathryn Adisman has a unique take on the subject, and we invited her to contribute to City Lore’s guest blog for us, which we share here with Voices, focusing, in part, on Bleecker Street in the West Village.<sup>1</sup> In our Afterword and in the accompanying collage by the artist Elaine Norman, we take a walk across Bleecker Street today.*

## Why Write About “Ghost Sites”?

As the co-owner of Vegetable Garden on Bleecker Street said to me less than a week before his shop closed in 2005: “You can write about it all you want, it won’t change the outcome.”

He was right: I couldn’t change the outcome.

With one crisis jostling the next for position—resignation of New York’s longtime Governor; #MeToo movement; pandemic variants; Black Lives Matter; Taliban take-over; disasters caused by climate change; hate

crimes; gun violence; war in Ukraine; Wall Street tumbling as inflation soars ... the list goes on (Did I leave something out? Only a little SCOTUS decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* that guaranteed a woman’s legal right to an abortion—oh, that’s all!)—amid everything demanding our attention now, why focus on lost places—things we can’t do anything about, that are in the past? What’s the point?

You might as well ask, “What’s the point of our lives?” It’s about leaving behind evidence of our existence. These places are us. Our NYC! They tell a story about what made New



Walking today on Bleecker Street. Photo collage by Elaine Norman.



Grace Church School, graduating class of 1963. Photo courtesy of Gwendolyn Nunez Lucyshyn.

York, New York. After we're gone, who will know there ever was a New York City with variety and "verve"—to quote another shop owner about what we are losing—if we don't bear witness to a time and place and pinpoint the moment, *as it is passing?*

What I am interested in preserving is my "relationship" with these unique places and the people behind them. This personal relationship is what's lost when a local business is replaced by a national chain. There was a time on Bleecker Street when the places I loved had vanished, yet I still "saw" them with my New Yorker's double vision, more vivid and real to me than what was really there. You could say I am haunted by these "ghost sites"; places that I once haunted now haunt me. BOO!

My whole life's journey comes down to a search for home, which I lost as a child and

found in my "relationships" with places that are literally the ground beneath my feet. Homes away from home.

What makes me uniquely qualified to write about the City? For me, it's personal. My mother's family was in real estate, and my father was evicted by Donald Trump. The quintessential battle between landowner and shop owner is in my DNA. I *am* New York! I combine two categories of New Yorker that E. B. White names in *Here Is New York*: the native and the settler.<sup>2</sup> I am both a native who grew up on the grid of the Upper East Side and a settler who landed elsewhere: off the grid in Greenwich Village. In her memoir, *A Freewheelin' Time*, Suze Rotolo writes, "Greenwich Village is a calling."<sup>3</sup>

I answered the call!

## Part I

### *Off the Grid*

The first time I traveled Downtown from the Upper East Side, taking the subway by myself, at 11, to start 6th grade at Grace Church School, I fell in love with Greenwich Village and vowed, "When I grow up, I'm going to be a writer and live in the Village. Like Bob Dylan!"

It took 20 years, but I kept my vow. To quote Edward Albee, "Sometimes, it's necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly."<sup>4</sup>

That long distance took me as far away as Cambridge, England, the Midwest, and Baltimore, where I'm nicknamed "The Walker," until NYU grad school called me home. My return in 1982 coincided with New York

City's real estate boom. I came back to a very different city from the one I left and settled in a very different neighborhood from the one I grew up in.

I defected (Is there any other word for it?) from the grid. I became a denizen of this maze called the West Village, where streets have names and go off on an angle of their own. And where West 4th St. and West 10th St. can intersect.

The most important thing to be said about the West Village is: It is "off the grid" of linear streets that most of Manhattan was designed on and that I grew up within. No matter how many moves we made when I was a child—up and down Third Avenue to Forest Hills, Queens, to Park Avenue—we always remained inside the grid. But when I came back to "Noo Yawk" (my nickname in Ann Arbor!), after exile in "America" with nothing to show for it but a divorce and a Master's in poetry, I took up residence off the grid—"Downtown" (Can you hear the song by "First Lady of the British Invasion" Petula Clark? Siren call to teenage girls of 'The Sixties!')<sup>5</sup>—in the small town of the West Village. Symbolically, you could say I had disappeared off the face of the Earth, as my family knew it.

**FLASHBACK September 2001:** Two weeks after 9/11, my Aunt Bea, who lives at the other end of the Earth from me, in the last building on the last block on East End Avenue next to the East River, invites the family to dinner for Rosh

Hashanah. Uptown, on the Upper East Side, the air is pure; you can breathe. It's a different City. Here, no hint of anything remotely out of the ordinary taking place is visible; you would never know, for instance, there was a terrorist attack. My Aunt is worried about Leslie, my half sister, who lives in the safe harbor of the same Madison Avenue apartment since she was 5 years old, but who knows somebody who knows somebody who died in the attacks. She's visibly shaken. There's a photo taken at dinner of Leslie and me, where she is literally holding onto me for dear life. Poor Leslie! vs. Me. Yours truly—whose dwelling is a one-room hovel in a four-story walkup on a side street Downtown, two Express subway stops from the burning buildings—Who am I to complain of the stench of burning flesh? I had no business being "down there" in the first place. It's my own fault somehow for being "off the grid." "What are you DOING down there?" my Aunt confronts me, oblivious of the fact I've been "down there" almost 20 years. "I LIVE down there; it's my HOME!"

The City seemed to adopt my family's point of view, of guilt by association, when a fence of police barricades was installed at 14th Street, which became a crossing point (another was set up at Canal Street, the gateway to TriBeCa), where you had to show a photo ID in order to pass. As I lived just inside this makeshift ghetto, I was allowed to cross the border. But oh, how humiliating to be treated like an illegal alien in your own hometown. *I'm an alien. I'm a legal alien....*

Long before 9/11, I used to joke, "Manhattan's moved to Brooklyn!" Not for me. When my landlady offered to sell me the Jane Street studio where I'd been perching for 20 years—always on the lookout for somewhere else—suddenly, I could not picture myself anywhere else but here. I'd turned into one of those old West Villagers overnight. There's a kind of salvation in place.

Wandering the circular streets with my yellow pad of Post-it Notes—*Who am I? Trudy, the bag lady that Lily Tomlin plays in A Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe, homing in on the psychic radar?*<sup>6</sup> I jot down cultural observations (a perfect mating of form and content—what are Post-Its but ephemeral pieces of paper doomed, like our times, to disappear?). I feel like the British sculptor, Andy Goldsworthy, who builds structures predestined to be short-lived—for example, sandcastles—then photographs them to preserve their mortal existence.<sup>7</sup> I used to hate him for being a fraud. Now I understand; this is what I do—scrawl on scraps of paper words I can barely decipher, then attempt to save these fleeting thoughts by translating them into type, like I'm drawing on cave walls.

"This is archaeology—what you're trying to do," said Downtown poet and archivist Ron Kolm, a night manager at Coliseum Books when I interviewed him in the last days of the iconic bookstore.<sup>8</sup>

**FLASHBACK January 2002:** Four months after 9/11, Coliseum Books, one of Manhattan's last big independent bookstores, a neighborhood institution since 1974, closes its doors at Broadway and 57th Street, where it held court nearly 30 years from the dramatic entranceway, catty-corner—gateway to the Upper West Side. I'm hanging out in my reporter's hat. *Who am I? "Parker" K Madisan, film-noir narrator in my head? I'm here, reporting for Ghost City News: "When the Coliseum Books falls ... Rome, er, NYC falls. It's a sign, folks!"* This turns out to be more fact than fiction....

"Parker" wasn't the only one who saw it as a sign! "America became the very thing it rebelled against," said Kolm, who saw it as the end of an era, with a "blue-collar" bookstore, part of an alternative culture, succumbing to the upscaling of New York. He took a cyclical perspective, predicting a return to white flight after 9/11. He could have been talking about today, post-COVID. Customer Danny Kapilian, a concert producer, described the bookstore's central location as "a connecting hub" between Columbus Circle and



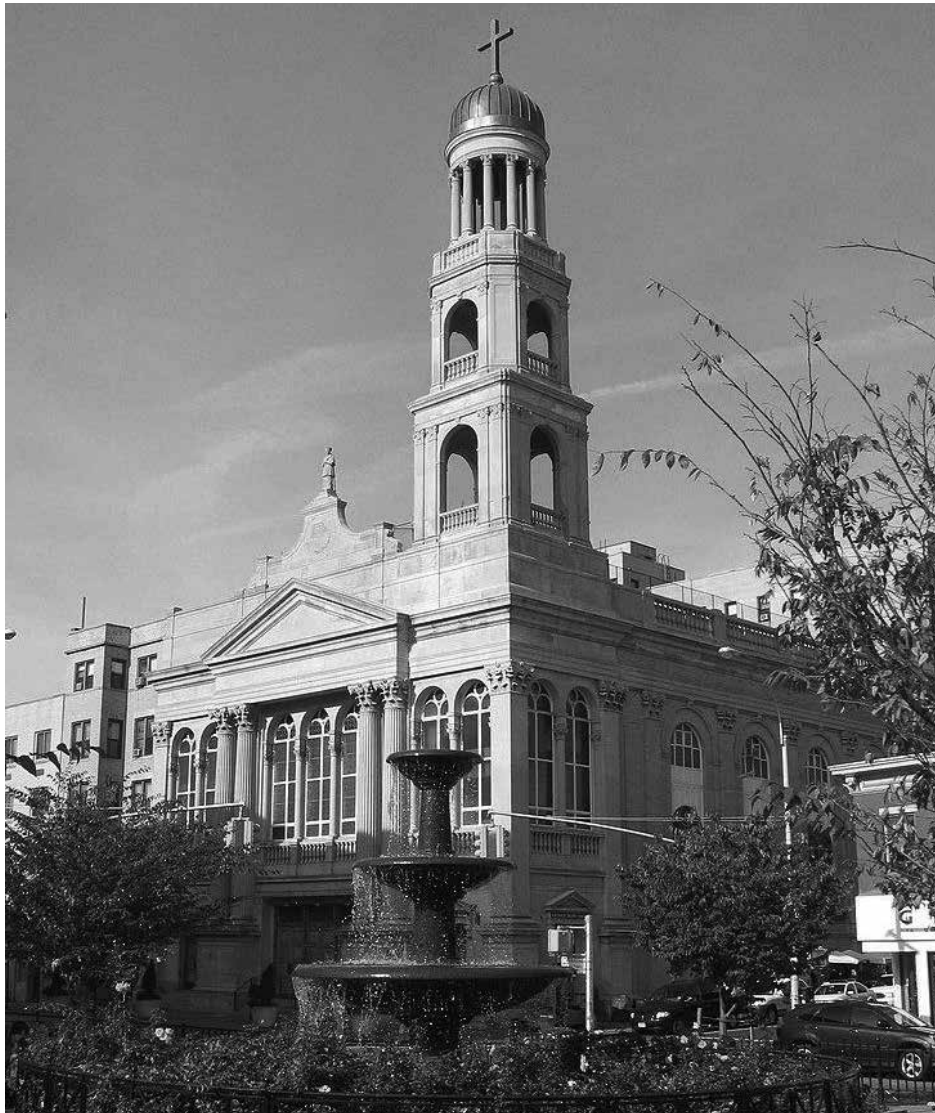
West Village Street sign. Courtesy: Kevin Walsh, *Forgotten New York*, <https://forgotten-ny.com/2021/10/4th-street/>

Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Times Square. “There’s something secure in the knowledge that certain places are around. Otherwise, you become a stranger in your own home.” Coliseum Books was one of those “secure signposts.” When the place closed, it felt like a chunk of NYC was missing, but its disappearance was presaged by the big “ghost site” in the sky.<sup>10</sup>

Little did I know then that I was about to become a habitual mourner at the wake of lost places. It’s not nostalgia; it’s about bearing witness to the moment of departure, the moment things start to change, the moment “*Twilight Becomes Night*.”<sup>11</sup> That moment happened for me in 2004 (Jeremiah Moss pinpoints almost the same exact Geiger counter moment as 2005, in *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul*).<sup>12</sup>



Both Towers burning (as seen from the West Village), September 11, 2001. Photo by Robert J. Fisch.



