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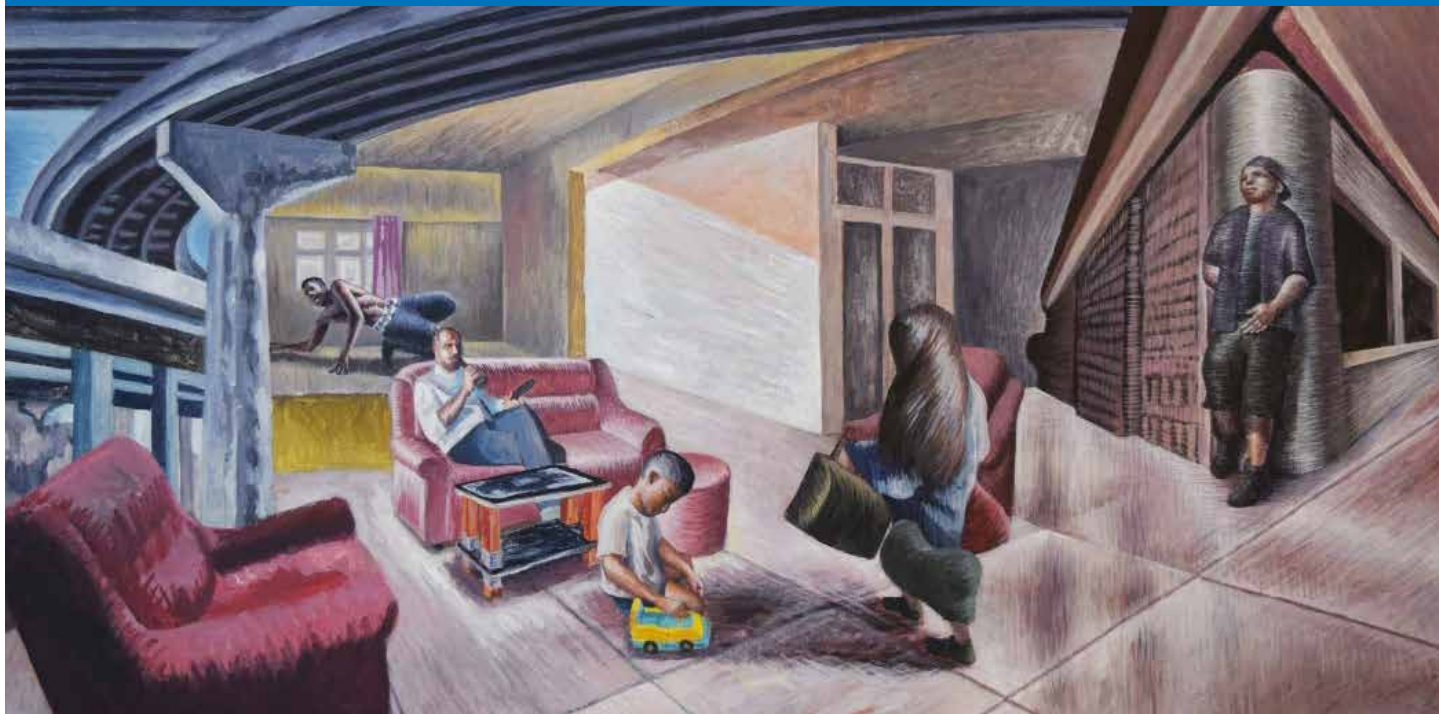
City VOICES

A Peer Journal for Mental Health

Summer 2019



“The Way Home in August” *Painting by artist Miguel Colon*



For more artists and artwork, see the Art Section on pages 8 and 9!

The Nursing Home Discharge Defense Project

By Tanya Kessler, Senior Staff Attorney, Mobilization for Justice, Inc.

Preventing Improper Discharges to Homeless Shelters

A Bronx nursing home resident recently received a Notice of Discharge, stating that he would be sent from the nursing home where he lived for five years to a homeless shelter. He was alarmed. He worried about his health and safety in a homeless shelter. Unsure of what to do next, he quickly called the New York State Department of Health. By making that call, he preserved his right to a hearing to challenge the discharge. But many nursing home residents may not know to do the same. Also, many nursing home residents may not know what to do next.

Nursing home residents who are discharged to homeless shelters will often have problems maintaining their health and stability. In a homeless shelter, it can be difficult to follow up with medical appointments, keep medications secure, or pursue permanent housing options. Individuals who are medically frail or have mobility impairments may be particularly vulnerable in the chaotic shelter environment. The stress of being in the shelter system may worsen mental health or medical health symptoms. It is therefore critical that nursing home residents and their friends and loved ones know they have the right to challenge an unsafe or improper discharge.

After receiving more and more complaints from nursing home residents facing discharge to the shelter system, Mobilization for Justice (MFJ) started a Nursing Home Discharge Defense Project. Through this project, we provide advice and legal representation to nursing home residents facing discharge to the shelter system. We also provide Know Your Rights trainings to impart essential information, such as:

- Before discharging a resident, the nursing home is required to give the resident a Notice of Discharge at least thirty days in advance of the discharge.
- The Notice of Discharge must be in a language the resident understands and must be sent to the resident's designated representative.
- The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP), which serves as an advocate and resource for persons who live in nursing homes, is mandated by federal and state laws to receive copies of nursing home Notices of Discharge.

“Residents have the right to be informed, the right to dignity, the right to participate in their care, and the right to make independent choices,” explains Deirdre Garrett-Scott, the Director of the LTCOP in New York City. “Unfortunately, these rights have the potential to be violated in a long term care facility. For example, we noticed that residents are not receiving 30-day Notices in their native language—this is clearly a violation of the residents' rights. Our program will continue to advocate for residents regarding this matter and any issue that violates residents' rights.”

(Continued on page 4)

Alternatives to Police Responding to 911 Calls

By Carla Rabinowitz, Advocacy Coordinator at Community Access and Nicole Bramstedt, former Director of Policy at Urban Pathways

Protecting Peers from Harm is the Name of the Game

Community Access, along with a coalition of 70 organizations, many elected officials, and concerned citizens, has been actively engaged with New York City officials since 2013 to reduce the incidents of violence and trauma experienced by people during an emotional crisis.

This advocacy work resulted in some early reforms, most notably the launching of a 40-hour training program for officers, called Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training. To date, over 10,000 NYPD officers have received some form of this training, although it's

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Ward Stories

Organized by Dan Frey, Editor in Chief

The warm weather has arrived, and, as Lisa A. Hopkins titled her poem, “love is in the air.” Our four poets featured here have love as their theme, whether for a family member or someone outside the family, someone who passed away or someone still living. Enjoy!

The Place You Now Call Home

By Gina Marie Misner (aka Deer Hart)

Somewhere the essence of who you were,
twinkles,
with the stars;
As your aura follows me,
wherever I go;
No matter how far apart we are.

Everyday your soul shines brightly;
As if you were the sun,
your spirit calling upon me,
creating my teardrops,
that fall,
one,
by one.

I hope to always feel your presence,
whenever the cold of winter settles in,
then I won't think about the way we said goodbye,
for I know,
someday I'll see you again.

It is when the flowers bloom,
and the rivers rise,
that I will recall the special memories,
of all our good times,
and even if I can't see or hear you,
because you've gone to the unknown,
I will continue to celebrate your remembrance,
and hope you're enjoying God's kingdom,
the place you now call home.

The Road to Love

By Ted Walner

Paranoia will destroy ya
If you let it
So, don't hold it against me
If I'm paranoid.
Don't use it as a weapon against me
I don't want to hurt anyone
and
I don't want to cause misery.
Left alone

(Continued on page 3)

Love is in the Air

By Lisa A. Hopkins

Love is in the air; exciting and
New, Love is in the air
I am accepting you
I love to have you happy
I love everyone whether their hair
is nappy
Love is beautiful
Love is kind
Love is a state of mind
I Love to see what is exciting to
you
Love is caring
Love is sharing
Love is bearing
The mother's Dove of Love
My brave heart from above
I know she is alive, but she doesn't
see me
As her part: but I love her from the
heart
My umi; my heart
Love is quality; Love is saving and
Sacrificing. My mother is my
greatest
Shero, my hero: I would never
Change, but wish she would smile
Again; feeling good, she needs
Love too.
I became someone's wife; now I
see the beautiful shades of
You; umi Love.