Father Demo Square and Our Lady of Pompeii Church. Photo credit: Public domain.

**FLASHBACK October 2004:** I’m strolling along the block of Bleecker Street known for its old-world charm, between 7th and 6th Avenues, leading to the corner where it meets up with Carmine Street, the steps of Our Lady of Pompeii Church and Father Demo Square, which I think is short for “Democracy,” but is really the name of a pastor; home to old-fashioned shops with European flavor, some of which have been here more than 40 years—Ottamanelli & Sons Prime Meats, Faicco’s Italian Specialties, Pasticceria Bruno and Rocco’s Pastry, Bleecker St. Records, Second Childhood, Matt Umanov Guitars—when I notice something. It’s a sign:

THIS IS MURRAY’S CHEESE. WHOLE-SALE RETAIL. EST. 1940 OLDEST, BEST

Murray’s, in its glossy reincarnation, faces its former shop, shuttered and dark, across the street, like an enormous fun house mirror. A STORE FOR RENT sign hangs above the gated storefront of the “old” Murray’s, whose modest “*This is Murray’s*” sign in dancing letters looks quaint. It was a cheese shop, and it turned into a gourmet store. Murray’s wakes me up.

Compare streets to a neighborhood of teeth in a mouth. You can’t uproot one and put it across from where it used to be. That’s the dentist’s daughter talking. The new Murray’s stands out like a gold tooth in an old mouth. It’s

abuted on one side by boarded-up shops. I lose my bearings. Where am I? Places are signposts. They orient us.

*The New Yorker* celebrated Murray's move in the same issue that it mourned the closing of the 80-year-old, family-owned bakery, Zito & Sons.<sup>13</sup> Another STORE FOR RENT sign above a description: "Bakery/Restaurant with two coal-fired brick ovens" is all that's left of Zito's. I got here too late. Documentary filmmaker Karen Kramer, a longtime resident of Leroy Street, off Bleecker, recalls: "A few decades ago, when I saw the neighborhood changing, I said to friends, 'The day that Zito's leaves, is the day I leave the Village also.' I knew it was safe to say that since I doubted that Zito's would ever leave."<sup>14</sup>

When Famous Joe's Pizza, immortalized in *Spider-Man 2*, closes at the end of October due to a rent hike (he moves into a smaller space on Carmine Street), it's a sign that Vegetable

Garden, neighbor in the corner building at Bleecker and Carmine, prime real estate, is next. I watch as a pedestrian tour guide ushers his flock into the one-of-a-kind shop, Aphrodisia, "an experience in ... herbs, spices and essential oils," demonstrating that specialty shops are an integral part of a sight-seeing tour—not sites the City will intervene to preserve, however, as corporate real estate interests dictate the future of our streets. Joann Pelletiere, owner of Aphrodisia Herb Shoppe, a "destination" on the "Downtown Loop," who has been here since 1969—longer than anyone, except Murray's—departs in 2010. Joann blames Mayors Koch and Giuliani for selling Times Square out to developers, which led to relocated porn shops and tattoo parlors popping up around the corner on 6th Avenue, aka Avenue of the Americas, the main drag (pardon the pun) of the West Village. I envision a day when nothing unique is left to see in NYC, and ghost buses barrel down Bleecker Street.

## On Bleecker Street

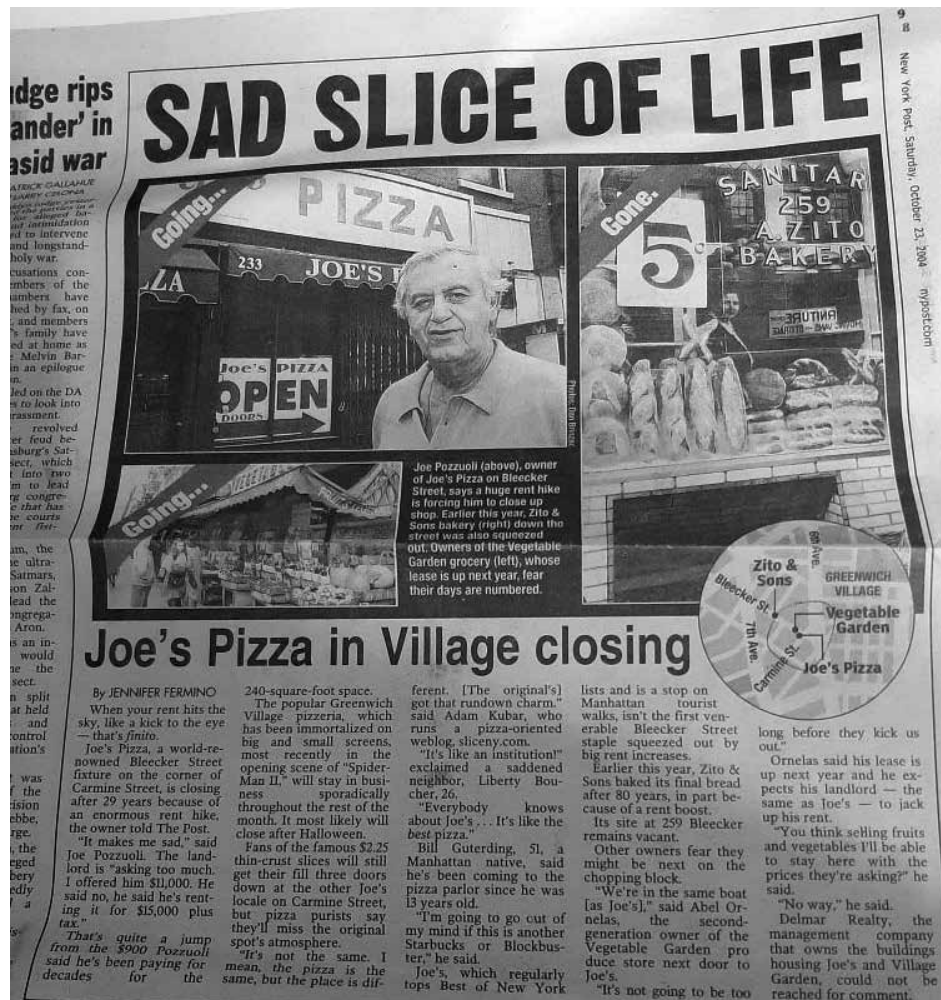
More than any other street in the City, this street has felt the imprint of my feet, on Bleecker—and off the grid. When I register the number of times I have traced this route across town, this is my territory, literally, my stomping grounds. If feet were hands—my Grauman's! I trod the blocks, on the stage of the street, up and down, back and forth, almost the entire width of the island, like an actor who treads the boards. *Who am I? Marlon Brando who plays longshoreman Terry* ("I coulda been somebody") Malloy, the whistle blower in *On the Waterfront*, evoking an era when the port of New York—New Jersey was a major harbor and longshoremen walked the docks, once upon a time?<sup>15</sup>

Bleecker was my crosstown route to the gym, Coles Sports and Recreation Center on Mercer Street, which also disappeared. It was on these walks that I got a pedestrian's-eye view of all the sights along Bleecker Street and could peer down side streets like MacDougal to glimpse the coffeehouses, comedy clubs, and night spots, including Caffè Reggio, Café Wha, and the Bitter End, dating back to Bob Dylan's day. Suze Rotolo recalls: "Bleecker Street was the Times Square of Greenwich Village...." (See Footnote #3).

Bleecker cuts a swath through the Village, a river of commerce and pedestrian traffic, from its source at Abingdon Square (the meeting of Hudson Street and 8th Avenue), where it wends its way leisurely, angling south and east, until it bottoms out on the Bowery. Carried along in its current, I put on the hat of the Tour Guide. Follow me! Down the river. My Mississippi.

Hop on a red double-decker tour bus. Hear what stories the guide tells the tourists. Did you know that ... "Billy Joel got his start on Bleecker Street"? "Robert De Niro grew up on Bleecker Street"? "\$30 pays your rent on Bleecker Street" in Simon & Garfunkel's 1964 song?

Tourists who used to be content to see the seven wonders of New York City—Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Empire State Building, WTC, Rockefeller Center, Radio City, Macy's, and Central Park—began taking rubberneck tours of my neighborhood. When I landed on Jane Street in 1984 (Was Orwell sending



### Joe's Pizza in Village Closing

By JENNIFER FERMINO  
When your rent hits the sky, like a kick to the eye—that's *finito*. Joe's Pizza, a world-renowned Bleecker Street fixture on the corner of Carmine Street, is closing after 29 years because of an enormous rent hike, the owner told *The Post*. "It makes me sad," said Joe Pozzuoli. The landlord is asking too much. I offered him \$1,000. He said no, he said he's renting it for \$15,000 plus tax. That's quite a jump from the \$900 Pozzuoli said he's been paying for decades for the

240-square-foot space. The popular Greenwich Village pizzeria, which has been immortalized on big and small screens, most recently in the opening scene of *Spider-Man II*, will stay in business sporadically throughout the rest of the month. It most likely will close after Halloween. Fans of the famous \$2.25 thin-crust slices will still get their fill three doors down at the other Joe's locale on Carmine Street, but pizza purists say they'll miss the original spot's atmosphere. "It's not the same. I mean, the pizza is different. [The original's] got that rundown charm," said Adam Kubar, who runs a pizza-oriented weblog, *sliceny.com*. "It's like an institution!" exclaimed a saddened neighbor, Liberty Boucher, 26. "Everybody knows about Joe's... It's like the best pizza."

Bill Gutterding, 51, a Manhattan native, said he's been coming to the pizza parlor since he was 13 years old. "I'm going to go out of my mind if this is another Starbucks or Blockbuster," he said. Joe's, which regularly tops *Best of New York*

lists and is a stop on Manhattan tourist walks, isn't the first venerable Bleecker Street staple squeezed out by big rent increases. Earlier this year, Zito & Sons baked its final bread after 80 years, in part because of a rent boost. Its site at 259 Bleecker remains vacant. "We're in the same boat [as Joe's]," said Abel Ornelas, the second-generation owner of the Vegetable Garden produce store next door to Joe's. "It's not going to be too

long before they kick us out." Ornelas said his lease is up next year and he expects his landlord—the same as Joe's—to jack up his rent. "You think selling fruits and vegetables I'll be able to stay here with the prices they're asking?" he said. "No way," he said. Delmar Realty, the management company that owns the buildings housing Joe's and Vegetable Garden, could not be reached for comment.

"Sad Slice of Life: Famous Joe's in Village Closing," *New York Post*, October 2004. Photo courtesy of Gretchen Torres De Ornelas.



Aphrodisia Herb Shoppe, with its elaborate window display, where a cat is usually luxuriating. Photo courtesy of Jeremiah's Vanishing New York blog, ca. 2010, Philliecasablanca's Flickr.

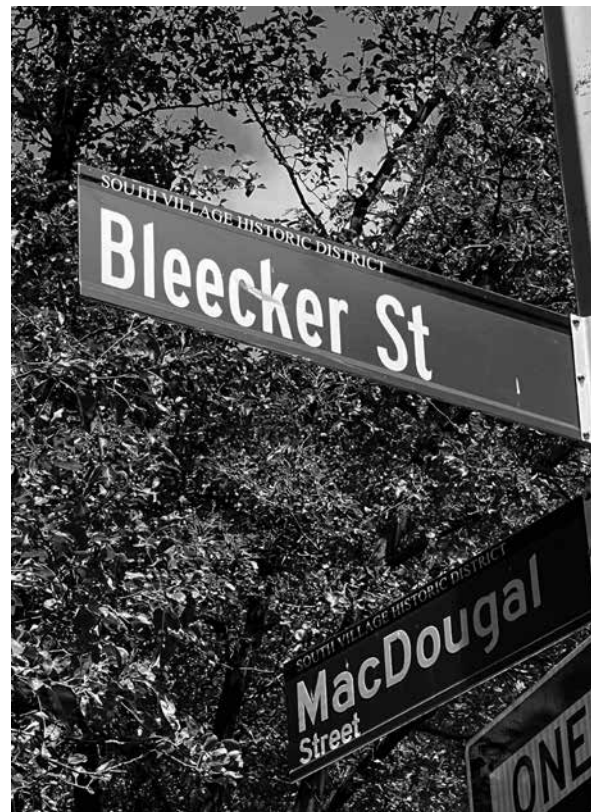
me a sign?), the West Village—with its mix of industrial, commercial, and residential uses or “mixed use,” a term coined by urban visionary Jane Jacobs who revolutionized the way we think about cities—was not just below the radar; it was off the map.<sup>16</sup>

It comes as a shock when, 16 years after I arrived, my hardly fashionable neighborhood is “discovered overnight.” I stare in disbelief as double-decker tour buses disgorge passengers in front of Magnolia Bakery and people line up for cupcakes the way they used to line up for Woody Allen movies. Blame it on *Sex and the City*. Who knew this boom would boomerang?

Biography Bookshop (with its outdoor book tables, a whiff of old London), upholding the corner at West 11th Street and the majestic Toons Thai restaurant (once a prison fortress),<sup>17</sup> holding down the corner at Bank Street, a pair of immovable pillars, both get swept away in a tsunami of designer boutiques. Bleeker Street between 7th and 8th

Avenues morphs into Downtown's Madison Avenue. In 2010, Marc Jacobs takes over the bookshop's corner location, with his cleverly named Bookmarc, selling coffee table art books and New York-centric lit, esoterica, handbags, and iPhone cases with the designer's name, which he branded on the brick and mortar of his six shops—all except Bookmarc abandoned to shuttered storefronts, but not before altering the character of the block that once upon a time was Antique Row. Bookmarc, Biography Bookshop's reincarnation in a smaller space further east on Bleeker Street, gives up the ghost in 2019.<sup>18</sup> BOO!

My first ever trip to Bleeker Street took place in the 1960s, ushered there by my uncle the *flâneur* and original Tour Guide. Uncle Richard introduced me to John's of Bleeker Street “No Slices” (still here!), which he proclaimed, “the best pizza in NYC!” This was tantamount to the official stamp of approval. My uncle was the self-appointed authority on everything. He didn't have a job. His office



Bleeker was my crosstown route. Photo by Robert J. Fisch.



“See the Sights!” Courtesy of Citysightsnyc/Wikimedia Commons/CC By 3.0.

was the NYPL, Main Branch. He patrolled the City in his trademark uniform of baseball cap and broom, slung over one shoulder, like a rifle. “Capitalism,” my uncle declared, “is the dragon that eats its own tail.”

His words come back to me, as I witness small businesses, built by immigrants like my grandfather who came here in search of the American Dream, getting consumed by conglomerates. I find out that my own great grandfather lost his business to the supermarket. I am the great granddaughter of a grocer!

### **Vegetable Garden**

No wonder I’m drawn to the Portuguese greengrocer at the corner of Bleecker and Carmine across from the steps of Our Lady of Pompeii Church, overlooking Father Demo Square, “the pushcart block” in the “Italian” South Village—my favorite shop in the City, until, like “Famous Joe’s,” it gets pushed out.



John’s of Bleecker Street. Uncle Richard’s favorite! Photo by Sharon McGee, Flickr.





Corner building at Bleecker and Carmine, home to Vegetable Garden and Joe's Pizza. Photo courtesy of Jennifer De Ornelas Nobriga.

“Nuts and Dried Fruits” says the sign above the storefront. Add freshly squeezed orange juice, gallon tins of olive oil, jars of artichoke hearts, canned ripe tomatoes, *broa* (Portuguese corn bread), BoraBora lemonade, La Squisita, Guaraná (Brazilian soda), *bacalao* (dry salted cod), and seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables—great produce at low prices.

Like so many customers, I would come for the variety, as well as the unique product—canned Portuguese sardines. It was the only place in Manhattan I could find them in olive oil with skins. Abel would order them for me personally. There was a gruff charm in the way he seemed bemused by me, “The Sardine Lady.”

Co-owner Abel Ornelas embodied the shop, which smelled of the outdoors—of earth and life. The *New York Times Metropolitan Diary* even wrote about Abel—a greengrocer who quotes Plato!

“There’s people behind places,” said Coney Island USA’s founder and creator of the Mermaid Parade, Dick Zigun, when he lost his place on the boardwalk in 1995.<sup>19</sup> “The loss to the City is the loss of a certain type of person in the City.”

Abel’s family had roots on the block. Coming to this country in 1961, at 12, Abel lived

around the corner on Carmine Street in a building that belonged to his uncle. He can remember pushcarts on Bleecker Street that once upon a time was Greengrocer Row. His whole life was encompassed by the store. He married his childhood sweetheart the same year the store opened!

The attraction of these small business owners is visceral. Abel’s got that charisma, common to entrepreneurs, going all the way back to the original prototype: my handsome, invincible Dad. He was James Bond and Superman to me, but he couldn’t conquer the real estate industry. NYC real estate mogul Donald Trump bought the building next to The

Barbizon Plaza Hotel—my father’s building, where his office had always been—and got a court order of eviction.<sup>20</sup>

**FLASHBACK October 31, 1987:** Happy Halloween! On the last day, I show up to help Dad move out. It was my building, too! *Once upon a time, at 100 Central Park South ... she was the little girl who visited “Daddy Ken” every Sunday after the Divorce in his “bachelor pad,” in the same building as his office, where they played Make Believe, but they could not escape the reality that Sunday would always end ... Today, the building is a condominium. The sign says: Trump Parc East. BOO!*

On the last day of the grocery shop, following Ron Kolm’s advice— “The chain stores have their place, good for petty acts of sabotage”—I buy a throw away camera at CVS (in 2005, I don’t own a smartphone) to record the moment, as it’s passing. Here is an excerpt from my “Valentine to Vegetable Garden”:



Abel Ornelas at legendary juicer. Courtesy of Gretchen Torres De Ornelas.

## Part 2

### Vanishing City, Vanishing Dream

*"Going out of business!"*

*"Lost our lease!"*

*"Everything must go!"*

The signs tell the story. As long ago as 1996, I wrote my proposal for *Vanishing City, Vanishing Dream*, a book mapping the disappearance of

New York City. By 2005, only a few signs remain. Alas, Bleecker Street is better known for what was here once upon a time.

Matching my own double vision, like existing in two time zones simultaneously, the sign above CVS pharmacy, at the corner of Thompson Street, signals another era when this was a block of world-class jazz clubs and theaters. The sign reads, "Art D'Lugoff's Village Gate." Ray Charles sang there. I saw Charles Mingus play there! The Back Fence, the oldest bar/music



LOST OUR LEASE sign. Photo by Kathryn Adisman with throw away camera.

Saturday, February 13, 2005. It's the last day of Vegetable Garden, the only Portuguese greengrocer in the City, after 31 years on Bleecker Street, a neighborhood institution.

People from the neighborhood gather on the sidewalk outside the shop and weep. What they are mourning is not just the loss of a grocery but a relationship.

"They're taking part of our life away, and we won't find what they gave us here ever anywhere," says an elderly customer, going on to describe her relationship with the store as a relationship with human beings who care—a phenomenon increasingly rare in the new box stores and online businesses.

It wasn't about business, co-owner John (João) Pedro agrees. "It was about life outside the business."

A man shakes Abel's hand, formally. "Thank you for 30 years. I've been coming here since it opened."

"It's been a good run," admits Abel.