Daddy's Girl

By Judy Meibach

You adopted me when I was little,
never considering the implications.

You taught me to ride a bike,
thinking I could compete in the
Tour de France.

You watched me as I learned how
to ice skate,
visualizing me in the Olympics.
You watched me as I fell and fell
and fell,
but you were there to lift me up.

You escorted me to rock concerts,
stuffing your ears with cotton balls,
as you thought we'd go deaf.
You thought Elton John looked like
Cousin Howard
Oh, what a sight that was to see!

(Continued on page 3)

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poetry

Ban the Box, HALT the Torture for New Yorkers with Mental Health Challenges

By Harvey Rosenthal,
CEO, NYAPRS

Help Us to Reduce the Damage of Incarceration on Prisoners

Winning criminal justice reforms affecting New Yorkers with mental health conditions has been a top policy and advocacy priority for NYAPRS members dating back to securing restrictions on the use of solitary confinement that came with the 2008 passage of “the SHU Exclusion Act.”

Since then, NYAPRS has worked to reduce criminal justice involvement by our community members through three major strategies.

Diversion: the New York State Senate has provided four years of state funding to reshape local criminal justice systems and to train police to de-escalate encounters that may otherwise have led to incarceration via Crisis Intervention Team initiatives.

Re-entry: we worked to win passage of 2017 legislation authorizing our state to seek federal permission to become the 1st state in the nation to boost pre-release planning and access to healthcare by restarting Medicaid 30 days before discharge.

Treatment not Torture: as a committed member of the Coalition

for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement, we are working very hard **right now** to push for passage of the landmark “Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement” Act (the HALT Solitary Confinement Act.)

Background

New York has reduced the use of solitary confinement in recent years, but the state still holds a higher number of people in solitary, about 7% of its prison population, than the national average which is 4.4%.

On any given day, there are nearly 3,000 people in state prisons in Special Housing Units (SHU) and thousands more in other forms of isolation. There are also hundreds of people in segregated confinement in jails in New York City alone. Solitary confinement is disproportionately used with people of color, with black people representing 60% of people held in long-term solitary confinement units in New York.

In these isolated conditions they are confined to small, sometimes windowless cells, usually the size of an elevator, for 22 to 24 hours a day without any meaningful human contact or programs, for months, years, and sometimes for decades. Phone calls and visits by family and loved ones are severely restricted or prohibited. A few times a week, people in solitary are let out for showers and exercise alone in a small, enclosed space, sometimes indoors.

Despite claims that segregated confinement is used in response to the most violent behavior, five out of six disciplinary infractions that result in SHU time in New York prisons are for non-violent conduct.

Although the United Nations has said that solitary confinement beyond 14 days can amount to torture, many New Yorkers routinely suffer in segregated confinement for months, years, and even decades.

Solitary confinement is not only extremely painful for many, it can be literally unendurable, as is evident

from the high number of suicides that take place in segregation. A 2014 study found that prisoners in New York City who were placed in solitary confinement were seven times more likely to harm or kill themselves.

HALT

The HALT bill would entirely ban the use of solitary confinement for people with mental, physical and intellectual disabilities, pregnant and new moms, elderly people and young people aged 21 and younger because of the particularly devastating harm these groups face in solitary.

The bill limits the length of time that any individual can spend in segregated confinement to 15 successive days and 20 total days in a 60-day period, in line with how international standards define torture.

“The HALT bill would entirely ban the use of solitary confinement for people with mental, physical and intellectual disabilities, pregnant and new moms, elderly people and young people aged 21 and younger because of the particularly devastating harm these groups face in solitary.”

It expands time out of solitary confinement from one to seven hours a day and creates alternative Residential Rehabilitation Units to support the development of more effective recovery and community living skills.

It creates new Residential Rehabilitation Units as a more humane and effective alternative and provides meaningful human contact and therapeutic, trauma-informed, and rehabilitative programs.

Finally, it requires training for Residential Rehabilitation Unit staff and hearing officers, public reporting on the use of segregation and oversight of the bill’s implementation.

States that have reduced the use of solitary significantly have seen positive outcomes, so much so that “corrections officers who had initially

opposed [the changes] changed their minds after they began to see positive results.”

In fact, the Department of Corrections recently stated that the number of assaults against guards actually declined over the last year, with “millions of dollars [having] been invested in additional security staffing, technology upgrades and training [that] has resulted in a dramatic decline in assaults and injuries to our staff.”

We Need Your Help!

As of today (May 6, 2019), the bill is poised to pass both houses of the legislature and has 33 Senate and 77 Assembly cosponsors but action has been delayed in the Senate. The next step would be negotiations with the Governor, who has proposed a

far more limited proposal that also leave out the ban for people with disabilities.

We will need your help to stop the torture and help people acquire the skills to get out and stay out of criminal justice system involvement!

NYAPRS calls on all readers of City Voices to join the fight by joining the Coalition a NYCAIC.org and keeping up with actions you can take via the NYAPRS E News list at NYAPRS-JOIN@KILAKWA.net.

Last year, NYAPRS recognized the heroic, heartrending efforts of Alicia and Barraza whose son Ben took his own life in “the Box” after repeated episodes of abuse in the NYS prison system. See how they have turned tragedy into relentless service and advocacy at youtube.com/watch?v=WVYJxaXoDPQ.

banning torture

*(Continued from page 2 Ward Stories:
The Road to Love by Ted Walner)*

I find my way home
So don't deceive me
Don't add fire to the fuel
Paranoia is harmful
But don't make it worse
By acting like a fool.
Love and tenderness is needed
That's the antidote
So with some kindness
The paranoia flies away
And the hate remains to be cast off
on the site of a new day.
The hate evaporates
and
Finally, you are left with peace.
The peace of knowing who you are
The peace of flying away.
and
The Hope that a new day
Will bring stability and love
Love that permeates
Love that we share
Love to take in and take out

The Hope that a new day
Will bring stability and Love
once more.

*(Continued from page 2 Ward Stories:
Daddy's Girl by Judy Meibach)*

We frequented basketball games and
tennis matches,
rooting for the champs:
Boston Celtics, Chris Evert, Martina
Navratilova, John McEnroe...

When you were older and could not
walk the area's stands,
we were glued to the television set for
each sports event,
screaming so loud that the whole
neighborhood could hear us.

You inspired me with your convictions
to our religion, Judaism,
assuring that I was properly educated
in its heritage.
The holidays were really very special
and

I prized our weekly Sabbaths.
We went to synagogue together
and then had our
father/daughter quality time;
eating festive lunches,
taking long walks.

My mother, your wife,
was very jealous of this special
connection,
calling me your “second wife.”

She did not understand that fathers and
daughters have a special bond.

Making the Climb with Chrystal

By Chrystal Woodson

Facing Rejection: When
Delusions of Grandeur
Don't Pan Out

Rejection is the story of my life. So
why does it have to be such a stigma?
I've always felt that I was destined for
great things. I felt that I was achieving
great things on a daily basis and
getting praise from my parents, family
and teachers. I just knew that I would
move on to international fame and
fortune as a bestselling author. I could
not picture myself living an ordinary
life. I lived in a nurturing cocoon of
encouragement and acceptance. The
first part of my life was pretty sheltered
and abruptly it all changed when my
mom remarried. She had married a
monster and we were cowering in fear.
All thoughts and words were about
how I planned to live a life of my own
design. I had to get away. Art was my
ticket.

I encountered some traumatic
experiences in my mid-to-late-teens
and suffered from feelings of fear,
rage, betrayal, regret and an abysmal

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3 Making the climb with Chrystal)

depression. I tried to write my feelings out, but I was actually suppressing them in my coded language and fictional verse. I started drawing and created a visual escape from the stress that I feel. I had hoped that I would become a famous artist. I wanted to create a name, but it seemed like I was never good enough. I have a few hundred images that I've created, and have been in art shows, but never had a solo show. I've written volumes, but never got a book deal. I've been offered the chance to sell a book idea, but I blew it.

I've been told that I was destined for great things, so I aspire to achieve greatness. Sometimes I think I'm great and sometimes I feel that I'm not good enough. Am I jinxing myself by putting myself out there before I'm ready? Or am I still holding something back? I've long forgotten the dream of becoming rich and famous. Will I be immortalized after death?