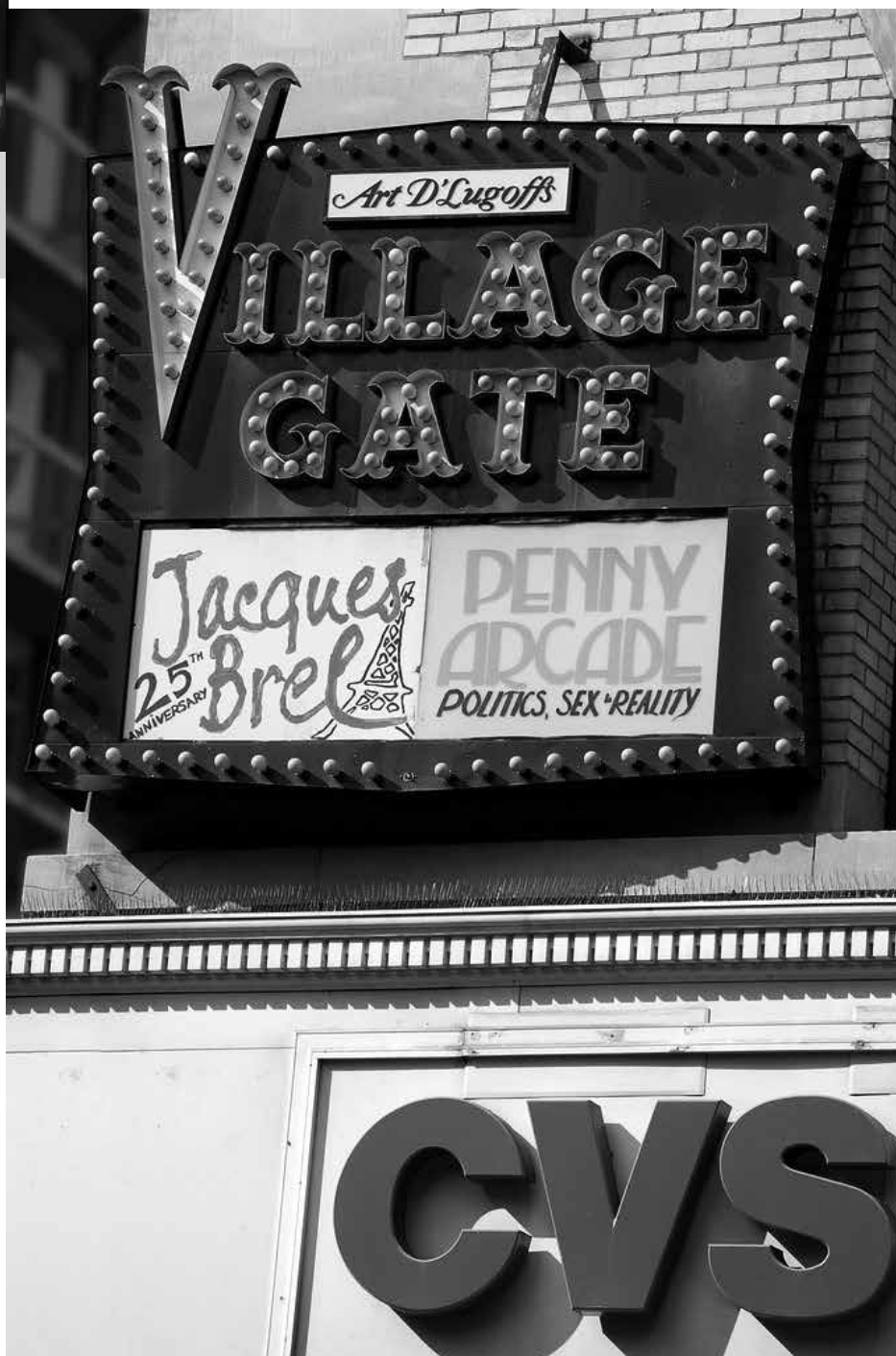
Somebody asks if he plans to go back to Portugal.

"I've been here since I was a child. I'm American. This is my country."

"How will we find you?"

"One day you'll see a sign: ABEL'S BACK!" The only sign you see is: "LOST OUR LEASE!"

Today an upscale chocolatier occupies that corner. BOO!



VILLAGE GATE sign, side by side with CVS, illustrates my NYer's double vision. Photo by Robert on Ludovic Bertron's Flickr.

venue still standing (It opened in 1945!), closes September 2013.<sup>21</sup>

The only “sign” of what was once Circle in the Square, an Off-Broadway theater, was the lower façade, otherwise unrecognizable after it was renovated into a modern apartment building by NYU. The biggest landlord in the Village, the University pays no taxes to the City due to its “nonprofit” status. Bleecker is home to Washington Square Village and Silver Towers complex, NYU’s initial dorm and faculty buildings.<sup>22</sup> Bleecker is also home to the Little Red School House, on 6th Avenue, founded by Elisabeth Irwin in 1921, one of the City’s first progressive schools, where my mother was a student, once upon a time.

Further east, a colorful cardboard cut-out sign was all that was left in 2005 of Kim’s Video Underground (former site of Bleecker Street Theater), gutted, and soon to be replaced by another branch of the drug chain with a name like a country-western star: Duane Reade.

Bleecker at Mott Street in Little Italy, the location of Manhattan’s Planned Parenthood, is the scene of abortion protests today. Perhaps, the whole history of Greenwich Village could be encapsulated by Bleecker Street. Where Bleecker ends: on the Bowery, “ghost site” of CBGB, birthplace of punk.<sup>23</sup>

Places like the Village Gate and CBGB can never be replaced (“The demise of CBGB’s democratic stage would mark not just the loss of a club, but of an iconic New York City

place; when Joey Ramone died in 2001, his memorial cropped up spontaneously outside of CBGB, then sprawled across the sidewalk for months. The club is emblazoned in the bacchanalian memories of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.” Steve Zeitlin, Director of City Lore, August 2005; CBGB closed in 2006). History was housed there, they were theatres of musical events, a live performance happened every night of the week.<sup>24</sup> All that will be left is the signs.

### **Caffé Dante—Side Trip to MacDougal, East of 6th Avenue**

The black and white shingle hung out over the street greets you like a Welcome Home sign ... No Wi-Fi! You’re stepping into another century...

Who could forget the little Italian ladies who sat in the window of the old Caffé Dante at the front table with the sign that says: RESERVED. I always wondered who it was reserved for.

“Us,” says Babe.

Sondheim can have his ladies who lunch; my ladies sip espresso with their gossip, the backs of their heads silhouetted in the store window, as in a painting. They’re part of the place. The round table at Caffé Dante was The Algonquin of Greenwich Village.

Their fame spread to the Upper East Side. At Lennox Hill Hospital, Babe overheard a man telling his mother about this café where

the ladies go every day. Babe said: “That’s me. I’m one of the ladies.”

It’s Babe who always said hello to me, who’d commiserate on my quitting smoking. Caffé Dante was one of the last places in the City (like La Bonbonniere Diner in the West Village) where you could still smoke.

Once upon a time, there were 10 at the reserved table, but by the end, there were only three. Babe and Eugenia and Jo, who had known each other 62 years. Neighbors in the same building. They reminded me of The Fates, spinning their tales of this one and that one. Once, I overheard a discussion of Jerry Lewis and his terrible appearance. If anyone would have the scoop on the breakup that was national news in The Fifties, it was our ladies!

**FLASHBACK 2002:** Today’s topic of discussion: The break-up of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, based on the made-for-TV movie that just aired:<sup>25</sup>

“What happened?”

I strain my ears to get the gossip—40-year-old news!

“For 20 years, they wouldn’t see one another! Sinatra and his daughter weren’t talking either!”

“What happened?”

“Poor Jerry! He blew up like a blimp! He explained it all on the Telethon...”

I lurk at my corner table in back *Who am I? Joe Gould, an eccentric writer with a hidden masterpiece, furiously scribbling scraps of “oral history” for posterity into notebooks that are never found?*<sup>26</sup> I have joined the ranks of unknown artists and writers who arrived in the Village from small towns in America; the only difference being that I come from the big town of another Manhattan, which looked askance on this one—outsider in my hometown, city of outsiders.

A week before it closed, longtime owner Mario Flotta, who should have been cast in a Martin Scorsese movie, was still denying it. But it was already gone—renovated past recognition, a ghost of its old self. In 2015, it was sold to Australians and changed its name from Caffé Dante to Dante, along with its menu and prices. The sign still hangs, but it no longer



Caffé Dante sign on MacDougal Street that waves you in. Courtesy of Jeremiah’s Vanishing New York blog, ca. 2014.



Glimpse of round table at window: Reserved for the ladies. Courtesy of Jeremiah's Vanishing New York blog, ca. 2014.

beckons me. Today's Dante has outdoor seating in (gasp!) white wicker chairs. What would the ladies say?! BOO!

### The Cornelia Street Café

Many of the “ghost sites” that haunt me are on spokes off the cog of Bleecker. Cornelia Street, a small side street, west of 6th Avenue, connecting the parallel streets of Bleecker and West 4th (the only two East–West streets that extend from the West to the East Village), was home to the fabled Greenwich Village restaurant, bar, and cabaret—The Cornelia Street Café—a magnet for artists that stood out, even in New York City, with its red doors and peppermint-striped awning.<sup>27</sup>

It started as a hole-in-the-wall with a toaster oven, rented by three artists in 1977, and became “a culinary as well as a cultural landmark,”<sup>28</sup> whose eclectic offerings ranged from science to songwriting, where Suzanne Vega got her start and Eve Ensler launched *The Vagina Monologues*, and where I saw John Oliver and David Amram perform. When it

closed, it felt like a light had gone out in the City. It was a beacon for the arts, a community gathering place, and a vital venue for spoken word and jazz, giving many artists a voice, of which I was one.

My “relationship” with the café goes back to 1985, when my friend from Baltimore, tap dancer and folk artist Michael “Toes” Tiranoff—another “settler”—who worked there as a dishwasher while studying with Tap legend Brenda Bufalino, got me a job waiting tables (before Lady Gaga!).<sup>29, 30</sup> Toes and I would meet for Sunday brunch at our favorite diner, The Bagel, around the corner on West 4th (Bob Dylan's haunt when he lived across the street with Suze Rotolo in his first apartment in the Village),<sup>31</sup> where Casey, the short order cook, stood in the window exhibiting his prowess with scrambled eggs, bacon, and grits. Toes reminisces: “I remember the French toast with the sausage links that came with little pitchers of melted butter and real maple syrup. The coffee was served in coffee cups that had a wire metal handle. I've only seen that before in a

diner in the film, *The Hustler*, with Paul Newman. I remember the outdoor table that was possible to get sometimes....” Most times, we'd squeeze our legs under the tiny counter and share our passion for preservation, only to lose our hangout.

My waiting tables job didn't last two weeks (I got fired for spilling cappuccino on the customers at the sidewalk tables), but my relationship with the café went on for decades—as restaurant patron in the upstairs dining room (a safe bet to invite family from Uptown or friends from Out of Town—charming Bohemian, but not “way out”) and as reader–performer in the downstairs cabaret.

One night, Toes and I went to see Robin read from his book of café stories. Writer Robin Hirsch, “Minister of Culture” and last of the original three artists who started the Café, was another “settler”—a German Jew who grew up in England after his parents fled the Nazis, so he had his own “double vision.”<sup>32</sup> After the reading, Robin joined us.

**FLASHBACK June 2014:** We're sitting around a bistro table at Cornelia Street Underground—Toes, Robin, and me—when Toes says, "I want to do a tap-dancing show here!" and I say, "I want to do a memoir show!" I notice Robin looks more interested in Toes' idea. **FAST-FORWARD six months:** The Aha! Moment. I jot down on a paper napkin the words, "Tapping into ..." "Tapping into ... the City" "Tapping into ... NYC" "Tapping into ... NEW YORK!" **A-HA!** Here is my original pitch for "Tapping into New York" December 7, 2014:

-----Original Message-----  
 Sent: Sun, Dec 7, 2014 8:08 pm  
 Subject: "TAPPING INTO NEW YORK": 2015  
 Att: Robin and Toes

I brought up the idea of doing a memoir evening and Toes suggested doing a tap night. Why not bring the two together in a collaborative event that combines memoir and tap dance? I'm thinking of generating backdrops in the listener's mind - sorta like duo of Astaire & Rodgers - only this would be cinema of the imagination, conjured by the crescendoing rhythms of the words on the page and the beat on the stage.