Does it have something to do with

my mental illness? Am I making that an excuse? Are these rejections a product of my own anxiety that I will fail? Sometimes it's easy to assume that past rejections resulted from people who couldn't relate to my mental illness. Trying to achieve success in spite of my illness became a barrier. I feel a responsibility to prove that I am more than my illness and it begins with forgiveness.

Better to Risk Failure Than to Let Fear Diminish Your Urge To Achieve Greatness

It's OK to fail. It's important to have a goal and you must take risks sometimes. But you have to have a back-up plan, in case your dreams don't pan out. Sometimes wanting something too badly will in itself jinx you from getting your wish, especially when you pressure yourself to get what you want at all costs. That's a dangerous game. Sometimes you want something so badly that it sabotages you. Many have lost their lives because of rejection.

Rejection Is Good

In the real world, I have achieved

great failures. I've quit good jobs and have been fired from even better jobs. I've been arrested for doing something stupid. I've been denied promotions for not being management material. I've been rejected many times and on many different levels. I've been dumped by lovers, been sent rejection letters, betrayed by friends and disowned by relatives. Do I blame my mental illness? I've heard it said that failure is just a step along the journey to success. Failure is not an ending point unless you think of death as a failure. From failures and rejections, we learn about our limitations. It's a way of assessing what I'm doing well and what still needs work. It still means that I have something left to strive for.

Climb or Descend?

When I think of rejection and how it relates to rock climbing. I remember that on the path up the rock wall or hiking up a steep and jagged mountain, I have stumbled, lost my footing and have fallen. When climbing and being harnessed, the rope is holding you and you're dangling. When you're hiking



and you stumble, you're on the ground. You feel uncomfortable, scared, exhausted. You gave it everything you had and you don't know if you can give it anymore. But something inside you says that you can't just stay defeated; you can't just give up. You must finish what you started. You must keep climbing.

Psalms 118:22 says, "the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Stay on the path, your efforts will pay off in the long run.

(Continued from cover The Nursing Home Discharge Defense Project)

It is important to know that there are only a few reasons why a nursing home can discharge a resident. For example, a nursing home can discharge a resident who no longer needs nursing home services or who fails to pay for the nursing home stay.

A resident who receives a Notice of Discharge and wants to appeal the discharge should contact the New York State Department of Health right away to request a hearing. The number to call to request a hearing is 888-201-4563. If the resident requests the appeal within 15 days of receiving the Notice, the resident will generally be able to remain at the nursing home until the hearing is held and a decision is issued. However, a resident who allegedly needs urgent medical care or pose a danger to others at the nursing home may be discharged before the hearing.

Before the hearing, the resident has a right to examine the file, and to obtain a copy of the documents the nursing plans to present at the hearing. The nursing home is required to record the reason for the discharge in the resident's clinical records. At the hearing, the resident has the right to bring witnesses, question the nursing home's witnesses, and present evidence. The resident may represent themselves or use legal counsel, a relative, a friend, or other spokesperson. The hearings are usually held at the nursing home, and are recorded. A Department of Health Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) hears both sides. The ALJ issues a decision in writing after the hearing.

If you or someone you know needs advice or representation regarding a nursing home discharge, MFJ's Nursing Home Residents Project can be reached on Tuesdays between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. at 855-444-6477.

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—We Thank You, The staff of CITY VOICES

"My agency actively participates in the City Voices empowerment journal. Our advocacy events are regularly covered and, in general, Voices is a great source for advocacy news. Keep your client-base informed and subscribe to City Voices."
—Carla Rabinowitz, Advocacy Coordinator, Community Access, Inc.

"City Voices has been empowering mental health consumers for almost twenty years. I encourage your organization to subscribe and empower the consumers that you serve."—Isaac Brown, CEO, Baltic Street AEH, Inc

"City Voices is unique. It's my favorite creative grassroots peer newsletter. All organizations who provide services to people within the behavioral health system should make sure their constituents have the opportunity to participate in the City Voices world."—Jody Silver, Former Executive Director, Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey (CSPNJ)

"We awarded City Voices for being an outstanding peer journal that empowers people with psychiatric histories with information and resources. I strongly encourage your agency to subscribe."—Glenn Liebman, CEO, Mental Health Association of New York State (MHANYS)

Randy Killings: A Second Chance in Life

By The Rainbow Heights Club

Getting Support and Giving it

For almost 20 years Randy Killings found himself in what he calls a “dark and low place” as he battled with violence, trauma, abuse, isolation, drug use, and later, incarceration. Although he received a mental illness diagnosis at an early age, it went untreated and it wasn’t until adulthood that his diagnosis was confirmed as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Ironically, his attempts to self medicate with heavy recreational drug use only intensified his depression. Initially rejecting treatment and prescribed medication, he spiraled downward. Love-hate relationships with his family and friends consumed his life until eventually he was incarcerated.

It was during his time at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility that he came in contact with Project Renewal’s Parole Support & Treatment Program, when they gave a presentation on life after parole. Randy had reached a point where he knew he had to change, and through the program was offered an opportunity to bridge back to life on the outside, through housing, peer counseling and job readiness.

Project Renewal’s services continued after parole and provided

Randy with a mentor who recognized his strong sense of compassion for others and introduced him to the concept of becoming a “Peer Specialist.” Randy enrolled in the Howie the Harp peer training program, (an intense six-week course followed by a three-month internship), which brought him to Rainbow Heights Club. At Rainbow Heights, Randy could see a path out of the self-destructive cycle he had been living. For the first time, Randy realized that the “something” he wanted to do with his life was to continue to work towards his own recovery goals while helping others to achieve theirs; just as his mentor from Project Renewal, Mr. Blocker had helped him to do. Through one-on-one counseling and mentoring during his internship at Rainbow Heights Club, Randy excelled to the point where he was able to land his first professional job at Rainbow Heights Club as a Peer Specialist.

Rainbow Heights Club, a program of the Heights Hill Mental Health Service Community Advisory Board in Brooklyn, provides services for LGBTQ adults living with serious mental illness. Randy started at RHC as a part-time Peer Intern, then, part-time Peer Specialist and in less than a year, became a full-time staff member providing both Peer support as well as supervision of the agency’s food program. Within another year, with quite a bit of experience under his belt, he moved up the ladder to become the Member Services Coordinator.

Today, after 13 years of recovery, multiple professional certifications, and years of work experience, Randy has now attained a position in senior management as the Director of Peer Services at Rainbow Heights Club. Since being at Rainbow Heights,

Randy’s life has never been the same. He has found self-respect, and a keeps a positive outlook on life.

Paying forward the mentorship he’s received in the past, Randy now works closely with the peers and interns he supervises at Rainbow Heights Club to demonstrate how sharing one’s own lived experience as a person living with mental illness with people who are struggling with trauma, mental illness, substance use and other mental illnesses can have a significant impact on their recovery—the way Randy experienced it years ago.

“Randy demonstrates Peer-delivered services at their best,” says RHC’s Executive Director Christian Huygen, Ph.D. “We’ve watched Randy’s resilience and strength grow as his own recovery progressed during his time here; while simultaneously using his experience to mentor both the Peers he supervises and the consumers he serves. We are truly grateful to have



Cumbo, on behalf of the New York City Council for his unwavering commitment to community service within the mental health community.

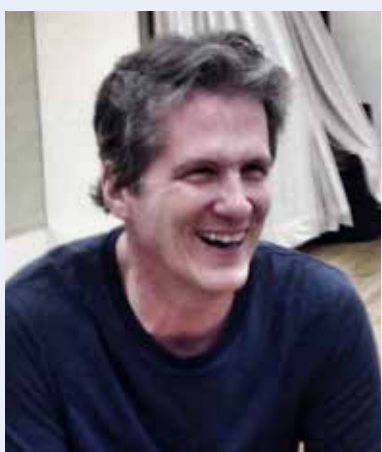
Randy has worked hard to get where he is today and remains dedicated to helping others recognize and realize their potential. “I am so grateful to God for giving me a second chance in life. My goal is to

“My goal is to continue supporting people in their struggles and become a mentor for the next generation of young people who are passionate about working with adults with serious mental illness.”

someone like Randy on our team.”

Randy’s mission hasn’t stopped with his work at Rainbow Heights Club. Through various speaking engagements, Randy’s story has become a model for many who are still trying to find their way out into the world after incarceration. Recently, Randy was honored with a Citation from City Councilmember and Majority Leader Laurie A.

continue supporting people in their struggles and become a mentor for the next generation of young people who are passionate about working with adults with serious mental illness. It’s all about giving back to the community that provided for me when I needed support,” says Randy. Randy currently resides in Brooklyn, New York with his supportive partner of 12½ years.



Book Ends: A Kind of Mirraculas Paradise by Sandra Allen

By City Voices Book Reviewer Kurt Sass

A Kind of Mirraculas Paradise: A True Story about Schizophrenia by Sandra Allen is actually two stories in one. The first story is the actual true story written by a man “Bob,” who lived his entire adult life with schizophrenia. The other story is about Ms. Allen, and comes in many parts. One part is how she, Bob’s niece, happened to come upon Bob’s manuscript and her decision whether or not to publish it and if so, in what fashion. The second part is how she herself became educated about schizophrenia. The last part is our view into the many interviews Ms. Allen had with the people Bob mentions in the manuscript in order to verify his story.

There are a number of things that set this book apart from other memoirs from people about their experiences with

mental illness. One thing is that Bob is not afraid to put all his viewpoints on paper, even if they are not politically correct. He has his own prejudices and preconceived notions, many of which are not popular with the majority of people, but does not let that hinder himself.

Another aspect of Bob’s writings which I found refreshing is that he gives equal time to the facilities and mental health professionals that treated him with care and respect as well as the ones that mistreated him. Many memoirs of mental health treatment focus 100% on bad, inhumane treatments, and while Bob certainly does give a full and detailed account of these (beatings, mind numbing medications, etc.), he is fair: When he was treated well, he tells you. When he was treated bad, he tells you.

What also sets this book apart is Ms. Allen’s involvement. You really feel for her as she wrestles with the decision whether to publish the manuscript as is, in another version, or not at all.

It is also obvious that Ms. Allen spent an enormous amount of time both researching schizophrenia and interviewing people mentioned in the book. As she herself notes “My shelf of books that relate to this project is now taller than me,” Also, she goes to great detail to note many details in the book, who or what was mentioned, people she spoke to, and whether they remember if what Bob wrote did actually occur. Unfortunately, Bob died in 2014.

I recommend this book highly, as it is so much more than your usual memoir.

When the Love of Your Life Disappears Forever

By Rev. Lisa Roma

Reggie, aka True Love, My Diamond in a Coalmine



True was my husband. We were in love. I knew his strengths and his vulnerabilities, his joys and his sorrows. I knew his accomplishments and his challenges. I knew the cheerful optimistic face he put on for the world to see. And I knew his inner heart, his sadness. I knew his depression. I knew his laughter, his humor, his gallant, helpful, protective nature, and I knew his carefree, childlike, fun nature. I knew his fears and his dreams. We had many dreams together. Some we had begun to build, while others were in the planning stages. We shared a sensitive spirit and artistic nature. We were true soulmates who deeply understood one another.

True was a brilliant and talented man in every way. He was a writer, a poet,

(who suffered from alcoholism and depression) at the tender age of five, and never knew who his father was. Although surrounded by love and extended family, raised by his older sister and beloved by his aunts, cousins and niece, he witnessed violence as a child, and suffered from PTSD all his life.

True struggled with anger and depression; he virtually grew up in foster care, group homes and prison (incarcerated for a crime he did not commit but was never exonerated for). At seventeen, he won awards for architectural drafting and was a star student. At 17, he discovered Akbar, a cultural community enclave where he learned the spiritual principles and wisdom which governed his life,

“True stayed longer to talk to me. He told me about a book manuscript he was writing. I told him I was an editor and would like to read it. The next time he came to the writing class, he brought his manuscript...That process solidified the love that was growing inside my heart for True...during the spring of 2009. Little did I know that I would end up marrying this man.”

an amazing portrait-artist, an inventor who saw some of his ideas created by others before he had the chance. He had gotten his CASAC license and was studying to be a counselor. He had begun to fulfill another dream by enrolling in college last fall and had completed his first semester as an A student. My True Love was a motivator who inspired others of all ages in every walk of life.

True was a kind man who always wanted to help those less fortunate than himself. He developed compassion, having had a rough start in life, growing up in a ghetto in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn during the 1960s. He lost his mother

and he took on the moniker “True Love.” As an adult, he worked as an architectural draftsman on the South Street Seaport, and in prison he began painting portraits and writing. In 2010, he won a first prize OASAS Award for his multimedia portrait of Mother Teresa.

When I first met True, I was facilitating a writing workshop for newly released parolees at a downtown Brooklyn community organization. I will never forget the way I felt when he first entered the room and we saw one another. It was love at first sight, but we were both cautious, shy and respectful, and maintained a professional demeanor. He came

right up front to sit close to where I was putting up notes and poetry, inviting the small group of men to write and draw. I was demonstrating haiku poetry. I had crayons and paper, notebooks and pencils on our big table in the center of the room near the big window, with various poetry handouts and spiritual books by contemporary authors such as *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz.

“I have read some of these books, too,” True told me as the class was wrapping up for the day. True stayed longer to talk to me. He told me about a book manuscript he was writing. I told him I was an editor and would like to read it. The next time he came to the writing class, he brought his manuscript. We wrote up a contract and I began the process of editing it. That process solidified the love that was growing inside my heart for True. It was how our professional friendship had begun. That was during the spring of 2009. Little did I know that I would end up marrying this man.

True and I made a happy home together with our kitty cats and our music. He worked hard on his studies, still struggling with his depression, but thrilled and excited about being a college student. His professors and students admired him. He was the oldest student in the class, but a model one. I worked away from home all week-long doing live-in eldercare, and would usually come home exhausted, but glad to hug my baby and start our weekend together. We cooked, shopped, enjoyed one another, loved and laughed; we were best friends.

He was a sharp dresser, even when he wore his sweatpants and T-shirts. Everything matched. If we had an argument, it ended up as a comedy skit in our apartment, with me laughing so hard I almost peed. We loved our children and our grandchildren. True spent a lot of time with his grandson Matt and took him to play basketball and watch the pro games when he could get tickets. We loved music. We danced around the apartment and sang. We always expressed our love verbally. We hugged a lot. He would tell me, “I love you forever, no matter what.”

We enjoyed Christmas Eve together not knowing it would be our last, sharing gifts, love and laughter, taking lots of photographs and little video snippets of the cats in his new guitar-case. He seemed a bit subdued, but happy. The next morning, Christmas Day, we were both a little anxious. I had to go to work for the week, and he was depressed about it, I could tell. He walked me to the Metro North train station, as he usually did, wheeling my suitcase. We took selfies and videotaped ourselves singing a silly song, the light from the late morning sun illuminated his face and head, partially obscuring his face in one image. I had my third premonition, that he was symbolically “going to the Light soon.”

I felt an ache in my heart, but dismissed it. We hated to be apart, but this was a necessity. It was our life. He was a student and I had to work. But we always kept in touch by phone and made plans for occasional lunch

meetings. Somehow, this last week of his life would be different. That Christmas morning was the last time I saw my True Love.

Friday morning, December 28th, I called home but True did not answer. We had last spoken Thursday night. He had been depressed and told me he was feeling hopeless. He had shared with me an intimate secret he was holding for many years about his childhood. A terrible incident of sexual abuse he experienced, but never dealt with in therapy. I encouraged him to stay strong and we would get him help when I returned home the next morning. We expressed our love and he vowed not to cause himself any harm.

From Friday morning onward, True never answered the phone when I called. I arrived home to my worst fear. I found my husband in our marital bed, his body cold and still. I never believed something like this could happen. His heart had taken enough sadness and gave up. It was his choice. My beloved husband, the love of my life, my creative partner, lover and best friend, had gone to his heavenly repose.

It has been a difficult journey losing True, but I do feel his spirit communicating with me at times. He is my guardian angel and I know he is



watching over all of our children. Our bond of Love cannot be broken.

When I spoke to my husband’s therapist, in retrospect, he said that if Reggie had shared his childhood experiences much sooner, he could have gotten the help he needed, including a survivor’s group for victims of childhood sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a leading cause of PTSD, low self-esteem and depression in victims.

It is important for people to seek help and reach out for the right kind of medical and therapeutic care, no matter what age or culture they are from. Abuse is never acceptable. Abuse is not a form of love. It never was and it never will be. Get the help you need before it is too late.