Here is Robin's reply to me one hour later:

On Dec 7, 2014, at 9:15 PM:

Marvelous notion. Am copying my various co-conspirators on this . . .

Robin Hirsch, Minister of Culture/Wine Czar/  
 Dean of Faculty  
 CORNELIA STREET CAFE  
 29 Cornelia Street  
 Greenwich Village  
 New York, NY 10014

"A CULINARY AS WELL AS A CULTURAL LAND-MARK"  
 Proclamation, City of New York, 1987

Long story short, I get offered a date for a gig in January. Next month! But Toes won't be available. So, there I am with a venue and no performers. Naively, I assume I'll read my memoir; the café will curate the lineup. *Are you kidding?* "We do 700 shows a year. That's *your* job! Do you want the date?" I consult my friend, the singer-songwriter Kendell Kardt.<sup>33</sup> Kendell says, "Go for it!" and is the first to sign on to be in the show! Without Kendell's support, I wouldn't have found the courage to take a risk. The moment I say, "Yes!" magically, everything falls into a place—I tell my friends in the Downtown spoken word community about

a gig at Cornelia Café, and they automatically enlist, and my student, John Townsen, an acrobat and clown, happens to know a tap dancer, Hank Smith, a stage manager on *Sesame Street*, who becomes our first feature!<sup>34</sup>—A show is born!

So, that was how I found myself producing, curating, and hosting shows at The Cornelia Street Café! Toes eventually features in the last show of the series, December 2016! I wasn't planning to produce another series when I heard the news...

**FLASHBACK October 13, 2016:** "The 2016 Nobel Prize in literature has been awarded to ..." Wait for it! ... **BOB DYLAN?!** Instantly, I recall a question my kid half brother, Bill Levine, asked me once upon a time.... **October 13 is my half birthday. It's a sign!**

<From: kathryn adisman  
 Sent: 10/13/2016 3:21 PM  
 To: kradisman@yahoo.com  
 Subject: "What were the Sixties REALLY like?"

Robin,  
 This was an actual question put to me by my half-brother who 12 years is younger. It occurs to me with Bob Dylan being awarded



Cornelia Street Café sidewalk seating under awning like a circus tent. Metro.us. Courtesy of The Cornelia Street Café.

the Nobel Prize in literature, that this is an award to a culture and a neighborhood that existed once upon a time, and some still remember. Cornelia Street Café being an offshoot of W. 4th street, it seems timely to do an evening about the Sixties.

Thanks for considering!

K  
Kathryn Adisman, curator/host  
Tapping into New York

From: [Robin Hirsch](mailto:Robin Hirsch)

Sent: 10/13/2016 4:43 PM

To: [kradisman@yahoo.com](mailto:kradisman@yahoo.com)

Cc: [jazzrebell@earthlink.net](mailto:jazzrebell@earthlink.net)

Subject: Re: "What were the Sixties REALLY like?"

lovely notion

let's see what we can do  
Christmas Eve?

Robin Hirsch

Minister of Culture/Wine Czar/Dean of Faculty  
The Cornelia Street Café

I pictured a few of us dichards gathered 'round a fireplace sharing our stories of the Sixties ... and that would have been that—if it weren't for Donald Trump being declared winner of the 2016 presidential election....

**FLASHBACK November 9, 2016,**  
**4:00 a.m.:** Weary, shell-shocked newscasters, stuck with the thankless task of Messenger, deliver the News to those of us who are still up. It's bad enough that Hillary won the popular vote and lost the election! I imagine my father rolling in his grave! I can't sleep! I have to *do* something! I wish ... there was something I could DO! Then, I realize there is! At 4 in the morning, I fire off an email to Robin and spoken word curator, Josh Rebell.

On Nov 9, 2016, at 4:09 AM,  
[kathryn.adisman <kradisman@yahoo.com>](mailto:kathryn.adisman@yahoo.com)  
wrote:

Robin and Josh:

I think we need that Sixties show, now more than ever. I think there's a lot of anger and fear and this election outcome just revolts against everything that was the promise of the Sixties, the revolution us Children of the Sixties believed we were part of. The revolution Bernie predicted is not the one we got.

Thanks for finding the right time, if you agree,  
Kathryn

Kathryn,

We agree the show makes a lot of sense right now. So we propose Friday January 20th: Inauguration Day...6:00 p.m. Please let us know by Monday if you'd like to accept.

Thanks!

Josh

"WOW!" to use an old '60s expression. I accept! And the rest is history! Thanks, Donald! It gives me satisfaction knowing that in this tiny corner of the globe, justice won!

*The Cornelia Street Cafe*  
29 Cornelia St., NYC  
212-989-9319  
[info@corneliastreetcafe.com](mailto:info@corneliastreetcafe.com)  
Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016  
6-7:30 PM – Hosted by K  
\$20 cover Includes 1 drink  
Reservations encouraged  
<http://www.nytap.org/tapex.html>  
<https://www.facebook.com/TAPPINGintoNY/>  
For more info, contact [kradisman@yahoo.com](mailto:kradisman@yahoo.com)  
<http://www.corneliastreetcafe.com/downstairs> Search by date: 12/13/16

*Kathryn Adisman*  
*Kendell Kardt*  
*Fred Simpson*  
*Ron Kolm*  
*Su Polo*

*Toes Tiranoff & Megan Haungs*  
Photo: Elliot Lieberman

# Tapping into New York

**'The Winter Solstice Show'...**  
Come join us for a celebration of the turning toward the light with an evening of tap dance, music, and storytelling that conjures the rhythms of the City - from the words on the page to the beat on the stage. *With:* Kathryn Adisman (K); Kendell Kardt; Ron Kolm; Su Polo; Fred Simpson. *Special Guest:* Fabulous Footlights, the Tap Dance Duo of Toes Tiranoff & Megan Haungs  
"Michael 'Toes' Tiranoff, a tapper whom Woody Allen might have created" – Jennifer Dunning, NYT

Flyer Design: Su Polo

*Tapping into New York: "The Winter Solstice Show." Special Guest—Fabulous Footlights: The Tap Dance Duo of Toes Tiranoff and Megan Haungs. Postcard design by Su Polo.*



“The Last Sixties Show” Finale, Cornelia Street Café, December 22, 2017. *Front row, left to right:* Ptr Kozlowski, Su Polo, Madeline Artenberg, Kathryn Adisman (“K,” *Center with mike*), Mindy Matijasevic, Rifka Kreiter, Davidson Garrett, Eve Packer. *Back row, partially blocked:* Michael Lydon, Ngoma Hill, Gordon Gilbert, Steve Dalachinsky, Tsaurah Litzky, Helen Peterson, Dorothy Friedman, Sparrow, Ron Kolm. *Not pictured:* Fred Simpson, drum; Ellen Mandel, piano.

“What Were The Sixties *REALLY* Like?” the series debuted on Trump’s Inauguration Day and was a “euge” hit, attracting enormous participation and featured in an article about alternative events.<sup>35</sup>

I didn’t send another pitch; I went to the monthly “artist” salon in February 2018. It was no secret by then that the Café was in trouble, so I was surprised when both Robin and Josh welcomed my idea for a Berlin-style cabaret ...

*Me:* Can we turn The Cornelia Street Café into the Kit Kat Club?

*Robin:* When?

... and we were booked for a first show in June. Coincidentally, Cornelia’s neighbor, Caffe Vivaldi on Jones Street, closes in June. It’s a bad sign. All around us, spoken word venues—Three of Cups Lounge and Sidewalk Café in the East Village—were disappearing.

Our last series, which paralleled the Weimar Republic during the rise of Hitler and our time of Trump, was titled prophetically, “Ghost City Cabaret” ...<sup>36</sup>



“Ghosts” of The Cornelia Street Café after our last show, December 21, 2018. Photo by Linda Kleinbub.

## **Weimar Republic meets Trump's America in this Contemporary Cabaret Variety Show about Disappearing NYC – aka 'Ghost City'**

... starring your g-Host—*Who am I? Joel Grey who plays the Emcee in the musical Cabaret? Or John Zacherley who plays the TV horror host, Zacherley?*—call me, “K.” I’m doomed to disappear also ... But first! Let’s go back to a moment when I am about to introduce our show starring Toes’ Tap teacher, the legendary Brenda Bufalino...

**FLASHBACK November 17, 2015:** Everyone spontaneously joins me onstage—the whole company crowding around the mike (My cousin Stephen Lewis, who said, “Only artists belong in NYC,” died a week ago). “Steve!” I say into the mike. “How right you are! And that’s why we’re here—Tapping into New York!” Here I am, surrounded by my fellow Downtown artists, all of us together onstage—this incredible moment of community—and the show goes on.

In the Show Finale, Bufalino, a mixed-genre artist, performed her memoir in song, story, and dance about once-famous 52nd Street, “Those Were the Days.” In the last chorus, Brenda sang, “THESE are the days!” and brought us all up onstage: “C’mon, Artists!” Brenda beckoned us to join her, once upon a time, at The Cornelia Street Café...

“Ghost City Cabaret” ended December 21, 2018; in little more than a year, everyone there that night would be prevented from gathering. Those were the days, indeed! On January 2, 2019—after 41-1/2 years—The Café vanishes, as if it never existed. Today, the space remains empty, the colorful awning furled—another “ghost site.” BOO!

## **Coles Sports and Recreation Center**

Even after an Equinox® luxury fitness club opened in my West Village neighborhood, true to my nickname, “The Walker,” I trekked

to NYU’s Coles Sports and Recreation Center—on Mercer Street between Bleecker and Houston Street at the border with SoHo—my destination.

Coles, dubbed “the jewel in the crown” of the university, welcomed thousands each day through its wide doors under a glass canopy. Designed by Wank Adams Slavin Associates, an offshoot of the architectural firm that designed Grand Central Terminal, the low-profile, khaki-colored brick building, with its modest exterior and rooftop track affording a panoramic view of the Village, blended into the context of the street and masked an oasis of space beyond those doors. Lying on my mat in the low-lit balcony that overlooked an atrium, I experienced solitude in the midst of community and made a deal with the devil, NYU, “the purple octopus that ate Greenwich Village!” just to belong there, my safe haven, a home away from home.<sup>37</sup>

My love-hate relationship with NYU spanned 50 years—as child of faculty, student, alum, community member, and finally, employee, when I was hired to teach Feldenkrais®, a method of somatic education, using gentle exercises that improve how you move by changing habitual patterns in the brain (<https://feldenkrais.com/>), one of hundreds of courses administered by Asst. Director of Recreation Gail Stentiford, the person behind the place. You couldn’t go

there without bumping into Gail in the lobby. She had the page-boy haircut and no-nonsense attitude of the seasoned jock.