God bless you, Reggie True, I miss you so much, but I love you forever, babe, no matter what. Thank you for gracing our lives with your amazing spirit. I’m putting your first poetry book together. You’ll see it from heaven.

The First Annual Jewish Board Art Exhibition

By Laura Anne Walker

Food, Live Music and Art: What More Could You Want?

The first annual Jewish Board Art Exhibition occurred on Thursday, April 25, 2019 from 12:00pm to 4:00pm in Queens, New York. Sonia W, a staff member at the Jewish Board, was the curator of this highly anticipated art event. She was assisted by Tanya K, another Jewish Board staff member, to bring Sonia's ideas of the exhibit to fruition, from abstract to concrete.

Being busy beyond words, I had to find out when my schedule would mesh with Sonia's, but it really didn't,

so I ended up postponing a doctor's appointment that I had made two months prior in order to participate in this art show. I did not know what to expect with this exhibit, but I knew I had to be a part of it. All of the artists were asked to make a flyer; a number of us actually did. Mine was of two women on either side of the vertical billboard that announced this exhibit.

Having been an exhibiting artist since 1996, I was having difficulty choosing which ink paintings of mine to submit. I narrowed them down, then narrowed them down again, hoping that there would be a good number of other artists, including Sonia. Sonia also decorated the bottles/vases that she used in the setup of the exhibit and in addition had several of her paintings on the walls.

As worrying is not useful, I stopped wondering about the other artists, deciding instead to focus on what I could do. I could make certain that my paintings were the best that I could make them. Since my artwork is often intricate, I had to pay attention

to detail, including, but not limited to color, layers of ink, appeal, etc. Basically, I had to do quality control. I would also be photographing the setting, the art, various visitors and viewers, the artists, the musicians, the poetry readers, and myself. Black and white was the color theme.

I was floored when I arrived first and saw the amazing, professional job Sonia and Tanya had done. Sonia's plans were well thought out. The hallway was an avenue of paintings and the conference room was transformed into an art gallery/botanic garden of flowers; quite a colorful and fragrant delight for the eyes and nose, respectively. On the strategically arranged conference room tables were more paintings set to match Sonia's decorated vase-bottles. The refreshments were crudité, salad, nuts, cookies, fruit, juice, lemonade and coffee.

One woman read several poems that were not her own in a booming voice. She chose to remain anonymous and did not want her photo taken. Walter

C, an artist and poet, read from a thick collection of his own well-received poems, and he posed by a painting of his. Marcia W was photographed next to her artwork, as was artist Sherri G, who also posed with her family. Artist/Guitarist Lucien C performed his original instrumentals on his guitar whose tuning knobs were in the body of the guitar. He played his instrumentals dexterously, which sounded like jazz to me.

Concertsinmotion.org provided a guitarist and a violin bassist duo who played a wide variety of songs such as "Night and Day", "La Bamba," a Bill Withers' song; and others. The guitarist sang wonderfully in Spanish and English. The bassist played lovely solos. Some of us sang along and danced a bit.

We are looking forward to future years of this exhibition as an annual event, which will hopefully occur the last Thursday of every April and hope to see you there.



we're making art!

Fountain House Gallery and Studio Arts Project

An environment for artists, including those living and working with mental illness to pursue their creative visions and to challenge the stigma that surrounds mental illness.

Founded by Fountain House in 2000 as a not-for-profit exhibition space for its member-artists, the Gallery sells original artworks and collaborates with a wide network of artists, curators, and cultural institutions. Embracing artists who are emerging or established, trained or self-taught, Fountain House Gallery cultivates artistic growth and makes a vital contribution to the New York arts community.

Gallery artists have full-time access to the space where they can work to

advance their careers while collaborating with others in a supportive setting. The Studio is open to the larger Fountain House community during designated drop-in hours.

Fountain House Gallery has attracted distinguished guest curators such as Agnes Gund, President Emerita of The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), who commended the Gallery as “a place where you can view fine works of art made by a group of excellent artists.”

Fountain House Gallery functions as

a cooperative business run by and for its artists. Operations are supported by a small professional staff led by Ariel Willmott, Director, with the assistance of numerous community volunteers.

Works by Fountain House Gallery artists are included in the collections of Citi, Eli Lilly and Company, and The Estée Lauder Companies Inc.

Fountain House Gallery has participated in exhibitions in public spaces, including: the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; the Citi DeFord Gallery and lobby in Long Island City; and the World Financial Center Courtyard Gallery in Manhattan. Works by Gallery artists are presented at the annual Outsider Art Fair.

In this section, City Voices’ field reporter and artist in her own right, **Jenny Chan**, interviewed five artists of Fountain House Gallery with the following questions:



Jenny Chan

- 1 How has being an artist impacted your life?
- 2 What inspires you?
- 3 What is the most important artist tool or material you always need to have in your studio and why?
- 4 How has your cultural experience influenced your work?
- 5 What are you currently working on?

This section contains photos of the artists, their bios, a selection of their artwork and their responses to Jenny’s questions.



ANGELA ROGERS

Angela Rogers’s poppets are a swerve from the neutral figurines of totems and trouble dolls. Each incarnates the specificity of a unique woman/creature who is, at once, a self and a singular archetype. Rogers adds Bondage to the threesome of Denise Levertov’s declaration: “Birth, Death, Marriage, we’ve had them.” Her repetitions of wrapping, sewing, unwrapping, and re-sewing are part of a dance that moves through the colors and sounds of her scavenged materials, producing the sensations of seeing, holding, and hearing forms that ask to be realized. It is, essentially, an act of careful listening. Rogers discovered this process after brain surgery, when she retreated from careers in music and experimental theatre in favor of the more solitary compulsions to wrap and paint. For Rogers, this practice better articulates the increasing synesthesia following the trauma of her medical procedures. Her paintings provide another kind of stage for the women/creatures she makes manifest, but equally convey the personal vocabulary of a woman born in the wilds of West Virginia and raised in North Carolina—her relationships to magic, tarot, and the props, teeth, humor, and scarred body that crisscross her life.

Angela’s Answers

1. The impact of being an artist has

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FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Little Hand II, Pamala, Military Hand.



GAVIN DUBBLEX ALLEYNE

Gavin (a.k.a. “Dubblex”) describes his typeface artwork as “somewhere between cuneiform and hieroglyphs.” His aim is to capture the movement of the letters in the mix. In his works, Gavin includes a phrase or quotation to catch viewers’ attention, leaving it to them to ponder the meaning of the work and the markings.

Gavin’s Answers

1. Art has totally changed my life. I started drawing as a child and found it very enjoyable. As a teenager, I became very depressed. My depression was a chemical imbalance coupled with an abusive home life. I suffered verbal abuse for many years, until I moved out of my family home in my early twenties.

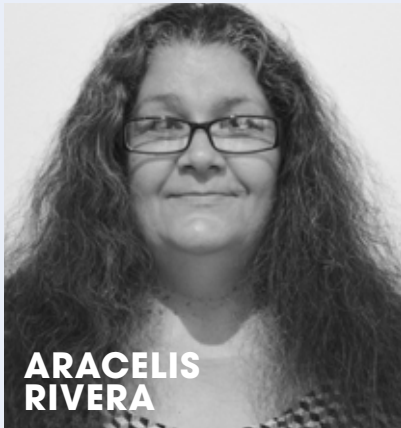
Art became my escape. When I drew I could possess a sliver of happiness. I became a graffiti writer during my early teens. I felt accepted by my peer group who was doing the same thing. I had no real friends growing up, but as a fellow graffiti writer I was accepted.

As I grew older, I continued making graffiti. I ran the streets posting my name all over. I had many pseudonyms over the years and began using the pseudonym DubbleX about ten years ago. It gave me happiness to see people post photos of my graffiti on the Internet (Flickr and Instagram) and see my name-fame grow.

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FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: A Dream Deferred, Nu Wave B. Girl, Self-Portrait.



ARACELIS RIVERA

Imagine my canvas open and twice my size. Art is a creation and sharing it with others is my way of showing and expressing my thoughts. How I create my art is by using general art skills that I've learned or master myself daily in drawing. The progression is slow and in painting color is amazingly superior. Brush, knife and a variety of color tool techniques are used to make art under my umbrella.

The schools that I have attended are Lehman College. Currently

enrolled in The Art Student's League. Otherwise, galleries are various but Fountain House Gallery is the most generous and successful to me.