**FLASHBACK Spring 2010:** One day, I muster my courage and approach Gail to ask about teaching weights to seniors. “Can you teach something else?” she fires back. “Feldenkrais,” I mumble, walking away, aware that a colleague is teaching it. Undeterred, Gail commands, “SEND ME YOUR RESUME!” Gail wasn’t someone you disobeyed. That summer, my colleague asks me to sub for her class. In the fall, she doesn’t return. Suddenly, there I am, teaching Feldenkrais *Awareness Through Movement*® ... for the next eight and a half years, thanks to Gail! Of all the “walks of life”—it affords me an opportunity to work in a place I love. Luckily, I don’t have to demonstrate; Feldenkrais is taught by giving verbal instructions. It’s an irony of my life that, thanks to 35 years of dance classes, I’m crippled with arthritis; yet, here I am, teaching in a gym!

At the last staff meeting, Stentiford, who built the Recreation program (Her career was bracketed by Coles from the time it opened in 1981, signaling a new era for NYU, which went from a commuter school when I attended as an undergrad in the late ’60s to a corporate institution), announced her



Entranceway to Coles, under a glass canopy. Photo by Jonathan Alpeyrie.



retirement: “NYU is a real estate maven,” she said. “This president [Sexton] won’t resign until the shovel is in the ground.”

Coles was demolished in 2016 to pave the way for a 21-story, multi-use “Zipper” building, slated to open Fall 2022, and to house a supermarket when the local Morton Williams is razed for a school for “special needs” kids. But NYU is renegeing on its promise to meet the “ordinary needs” of the community. I survived the move from Coles to a “glorified storefront” until I hung up my instructor’s hat and said goodbye for good to NYU in 2019. Today, the gargantuan glass-and-steel “Zipper” looms over the street, mirroring the predatory relationship of the University to its GV neighborhood. Thanks to my New Yorker’s double vision, the “ghost site” of Coles Center still resides ... in my memory and superimposes on the (frightening) reality. BOO!

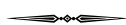
## Conclusion

Once upon a time, I was “The Walker.” NYC was a great pedestrian city. As my city was disappearing before my eyes—place by place—I was disappearing along with it, losing my mobility. Now, I walk in my imagination. I visit all the old haunts I am haunted by. And they visit me. BOO! No longer am I “The Walker”—seems like the City and me both got hobbled at the same time. Double-decker tour buses no longer barrel across Bleeker Street to see the sights.

## All Aboard

So, here is your free ticket to board the Ghost Tour Bus. Ghost bus don’t carry no tourists, and it won’t disturb traffic. I am your guide to all the places that are no longer here. As these places disappeared, I, too, have disappeared—a ghost of my former self. Follow me in my hat as Tour Guide to a Ghost City! BOO!

FIRST STOP: BLEECKER STREET!



## “Ghost Sites”—An Afterword

Colson Whitehead, like Kathryn Adisman, was struck by the presence of “Ghost Sites” in New York. “No matter how long you have

been here,” he writes in *The Colossus of New York* (London: Fleet, 2018), “you are a New Yorker the first time you say that used to be Munsey’s or that used to be the Tic Toc Lounge.... You are a New Yorker when what was there before is more real and solid than what is here now.”

In many ways, New York is a different city every 10 years. Preventing one’s presence from being built-over to accommodate new narratives or structures (whether architectural, social, political, or financial) is a continual challenge in the urban environment. This rapid change means that places—whether individual buildings, blocks, neighborhoods, or whole boroughs—are like palimpsests, ancient manuscripts or parchments used as writing material. Palimpsests contained text that was scraped off, so that the piece could be reused, leaving traces of earlier verses, ideas, stories, and identities still visible, if not legible, in the parchment.

A few days ago, Steve walked the length of Bleeker with photographer Elaine Norman. There is evidence that Bleeker is attempting a comeback. Certainly, the West Side of Bleeker, gentrified by Magnolia Bakery, whose cupcakes were made famous by “Sex and the City” is now lined with empty storefronts where high prices have left “Retail Space for Lease” signs on window after window. Yet, thankfully, the East Side and center of Bleeker still houses Overthrow Boxing, the marvelous Bessou restaurant, the revamped but still extant Murray’s Cheese, the Bitter End, even a shoe repair shop, and a crammed-in bookstore, Codex. But the only way to truly appreciate the vitality of the City is to give equal weight to the neighborhood’s past and its sometimes vital, sometimes shabby present. Grasp the vivid, touchable present, while keeping an eye on the shadows from the past. Walking on Bleeker Street, check out the present storefronts that cast the shadows, the “ghost sites.” Appreciate them equally with Kathryn’s “New York” eyes.

With past/present vision, we walk our New York streets remembering the dismembered city blocks—the present-day storefronts are brick and mortar, the rest are interior streetscapes of vanished sites, populated

with memories, places we need to reconstruct from the gossamer threads of remembrance to create architecture for the soul.

—Steve Zeitlin, Executive Director,  
City Lore, and Molly Garfinkel,  
Places Matter Program Director

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## Author’s Acknowledgments:

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Native New York writer Kathryn Adisman (“K”) conceived “Vanishing City, Vanishing Dream,” in 1995 and was sponsored by City Lore for a NYSCA grant. A former copy editor at *People* magazine and adjunct



instructor of composition at CUNY, Kathryn holds a Master’s in poetry from The Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars and an MFA in dramatic writing from NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts and is a Guild-certified Feldenkrais® practitioner. Her writing has appeared in, among others, *The Baltimore Sun*, *Baltimore* magazine, *WestView News*, *The Villager/amNY*. “K’s New York: Going Gone,” a virtual minitour at the City of Memory site, was featured in *The New York Times*: “Seeing the City Through the Memories of Others,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/nyregion/thecity/08disp.html>. Photo by Susan Rae Tannenbaum.

# In Memory of Carol Gregson (1925–2021)



Photo by Gene Ostertag.

*Used by permission of her family*

OLMSTEDVILLE—So long, it's been good to know you. The long, eventful, and celebrated life of Carol Gregson has come to a close. She died Friday morning, November 12, 2021. Born December 2, 1925, she was 95 years old.

She was predeceased by her husband of 27 years, Albert Allen Gregson; her parents: Sven Magnus and Martha Craney Wiberg; her brothers, Wally and Lloyd; her sister, Dorothy Delo; and by her sons, Eric and Lance, all of whom she expected would meet her as she passed.

She was known in the Adirondacks as the “Mother of all Gregsons.” Actually, Carol only had seven children: Kris, Eric, Barry, Kent, Blair, Jill, and Lance (in that order). She is survived by her sister, Shirley Corthell; her daughters: Kris Gregson Moss (Rich) and Jill Gregson Harris

(John); her sons: Barry (Darlene), Kent (Daisy), and Blair (Judy); her daughters-in-law: Jane Gregson and Anne Gregson Rendino (Marc); grandchildren, Nathan Dang (Katy), Matthew Gregson (Tiffany), Dylan Gregson, Julie Flynn Walsh (Rob), Elly Norton, Rebecca Pless (Gary), Argus Carriger, Aron Carriger, Skye Gregson, Blair James Gregson, Daniel Carriger (Jennifer), Noah Carriger, Sara Fabian (John), Ryan Gregson, Allison Ritson (Mickey), Briana Gregson, and 20 great-grandchildren; two books, and a CD.

Carol was quick to tell you that she was not from around here, having only come to the Adirondacks in 1945. She was born in Renton, Washington, where she graduated from high school and went immediately to Texas to help draw blueprints of aircraft for the Second World War. Finding Texas too hot, she returned to Washington to draw for Boeing, where among many other things, she was asked to draw for a

modified B-29 that turned out to be the Enola Gay.

In Seattle, she met Albert (Greg) Gregson, a sailor from Pottersville, New York, who didn't mind being beaten at ping pong. They married in San Francisco in 1945, as the war ended and came to live in Chestertown where they had five children: Kris, Eric, Barry, Kent, and Blair. Carol and Greg became very active in Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. Carol was a den mother for 17 years and trained many others. Carol was also a president and a district representative of the PTA as described in her essay, “The PTA Taught Me to Drink.” The family moved to Pack Forest in Warrensburg in the early 1960s and had another daughter, Jill. While they worked for the Boy Scouts in western New York, the last child, Lance was born. At the end of the '60s, the family moved to Schroon Lake, where they built the Above and Beyond Campground.



Carol Gregson. Photo by Daniel Way.



Carol Gregson cooks dinner in her kitchen, with son Kent, April 20, 2013. Photo by Andy Flynn.

Greg died on August 13, 1973. Until 1980, Carol continued to manage the campground; juggled commercial art jobs from the Adirondack Resorts Press in Lake George to Denton Publications in Elizabethtown, doing layout and illustrations; and worked summers at Wakonda Family Campground in Pottersville, while she earned a teaching degree at the College of Saint Rose in 1980. She then moved to Olmstedville and taught art at Johnsbury Central School for 11 years.

Her art took many forms. Her Master's degree was in "Colonial Fibers." She started spinning and dyeing at the original Frontier Town. Weaving and founding the Serendipity Spinners with her friends delighted her. Her large "Red Connection" sculpture graced her front yard and was a landmark locally in Olmstedville.

She was a founding member and favorite presenter at the Academy for Lifelong Learning at the Empire State College in Saratoga. She became a storyteller and then a published author with a CD, "The Pottersville Complainer," and two books, *Leaky Boots* (in two editions) and *Wet Socks*.

Carol Gregson was an elder in the United Methodist Churches of Schroon Lake and North Creek. The family extends heartfelt thanks to Laurie Kuba and the ladies of Above and Beyond Compassionate Care.

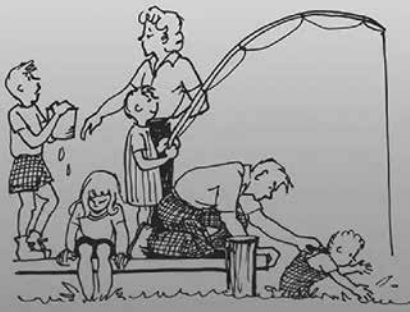
In the last chapter of *Wet Socks*, called "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You," she described her life's attitude and ending. The last six words are "...I hope they have a celebration." That celebration was held December 4, 2021, from noon till 3:30 p.m. at Basil & Wick's Restaurant in North Creek, New York.

## Testimonials for Carol and Her Books

Carol was, is, and always shall be one of my all-time favorite people. Although she "wasn't from around here," she was an Adirondacker Waiting To Happen from the day she was born! I spent many enjoyable days sharing tables with her at book fairs and reading her hilarious books. The signed copies of *Wet Socks* and *Leaky Boots* in my personal library are among my most prized literary possessions. Her presence will endure in Adirondack lore and legend for all time, and when it's my turn to pass, I hope she is among the short list of family and friends waiting to greet me—wherever that place may be. See you later Carol!

—Daniel Way, Adirondack writer,  
photographer, and doctor,  
[www.danielway.com](http://www.danielway.com)

# Wet Socks



Written and Illustrated by Carol Gregson

"Carol's memory, imaginative mind, and sense of humor shine in these stories, letting you see the fingerprints and hear the voices. Like magic, she pulls laughter and inspiration out of a hatful of hard times—right before your eyes."  
—Dan Berggren, songwriter & folk singer, owner/producer Sleeping Giant Records

Above: Cover of *Wet Socks* by Carol Gregson.