I learned at Lehman College during the 90s how to create a variety of art. My major was painting. There, I learned to use color and what coloring means. Drawing was limited because I had no background in drawing. At The Art Student's League I am drawing and learning to master some very

unique styles like life-drawing or painting with the necessary tools I use each day. I understand that to sell art is a broad and challenging skill, just another way of saying do you like what you see?

I have experienced, much of the way a child does when growing up, how to manage my steps into the field. Growing with the Fountain House Gallery has shown me that it is rewarding when putting up one's work on a wall for viewing

(Continued on page 15)



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: *Johannesburg Women*, *Two Faced*, *Out of Me*.

Boo Lynn is a multi-disciplinary artist who utilizes paint, photography, and multi-faceted assemblage to create artworks in response to current world events and the New York City urban environment in which she lives. A graduate of Hunter College with a BS in Sociology, Boo Lynn has expanded her self-taught artistic skills via study at The School of Visual Arts, Pratt Institute, Fashion Institute of Technology, and the Art Students League, and her work is further informed by a

lifetime of passionate world travel and immersion in culture and the arts. Boo Lynn's artistic projects manifest a distinctive, bold vision spanning a wide range of expression, from gallery shows to installations, pageantry, and murals. She worked extensively on the Fountain House Gallery collaboration with NYC Mural Arts Project, resulting in the creation of a large-scale mural which remains on view on West 34th Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues in Manhattan. Boo Lynn's work is

included in the permanent collections of Museum of Modern Art (Wales) and Modesto Art Museum.

Boo Lynn's Answers

1. My path as an artist has many adventures and detours. Someone once said to me "You have paid dearly for who you are," and that still resonates in my memory.

Looking back over the past decades I'd say that during my formative years I drew and painted compulsively, but there was never

(Continued on page 15)



BOO LYNN WALSH



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: *Bain Joyeux (Joyous Bath)*, *Chelsea Under Wraps*, *Diaspora Transmission*.



MIGUEL COLON

Miguel Colón was born in the South Bronx in 1969. He is a 1992 graduate of the School of Visual Arts, holding a BFA in painting, with honorable mention. He studied with the likes of Jack Potter, Marilyn Minter, and Kenny Scharf. He also studied drawing, painting, and sculpting the figure with Irwin Greenberg, Ephraim Rubenstein, and Barney Hodes at the Art Students League of New York, and monitored for Costa Vavagiakis at the Art Students League of New

York, National Academy of Design, and New York Academy of Art. He is a 2001 recipient of the Edwin Austin Abbey Mural Workshop Grant at the National Academy of Design. His artistic influences include Diego Rivera, Vincent van Gogh, and Amedeo Modigliani. He is currently working on his first public work, a mural which advocates for social justice.

Miguel's Answers

1. It allows me to navigate a seemingly unnavigable world.

There are so many possibilities in life, of what we might do, what we might become, that it can be overwhelming, even scary. But when I learned I was an artist at the age of four in a pre-K program called "Head Start," I realized I was ok, more than ok, that I could get started on a journey which would contain great wonder and would be rewarding. Being an artist allows me to feel integrated, a part of the world.

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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: *The Central Heart*, *The Weight of Knowing*, *Three Vignettes*.

Beyond the Medical Model with Neesa

By Column by Neesa Sunar, Peer Specialist, Transitional Services for New York, Inc.

The Difference Between Peer Specialists and Social Workers

Peer specialists inevitably encounter social workers in their work. They can work side-by-side in hospitals, clinics or community organizations, providing care and services to consumers. Peer specialists can also communicate with social workers from other agencies, especially if they are coordinating care between multiple providers to benefit consumers.

However, the social work profession is highly varied, and one need not pursue the clinical route. Some social workers are administrators in agencies and settings that offer medical and/or mental health services. Others work as community organizers, serving as advocates for vulnerable populations and demanding changes in policy to better serve their consumers. Still others work as researchers, investigating current practices and innovating the profession with new ideas.

Social workers and peer specialists adopt separate approaches to mental health care. Social workers are trained in the Medical Model, viewing maladaptive behaviors as symptoms which indicate mental illness. They utilize the DSM-5 to diagnose, then offer therapy to assist the consumer in developing coping skills to counter their “symptoms.” In contrast, peer specialists reject the Medical Model

and support the Recovery Model. Recovery is not merely the eradication of symptoms, but instead is a holistic concept where life is satisfying in most or all domains.

Peer specialists do not provide typical therapy sessions, given that this is outside their scope of service. Instead, they utilize non-clinical methods of engagement such as Intentional Peer Support (IPS). IPS removes the top-down relationship between provider and consumer, and instead prompts both people to identify power imbalances and negotiate power. Dialogue allows for the people to learn about one another and their worldviews, thus developing respect for multiple truths. Both parties set goals and aid one another in working towards them. Peers adopt nuanced practices to eliminate top-down implications, such as not sitting behind a desk but rather to the person’s side, and also not wearing a staff ID tag. Even the idea of “providing services” is challenged, because peer specialists are fundamentally equals to the people they assist.

One of the biggest differences between peer work and social work is that of self-disclosure. Peer specialists openly disclose their mental health statuses, so as to connect and support the people they work with. This is the very core of peer work. However, with social work, self-disclosure is much more limited. According to the National Association of Social Worker’s (NASW) Code of Ethics, self-disclosure can cause a negative “dual relationship” with the client, that of therapist and perhaps something else that is too friendly. (Section 1.06e). This can harm the therapeutic relationship and cause “boundary confusion.” (Section 1.06f). Self-disclosure of serious personal struggles can also impair a person’s ability to work with professional judgment. (Section 4.05b).

Compare this with the work of peer specialists. If a person struggles with

psychosis, a peer can share coping skills that they utilize themselves to manage their own psychosis. If a person feels like a failure due to having a disability, a peer can disclose that they have been hospitalized many times too. At best, peers have the freedom to fully exercise their non-clinical recovery model perspective. If a consumer has a complaint regarding their clinical providers, a peer specialist can step in and advocate on their behalf. Ideally, peers should have the power to pressure clinicians into providing care that is according to the consumer’s wishes, chipping away at the medical model top-down hierarchy.

Social workers can adopt aspects of peer work and the Recovery Model into their practice, thus enhancing their quality of care. They can encourage consumers to self-determine personal wellness tools, and they can also include the consumer in the writing of progress notes. Hopefully, if peer specialists become more integrated into standard mental health service delivery programs, their non-clinical values can humanize the practices of clinicians.

Unfortunately, peer specialists often encounter stigma in the workplace. Non-peer psychiatric staff may view peers as “less than,” given that they have a mental illness that



that they abandon their values. Instead of being advocates who fight against clinicians for their clients, peer specialists are instead forced to reinforce the agenda of clinicians. Especially when they work alone, not alongside other peer specialists, clinicians may fail to recognize the need for peers to have reasonable time to go to peer events outside the workplace.

Ultimately, staffing peers is not a matter of filling a quota to comply with Evidence Based Practice. Instead, we peers must teach clinicians about the nature of our work, including that of non-clinical values and equal mutuality with clients. When clinicians boss peers around, they must answer back diplomatically, reminding them of the extensive training we have

“Ultimately, staffing peers is not a matter of filling a quota to comply with Evidence Based Practice. Instead, we peers must teach clinicians about the nature of our work, including that of non-clinical values and equal mutuality with clients.”

makes them less professional in their views. Although peer specialists are extensively trained in non-clinical modalities, they may not be able to practice these skills because of pressure from clinicians, requiring

completed. This communicates that we are professional, and therefore deserving of respect in the workplace despite our rabble-rouser views that criticize the medical model.



Talking to Politicians’ Aides on Legislative Day

By Ted Walner

Lobbying for Better Housing Rights

It was a cold, wintry day on February 26, 2019 as we arrived on the scene in Albany, New York. It took us longer than we thought to get there, so we arrived late to the initial lecture. We did get the gist of it. NYAPRS, the mental health non-profit that organizes Legislative Day, proposed to expand housing, and pass criminal justice reforms. This organization advocated for the end of solitary confinement for many people in the system. We were excited and interested to meet

politicians for the purpose of lobbying for those in the mental health field.

After lunch, we chose the politicians we would like to go to. We selected politicians who were involved in housing, since that was our major concern. We chose to go to Assembly Members Harvey Epstein and Linda B. Rosenthal.

We were greeted by the aides of these politicians. They were very

“Change occurs and sometimes it can bring out beneficial results. Legislative Day is a great way to affect change.”

accommodating and took notes while we spoke. We had three specific requests of these Assembly Members.

Firstly, we asked for the SPOA

(single point of access) system to be improved. CUCS, a housing agency, provides three referrals that will grant our clients interviews for supportive housing, after they have been approved by the Human Resources Administration. These are called SPOA referrals. The problem arises in the fact that the housing agencies don’t take the SPOA referrals seriously. After the agencies receive the SPOA referrals, they are supposed to grant interviews and seriously consider these clients for housing. This does not happen and we wish pressure would be put on these agencies to grant housing to our clients.

Secondly, we feel there should be more individualized apartments offered. The clients are scared to share apartments with strangers. Rather than construct supportive apartments whereby people share common areas and have their own room, individualized apartments should be constructed.

(Continued on next page)

The clients would be happier and more accepting if this is done.

Thirdly, there is a rule that you have to be in a shelter one year out of two, or two years out of four, if you want family housing. We think this rule is ridiculous. We have to turn away families who are living with friends

or family, because they haven't gone through the shelter system. It should really be that the head of the household, who has mental health concerns, should be allowed to get family housing if they are a family in need. This rule is not helping families who really need help at this time.

These are the ideas we presented to the politicians. Presently, we are discussing these issues via email. We are making progress. We first alerted the politicians and now we are talking to them about it. Hopefully, we can make changes for the better.

Thus, Legislative Day gave us the

opportunity to try to improve the lives of those affected by mental health concerns. It was a very good day and it was beneficial to a lot of people.

Change occurs and sometimes it can bring out beneficial results. Legislative Day is a great way to affect change.

Op Ed: Creating Your Family

By MVK

Some Thoughts on How to Create a Sense of Community in Your Life

Life is different for every person. We all have different bodies and minds and an indefinable something which I believe is soul. We also have unique experiences and different people who influence our lives – for better or for worse. The first ones to influence us are often our parents and siblings in what we call family.

I am fortunate in that my family was a loving one. This does not mean there were no challenges, however. My father suffered from mental illness for most of his life and was in and out of hospitals for all of my growing up years. My mother drank to cope with the loneliness and stress but was always loving to me and my older brother. I was also blessed to have a strong maternal grandmother who held our family together and who drew strength from her faith in God and Jesus. I am grateful for the family I had and the years we shared together. But all things change in life and people

depressed and felt that all that I cared for was taken from me. But I have faith in God and know that this life is temporary. I also know that the word family means much more than the people we were surrounded by since birth.

Family is more than just a biological connection. Family is a connection based on mutual love and respect. And we can have this connection from people we choose to bring into our lives.

Friends

A dear friend of mine, and one who I consider to be part of my family, has this saying hanging on his wall: *Friends are the family we choose.* I agree with this. So choose wisely and choose people who genuinely care about you. A true friend is there when you need him or her. This does not mean they can fix all your problems or hold your hand through all your life challenges. They have their lives

“My father suffered from mental illness for most of his life and was in and out of hospitals for all of my growing up years. My mother drank to cope with the loneliness and stress but was always loving to me and my older brother.”

pass away. My original family is gone now except for my brother and I.

So what do you do when life has taken away the people you love and have relied on? In my case I accepted the passing of my loved ones as being a natural part of life. I could have been

to lead too. What it does mean is that they have your best interests at heart and will do what they are able to help you. In turn, you must be a true friend for them as well, for friendship is a balancing act wherein both people give and receive in equal measure.

Trapped

By Elyssa Durant, Ed.M.

Note from Author: At the time I wrote this poem, I was recently assaulted and awaiting trial for felony assault. I was told not to leave my apartment for six months until the trial if I wanted to live to testify. I was extremely depressed and felt trapped.

I testified at the trial and my assailant got 6 months for felony assault. I started a new medication regimen, moved and made it through some very difficult times with support from family and friend. Although I suffered a severe spinal injury and

had neurosurgery, my spirits are high.

I was near completely paralyzed and spent five months in the hospital and now I am able to walk and write again and had my whole family around me this weekend and they got to see me walking again.

I was in the hospital for a long time and did a lot of writing using voice (assisted) technology

Have you ever been trapped? I am not talking about your everyday run-of-the-mill subway congestion or an elevator that is filled beyond capacity. Trapped. No way out. Paralyzed. Frightened, frustrated, angry and desperate.

Like any ordinary “normal”

Marriage

For those fortunate to find romantic love, marriage is the best avenue to extending your family. No longer alone, you will have a partner at home who cares about and loves you. Too many people, however, think that all their problems will be solved if only they had a love in their life. Nothing could be further from the truth. When two people commit to spend their lives together, they are taking the good with the bad. There is much compromise and give and take involved in a successful relationship, and much work. But don't let this deter you. If you love someone enough, you will gladly shoulder the responsibilities and learn how to be there for your spouse.

Fellowship

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. – Ecclesiastes 4:12

“No matter how tall, smart, or rich you become you'll soon find yourself needing community. When we fellowship with others in love we can fight off loneliness, enjoy the wisdom of others, and find comfort in knowing we are valued. Fellowship, especially in a faith-based community, helps to multiply our joys and soften the blow of sorrow.” Pastor Jordan, Everlasting Church

I have found love, acceptance and support at this small but growing Christian church in the Bronx. Having a place to gather with people who are seeking a relationship with God has given me the strength I need to face the challenges that life presents. Christian fellowship has brought me closer to the Lord and closer to people who I call family.

Final Thoughts

We each of us must learn to adapt to the changes that life brings. One of these changes is to the composition of our family. Try not to be discouraged if



it seems like a hard endeavor to create a family. Go about this quest with a good heart, be positive and loving, and you will draw people to you.

Even if you think you have no one in your life, please know that in a broad sense, the world is your family. Be grateful for all the people out there whose jobs improve your life. We rely on and need others to survive and thrive.

Right now you are benefiting from the knowledge, skills and labor of all those people who came before. Whether it is having clean water, a home to live in, plumbing, food, electricity, medicines, transportation or technologies, our lives would be so much harder without the inventions and work that make all this possible.

Or when you listen to music, read good books, view paintings or participate in whatever form of art you enjoy, you are sharing in the thoughts and emotions of the artist. The art of others can give us an outlet to our own thoughts and feelings.

It is a blessing to live in this world, surrounded by good people and their contributions. Take comfort in all that exists. And be proud. We are fortunate in that we belong to a big, wonderful human family.

I wonder what I may do if my task was completed. It is my greatest hope to find a place where I can end this debilitating madness. Just break the cycle. Free.

Free from the need to provide objective verification of my physical existence and a rational basis for a seemingly bizarre obsession. Proof that I am the original despite the countless people impersonating me using simple Social Engineering and spokeo!!

I know these things.

I know who I am and what I stand for. I organize my life in a sequential, numerical, historical, logical order where everything has a designated

(Continued on page 12)

enhancing your life or just struggling to survive

(Continued from page 11 Trapped)

beginning, middle and end.

There must be a place where reason and purpose replace obsessions and insanity.

Can anyone understand this



madness? Why can't you see how simple everything is for me?

I need things to be simple.

My patterns seem so obvious. Pay attention! What seems like chaos to you serves as my salvation.

Don't you see how resourceful I am? I know my methods are rigid, but they are clearly consistent with my "mission" in life.

Few can be bothered with the elegant simplicity of my rituals. My behaviors are rational! They protect my delicate foundation. I do not have far to fall.

I need an out!

Why question my methods?

By collecting physical evidence of my experiences and transient existence, I can be someone. Someone with a past, a present, maybe even a future.

I collect, therefore I am.

Look! I have proof! History. References.

I want to be part of your world. Really I do.

I want roots, consistency and foundations. I want high school reunions and a hometown.

My task must be finished! It is destroying my relationship with my future self. My soul is withering away beneath this desperate facade.

Please give me a moments consideration and see me.

I am not cruel. I am not evil. Nevertheless, I am so alone and isolated. I am here and I am ready. I am ready to end this endless search for home. But how?

I need you.

I need you to help me find a place where I can feel comfortable ending this vicious cycle.

I am looking to you...the collective you of humanity to help me through this time of need and uncertainty.

All I seek is compassion, empathy, and understanding. I continue my search hoping I am not completely alone in my quest.