Right: Cover of *Leaky Boots* by Carol Gregson.

# LEAKY BOOTS

by Carol Gregson

"Carol's memory, imaginative mind, and sense of humor shine in these stories, letting you see the fingerprints and hear the voices. Like magic, she pulls laughter and inspiration out of a hatful of hard times—right before your eyes."

—Dan Berggren, songwriter and folk singer, owner/producer Sleeping Giant Records

"Be prepared to enjoy Carol Gregson's latest memoir. With this book, she invites me into her living room, tells me a story of her life, and makes me feel at home with her honesty, charm, and wit. She makes me laugh; that's what I love most about Carol. She's an expert storyteller and left me wanting more, much more."

—Andy Flynn, author of the Adirondack Attic book series



Carol Gregson surrounded by family. Photo courtesy her daughter, Kris Gregson Moss.



Carol cooking up something good! Photo by Andy Flynn.

“I want to be like Carol Gregson when I grow up. In her new book, *Wet Socks*, she whips up a generous serving of her life’s stories with the warmth, humor, and that twinkling spark that Carol always sneaks in. It’s a bit like indulging in a creamy, comforting egg salad sandwich, with a good shot of mustard and horseradish to make you take notice.”

—Todd DeGarmo, Founding Director, The Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library

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*Editor’s Note:* Carol Gregson was the first guest writer for our renewed Foodways column in *Voices* Spring/Summer 2012 (Vol. 38, 1–2). In that issue, she shared her admiration for her mother-in-law Fern Gregson, and the recipe for her famous Chili Sauce.

## Grandmother’s Chili Sauce

- 12 large ripe tomatoes
- 1-1/2 cups brown sugar
- 3 onions
- 3 teaspoons salt
- 2 sweet green peppers
- 2 sweet red peppers
- 2 tablespoons pickling spices
- 3 tablespoons celery seed
- 2 cups vinegar

Peel and dice the tomatoes. Also, dice the peppers and chop the onions. Put everything in a large pot, including the spices, in a cheesecloth bag, and simmer for a few hours until you like the looks of it. Then ladle it into sterilized jars and seal immediately. It should make four or five pints.

# On a Wing and a Prayer Finding Poetry in the Cliché

BY STEVE ZEITLIN

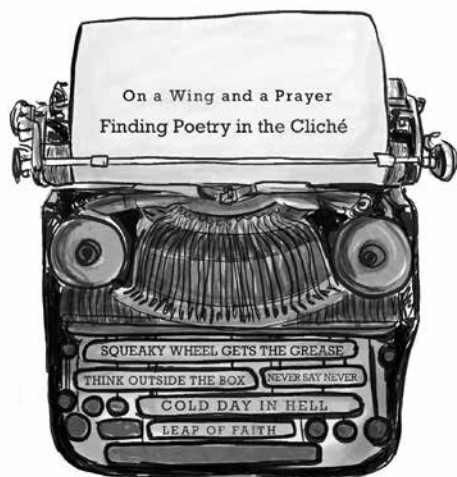


Illustration by Eva Pedriglieri.

**“If you want to be a writer,”** my high school English teacher taught, “avoid clichés like the plague,” using one herself to make the point. Clichés, though once original phrasings, are expressions that have become overused over time. A website, “The Editor’s Blog: It’s All About the Words,” suggests that using clichés, like *She’s cute as a button* and *I’ve painted myself into a corner*, is “like wearing someone else’s old and dirty clothes. They might have looked good at one time, but they don’t look good anymore.”

But clichés are also part of the poetry of everyday life. When my close friend Carol Reuben starts conversations with “*What’s the story, morning glory?*” and ends them with “*Okey-dokey, artichokey,*” she is not only using rhymed clichés; she is expressing her characteristic playfulness. Some people even use silly clichés to create others: *Toodle-oo, Kangaroo, Take care, Polar Bear, Keep on Talking, Steven Hawking*. When Lucas Dargan, my late father-in-law, said, “*Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt,*” the timeworn phrase nevertheless captured his thoughtful, succinct, and sparing use of words. He had made it his own.

*Cliché* was the French word for “stereotype,” but its current use is said to come

from the jargon of French printers. To save time, French printers would place frequently used phrases in one block, ready to be set among the individual letters. The French verb *clicher*, meaning “to click,” imitates the sound the letters made when striking metal to create the printing plates. Through onomatopoeia, *cliché* came to mean “a ready-made, often-used phrase,” and was so useful that it migrated into English. Of course, “overuse” is subjective. Each of us has heard these phrases repeated a different number of times, so what is or is not a cliché is always arguable.

Each word in the English language has its own etymology, its own history. Many come from simple sounds for natural elements or body parts—such as head, foot, and heart—that, over time, are combined into metaphors that express concepts: *the head of the class, the foot of the bed, the heart of the matter*. In Middle English and Old Norse “window” originally meant “eye of the wind.” In his 1844 essay “The Poet,” Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin.” In a sense, every word is a poem. Clichéd phrases are too.

Anyone who loves language should appreciate the handed-down poetry of the cliché. I once called a program officer of a granting agency to ask if City Lore could apply for two different projects in a single proposal. In keeping with his background, he answered with a Southern saying: “*If you try to catch two rabbits, you may not catch either one.*” This conversation led me to imagine the following conversation between myself and Molly Garfinkel, City Lore’s Co-Director:

“How do we know if we’ll get the grant?” Molly asks.

“*We’re out there on a wing and a prayer,*” I reply. “We’ll have to take that *leap of faith.*”

“Well, why don’t we call the program officer to ask about where it stands?” Molly says. “You know, *the squeaky wheel gets the grease.*”

“Well, we don’t want to *bite off our nose to spite our face,*” I say.

“*I see,’ said the blind man,*” Molly responds. “Good point.”

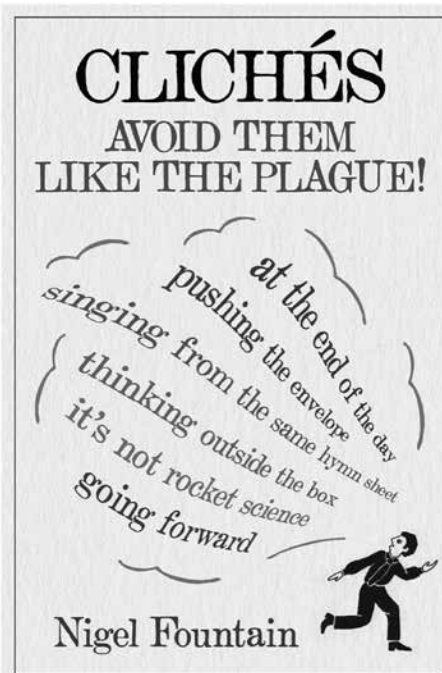
I reply, “Yeah, I guess in this line of work, *if you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.*”

Each of these phrases paints a vivid word picture—created by Anonymous—that explains their enduring charm. Many phrases that are now clichés are poems unto themselves:

Many are perfect, satisfying metaphors, such as the Morton Salt slogan: *When it rains,*

baptism by fire	kiss of death	Heavens to Betsy	wild goose chase
on a shoestring	the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree	raining cats and dogs	
water off a duck’s back	once in a blue moon	throwing caution to the wind	
when hell freezes over	the leopard cannot change its spots	going to hell in a wheelbarrow	
water under the bridge	it comes with the territory	thank God for small favors	
there is a God	absence makes the heart grow fonder	youth is wasted on the young	
It’s not the age, it’s the mileage	the living end		

Image of Poem no caption



A book on the market uses my English teacher's cliché as its title.

*it pours*, also used for a string of bad news. Some can be turned around or built upon. After a New York City arts council tried to justify a dramatic change in direction that demoralized its constituents, its director encouraged them with the phrase “*There’s light at the end of the tunnel*,” to which Trinidadian artist Michael Manswell replied, “It’s hard to see the *light at the end of the tunnel* when there’s a bend in the road.”

When my wife and I asked Burl Godwin, who was building a driveway on my wife’s family farm, a question for which he had no response, he replied: “I have no idea. I didn’t take that girl to the dance,” meaning: “That’s not my area of expertise.” When I asked him to explain the origin of the phrase, he said, “You should only dance with the girl you brought to the dance. If you try to dance with all of them, you might come home with none at all”: some wry wisdom, he suggested, for anyone—like us at City Lore—who may be juggling too many projects.

Master poets and songwriters use clichés as well. Even Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602) uses *like the dickens*. The word dickens had nothing to do with Charles Dickens (who was not yet born at

the time), but was a synonym for the devil.

I once read that Bob Dylan, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, “approaches a cliché the way a butcher approaches a salami.” Some of his deeply moving lines seem to have their origin in daily phraseology: “*Most likely you go your way (and I’ll go mine)*”; “*Don’t think twice it’s all right*.” Singer-songwriter Tom Paxton draws on a cliché for his masterful song “*The Last Thing on My Mind*.”

In an onstage introduction to his wonderful, quirky song “It’s a Big Old Goofy World,” the late John Prine said, “This poem I got the idea for when I was helping my mom finish her crossword puzzle. About a year ago, on the back of the crossword puzzle book, there was this deal where you fill in the blanks of a whole bunch of similes, like *shy as a fox*, *busy as a bee*, and we got to laughing about them.... So, I carried this idea around for a year, collecting these similes.” With them, he created his lyric, which ends, “So I’m sitting in a hotel / trying to write a song. / My head is just *as empty* / *as the day is long*. / Why it’s *clear as a bell*: / I should have gone to school. / I’d be *wise as an owl* / ’stead of *stubborn as a mule*.”

The singer songwriter Tom Waits took the great cliché, *That’s the way the cookie crumbles* and created the lyrics, “That’s the way the pan flashes. / That’s the way the market crashes. / That’s the way the whip lashes. / That’s the way the teeth gnashes. / That’s the way the gravy stains. / That’s the way the moon wanes.”

Most of us are not capable of such masterful turns of phrase. However, as we become more intimate with one another, our conversations often shift from prose toward poetry. A friend of mine, Solomon Reuben, put it this way: “Heartful sharing becomes artful sharing.” We condense our stories into brief phrases that sum up a story we know our friends and family will recognize. We begin to use catchwords and allusions, and much of our conversation is laden with these associations. Because of this, close families and friends often seem to be in sync. Without missing a beat, they can interject a teasing family expression

that brings back a rush of memories. The better we know and love someone, the more layered and poetic our conversation becomes. As another friend, Ginky Caswell said about her relationship with her sister: “We refined our communication into a work of art.” Employed with irony and humor, clichés can help us do the same.

Not long ago, during a game of pickleball, I ran for a shot that nicked the net but didn’t go over, instead rolling back on my side. Ann Regan, one of my opponents, said teasingly, “*Close, but no cigar, as they say*.” Playfully, I retorted, “Fuck you”—but then to soften it I added, “as they say.” She burst out laughing. Writing teachers will tell you that *as they say* weakens any sentence—it’s a phrase often used as a cliché to introduce other clichés. Since the day I made that comment, Ann and I pause after any sarcastic retort, then add *as they say*. We have created our personal use for a phrase that not only evokes the original incident but means something different to us than it does to the rest of the world: it has become part of what the writer Virginia Randall calls “The language of us. Sometimes the deepest meanings are hidden in the silliest things.

So, *at the end of the day, when all is said and done (to coin a phrase)*, I would say this about clichés: *Don’t touch them with a ten-foot pole!* But, then again, *Never say never*. Clichés can be a source of wisdom, humor, and joy in language—some are so good they bear repeating. *Rules are made to be broken*—make them your own; appreciate their poetics; twist them around; don’t believe everything your English teacher says; and don’t miss out on the poetry of everyday life. ▼

Steve Zeitlin is the founding director of City Lore in New York City and the author of *The Poetry of Everyday Life: Storytelling and the Art of Awareness*. (Cornell University Press). Photo by Tom Pich.





# New Voices in American History

BY NANCY SCHEEMAKER

Forty years ago, I was immersed in one of the greatest experiences of my life: working toward my Master's Degree at SUNY Albany's Department of African American Studies. Those years left an indelible mark on me and my reading. My early life in an all-white, working class, rural upstate New York village gave me little exposure and understanding of anything outside of it. New experiences of anything other came from books—always my window to the world.

During my struggles to afford my education, on a break at home, toiling over a paper at a time when typewriters and corrective tape and many repetitive drafts and pulling of hair ensued, I recall a Thanksgiving holiday, when my mother once broke her otherwise inscrutable silence regarding my graduate degree to ask, "Why are you doing this?" *Translation:* Why on Earth are you, my white daughter, spending all your time over the study of Black people? *Meaning:* How is this going to help you? *Meaning:* How will you ever get a job? *And maybe—* When will you stop doing CRAZY RADICAL THINGS???

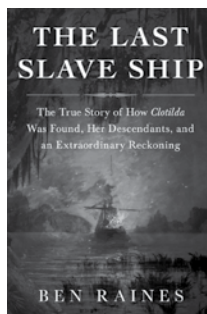
Relevant questions. I didn't have a fully developed answer then. I was just compelled and driven. And absolutely sure it was the right thing to do. Somehow, I knew that this was a life changing opportunity. And it was. And it afforded me an entirely different view of life.

Have you ever sat in a classroom where you were the only white person in the room? Working in a bookstore affords me daily opportunities to be a bridge.

Sometimes, it is the subtle act of being sure that book displays are diverse and representative.

Many times, I have a chance to pitch a book I've discovered that could ultimately be very meaningful to someone else—a title they would not have discovered without our conversation. Of late, I've been catching up on recently published histories that I find both extraordinary, relevant to former studies, and terribly relevant and often uncomfortable truths and consequences.

*The Last Slave Ship: The True Story of How Clotilda Was Found, Her Descendants, and an Extraordinary Reckoning*, by Ben Raines (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2022), is a fascinating



account demonstrating how history, legend, and technology solved a mystery, while opening a door to contemporary reconciliation and shared community memories.

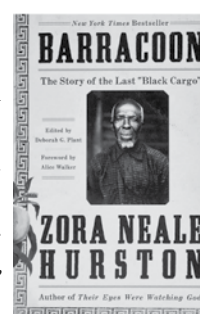
The story of the *Clotilda* could not be told without a broader view of the Atlantic Slave Trade which transformed world history. It is a traumatizing history, but I continue to be drawn to the overwhelming significance of it, less for the sobering and harsh political and economic lessons, and more for the extraordinary impact on individuals and families throughout the world.

Of the 10 to 12 million people forcibly removed from the African continent through a process surely as monstrous and cruel as any modern war crime, approximately 307,000 were sold into the slavery system of North America. New research, technology, and growing enlightenment have led to vigorous new scholarship and discoveries, creating a plethora of newly published and essential histories.

In 2018, river guide Ben Raines plunged into Mobile Bay's desolate swamp waterways in pursuit of a long circulating regional rumor. His recovery that day of a sodden, worn plank bearing rusted, handmade nails made possible the eventual identification of the legendary 1860 *Clotilda* schooner, known to local residents as the last slave ship to import African slaves to America.

*Clotilda's* identification would garner international attention. She symbolized the countless voyages preceding it and the centuries old brutal practices integral to the Atlantic Slave Trade. Raines' important book highlights the previous scholarship surrounding this particular voyage, the discovery of the vessel, and the story of the human cargo forced into the hold, their post-Civil War lives, communities, and descendants.

Cudjo Lewis was one of the last Africans smuggled into North America and one of the last surviving passengers of the *Clotilda*. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo,"* by Zora Neale Hurston



was finally published in 2018 (HarperCollins, New York), and immediately rose to a well-deserved place on the bestseller list.

Zora Neale Hurston accomplished her groundbreaking research as an anthropologist and folklorist in the 1920s. Her documentation of the lifeways and experiences of black Americans remains iconic, including a weeklong interview in 1928, with Cudjo Lewis, who entrusted his account to Zora's willing and earnest scholarship. She carefully recorded his heartbreaking memories of capture in Africa, the brutal crossing of the Atlantic, his years of slavery in Alabama, as well as the remainder of his post-Civil War life as a leader and elder in Mobile's Africa Town—one of the first self-governed black communities in the United States.

I wonder if Zora Neale Hurston fully realized how momentous her time with the last survivor of the *Clotilda* would come to be. Her efforts resulted in the preservation of an authentic voice, made available for all time, which tells a story representative of the millions victimized by the inhumanity of the Atlantic Slave Trade, of their experiences and heartbreaks, and for many like Cudjo, a lasting wish to return home. It is a wonder and a gift that the manuscripts survived the long wait to become public 80 years later.

*All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*, by Tiya Miles (Random House, New York, 2022) is a wondrous book, unflinching in its exposure of the immense suffering endured by black women and their children under slavery. This work is nothing short of a triumph for the masterful way Miles delivers an expansive view of African American women's history—truly magnificent

scholarship and essential reading.

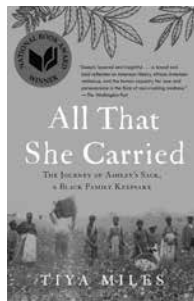
Miles tells the story of Rose, enslaved in South Carolina in 1850, and as Miles conveys very clearly in the prologue of this work, *Ripping families apart was a common practice in a society structured by—and indeed dependent on—the legalized captivity of people deemed inferior*. The sale of children away from parents was common practice, so when Rose understood the gravity of this threat to her family, she did what she could to impress upon her child a sense of identity, family, and enduring love. She created a small sack for her to carry and filled it with precious mementos—some pecans, a braid from her mother’s hair, and a worn dress. Rose and Ashley were soon separated, and then, Ashley sold. They never saw each other again. However, their story and the sack resonated for generations of this family. Ashley’s great granddaughter Ruth carefully articulated the words in embroidery on that very same sack in 1921.

Miles writes: “Through the medium of the sack, we glimpse the visionary fortitude of enslaved Black mother, the miraculous love Black women bore for kin, the insistence on radical humanization that Black women carried for the nation and the immeasurable value of material culture to the histories of the marginalized” (4).

*All That She Carried* won the National Book Award for nonfiction in 2021.

*The Last Slave Ship, Baracoon*, and *All That She Carried* are all readily available at libraries and your favorite Indie bookstores. Through their respective individually remarkable, groundbreaking scholarship, they illuminate further the growing story of our nationhood, inspiring my curiosity as to the essential stories still waiting for us to discover and all that remains waiting to be told. ▼

Nancy Scheemaker is the General Manager of Northshire Bookstore in Saratoga Springs, NY. She experiments with textiles, pottery, and collage, and holds an MA in African American Studies. Photo by Todd DeGarmo.



## Submission Guidelines for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*

*Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore* is dedicated to publishing the content of folklore in the words and images of its creators and practitioners. The journal publishes research-based articles, written in an accessible style, on topics related to traditional art and life. It also features stories, interviews, reminiscences, essays, folk poetry and music, photographs, and artwork, drawn from people in all parts of New York State. Columns on subjects such as photography, sound and video recording, legal and ethical issues, and the nature of traditional art and life appear in each issue. We encourage contributions of original articles, news items, photographs, and any other materials relating to folklore and folklife in New York State for possible inclusion in *Voices*.

### Editorial Policy

#### Feature Articles

Articles published in *Voices* represent original contributions to folklore studies. Although *Voices* emphasizes the folklore of New York State, the editor welcomes articles based on the folklore of any area of the world, especially if it relates to some aspect of life in New York State. Articles on the theory, methodology, and geography of folklore are also welcome, as are purely descriptive articles on the ethnography of folklore. In addition, *Voices* provides a home for “orphan” tales, narratives, and songs, whose contributors are urged to provide contextual information.

Authors are encouraged to include short personal reminiscences, anecdotes, isolated tales, narratives, songs, and other material that relates to and enhances their main article.

Typically, feature articles range from 1,000 to 4,000 words and up to 6,000 words at the editor’s discretion.

#### Reviews and Review Essays

Books, recordings, films, videos, exhibitions, concerts, and the like are selected for review in *Voices* for their relevance to folklore studies or the folklore of New York State and their potential interest to a wide audience. Persons wishing to review recently published material should contact the editor at [tdegarmo@sals.edu](mailto:tdegarmo@sals.edu). Unsolicited reviews and proposals for reviews will be evaluated by the editor and by outside referees where appropriate. Reviews should not exceed 750 words.

#### Correspondence and Commentary

Short but substantive reactions to or elaborations upon material appearing in *Voices* within the previous year are welcomed. The editor may invite the author of the materials being addressed to respond; both pieces may be published together. Any subject may be addressed or rebutted once by any correspondent. The principal criteria for publication are whether, in the opinion of the editor or the editorial board, the comment constitutes a substantive contribution to folklore studies, and

whether it will interest our general readers. Letters should not exceed 500 words

### Style

The journal follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Consult *Merriam Webster’s College Dictionary* for questions of spelling, meaning, and usage, and avoids gender-specific terminology. It is also available online at <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

### Footnotes

Endnotes and footnotes should be avoided; incorporate such information into the text if possible. Endnotes can be included minimally, at editor’s discretion. Ancillary information may be submitted as a sidebar.

### Bibliographic Citations

For citations of text from outside sources, use the author-date style, described in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

### Language

All material must be submitted in US English. Foreign language terms (transliterated, where appropriate, into the Roman alphabet) should be italicized.

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Born into an artistic and tinkering family with roots in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, Beth has been around creative endeavors of music, sewing, painting, metal work, and gardening since childhood.

After a lifetime of singing and a 30-year career in higher education and human services, Beth fell in love with quilting. Modern quilting offers endless creative opportunities. Free-form quilting combines color, pattern, and texture to create fiber art, wall hangings, ornamental religious hangings, and greeting cards, using new and recycled materials.



*Spring Parkway Walk, 37x26"*