Restoring order dominates my very existence. Keeping me trapped in the

past; invading the present; dictating my actions through repetition, ruminations, anxiety and fear inhibiting my growth and progress. I do not have it in me to climb out of another depression.

Don't you see how this life is breaking me?

If only I had the same resignation and grace of that lone Buck crossing a quiet country road, I would cherish the instant where I am faced with certain death or total salvation. I would search for a sanctuary where forgiveness replaces damnation.

For one instant, I would welcome the challenge to live freely in this brave new world...to explore and run free on a distant, winding path.

I would stand proud, defiant, and free.

Really, truly, trapped.

Editor's Note: If you or anyone you know is contemplating suicide, there is a helpline you can turn to that is confidential and open 24/7: 1888-NYC-WELL.

Bruni in the City: Manhattan After Dark

A Column by Christina Bruni

Lit with a Fire to Express Myself

The driver took only thirty-five minutes to take me to Avenue A. Two hours early for a literary event I acted as a *flâneur* walking about the streets around St. Mark's Place.

Live bands were performing in Tompkins Square Park. I sat on a bench in the park for fifteen minutes. A tall dude decided to sit on the bench right near me even though other benches were empty.

A woman joined him yet didn't sit down. She circled around talking in front of us. Did I look like a turista with the Brooklyn, NY logo tote? My shoes were Missoni Converse.

The secret to surviving in Manhattan after dark is to put on your game face when you're outside. I've figured out that no one will mess with you when you're wearing Converse.

As I'm sitting on the bench, I proudly wear a sterling silver necklace. It was a gift from my mother, she bought it in Mexico in the 1990s.

The tall dude is smoking a blunt next to me. In New York City there's a new rule: people caught toking marijuana in public aren't supposed to be arrested. That fits with my Green Party mantra that non-violent drug users shouldn't be sent to jail.

Only it's not so great when you're walking down the street and reefer smoke is invading your nostrils. You didn't sign up to get a contact high

just sitting on a park bench minding your business.

The tall dude asks a nearby guy: "Got a cigarette?"

"An American is seventy-five cents."

The girl is still wandering around in front of us. She can tell I'm not a street person. My pocketbook is next to me on the park bench. She doesn't try to shake me down, just stands there talking to the tall dude.

After fifteen minutes I get up off the bench to go to Sidewalk Café. The Italian American writers' group is performing there. Between Italians—*fra noi*—you're one of us regardless of your color creed or where you come from. Even if we just met you a half hour ago, you're our new friend.

For over eighteen years I've been performing on this stage. It's a different city today. Yet everyone's the same around here: dressed in black with white sneakers, or in an autumn overcoat, or carrying a tragicomic backpack.

In this great city I can be who I am: Chris Bruni. Chris has a defective brain that acts like a normal brain with the help of chemical intervention. Music is her forever muse. Words are her salvation. I am that girl. She is who I am.

Over the fall I thought long and hard about this. A lot of people

"Chris has a defective brain that acts like a normal brain with the help of chemical intervention."

haven't gotten the memo that recovery is possible. One two-star reviewer of my memoir wrote: "Not worth your money. Better mental health books exist."



Left of the Dial was supposed to be an unusual retelling of what happened to me. My intent was to show how I healed via creative efforts with music, fashion, writing, and exercise.

Today, I hope not to lose the spark inside that keeps me alive. In 1987, when I was getting ill I had euphoric energy. Words burst from my lips non-stop. Thirty-one years later I wonder if having the breakdown dulled my personality. Or was my exuberance a symptom of the oncoming illness.

It's true I'm not the same person. Yet would I want to be unmedicated and have an ill mind, yet be a gifted writer. No—give me my sanity. My greatest achievements happened

after I recovered. Did you read that sentence? Read it again.

Every day I kneel down thanking God for what he has given me: the greatest life I'll ever live in any lifetime I walk this way on earth. I'm a realistic optimist: there's no going back in time and changing what happened.

The cure at 7:15 on a Saturday night is taking the stage and using my voice to tell a story. I'm at home in this imagined world, where everyone comes together to celebrate our humanity. Here we can be ourselves.

I'm happiest performing in front of an audience. That's when the old electrical energy returns, and I'm fired up. My soul ignited, anything is possible.

performance art



The Doggie Rebel

By Craig R. Bayer

We Miss You Pierre

My family owned two dogs over the course of my childhood, Pierre and Nikki. Pierre, a toy poodle, was my first dog; Nikki, a miniature Schnauzer, was the second.

Nikki was the sweeter pet. Never growled at us, never bit. You could pick her up, squeeze her muzzle, kiss her head; don't recall her ever being a problem with children.

Pierre, on the other hand, had almost no desire to be a pet. You couldn't pet him, only my mother had the nerve and desire to lift him and even she was bitten once in a while. He wasn't aggressive toward people, but if you tried to touch him, he growled.

One time, he escaped from the house and casually trotted down the street. I was scared for him because he could have been attacked by another dog or a cat or even be hit by a car.

"Pierre!" I cried to him.

Pierre turned around, took a look back at me and growled. Then, he proceeded on his angry way.

Today, I would think it at least partly ridiculous to keep a dog like him around. Maybe he needed to be set out to pasture.

But as a child, I thought this was partly hilarious, partly symbolic. As a young teenager, I was somewhat angry myself and I perceived Pierre's contempt for being a pet as a nod to animal rights.

Why, I thought, was he obliged to be a good dog? Why should any animal submit to the tyranny of the petty, selfish, human race?

I had all sorts of names for him, too. Dick Dirt: because he was always dirty and matted; only my mother would bother to brush him and bathe him. Butch Beard (no offense to the New York Knicks basketball player), because he had a sort of orange and brown beard, a stain from food, water and God Knows What. How funny he looked with his white fur and orange/brown beard!

I also called him Yosef O'Yagai, a bastardization of the name of a character in a childhood book that I had read.

"What about Yosef O'Yagai?" I would ask out of nowhere. "What about the doggie?"

"F_ck Yosef!" a friend of mine and no fan of his would respond; he hated Pierre because the dog was mean and nasty.

Ironically, Pierre wasn't really born or raised nasty, even though he was the runt of the litter.

When he was a pup, a neighbor of ours lifted him up and dropped him. When Pierre fell, his leg was broken.

And so, history was made: Pierre never fully trusted a human being again.

The only time Pierre was gentle with me was on cold, snowy days.

We'd come in from his daily walk and his fur would be caked with snow and he'd be shivering intensely.

He'd let me cover and rub his body with a towel until the snow melted.

anti-hero.

Pierre died when I was away at sleepaway camp, so I did not go through the trauma of finding him dead. But I was very sad and I still

"Pierre, the true leader for animal rights, or, as my sister said, 'Pierre's rights!'"

Otherwise, he was a bad doggie, a member of the family, mind you, but a bad doggie.

And I was a depressed and angry adolescent anyway, so Pierre was something of a hero, or at least an

miss him.

Pierre, the true leader for animal rights, or, as my sister said, "Pierre's rights!"

a dog has rights too



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(Continued from cover story *Alternatives to Police Responding to 911 Calls*)

not clear how the officers are recruited or deployed once trained.

But there are still too many encounters that result in death or injury to the person in need. Since June 2015 when the NYPD CIT training started, 15 people have died or been seriously injured when they were shot by NYPD in a crisis call, mostly when loved

family members, and community organizations) need to be part of the planning process to reimagine, test, evaluate, implement, and monitor its performance.

We have prepared the following online discussion paper at <https://bit.ly/2WIsQH7> which traces the many projects and initiatives that

“Because many mental health recipients fear hospitals, we need more pre-crisis centers. When people cut their hand they go to an urgent care center for stitches. Why can’t we have mental health urgent care centers in the city?”

ones of those in crisis called for help.

Based on our experiences, we have come to believe that the crisis response system needs to be fundamentally rethought such that: 1) the total number of 911 calls are reduced through the development of alternative support systems; and 2) when assistance is required the first responders should be specially trained crisis workers, not police officers.

We further believe that those who have the most direct knowledge and experience with that system (peers,

have been launched by the de Blasio administration since 2014 and the ideas and recommendations generated by our coalition colleagues for transforming the crisis response system. We welcome your feedback and encourage you to connect with us by email at crisisresponse@communityaccess.org.

Efforts in New York City to respond safely and humanely to people experiencing mental health crises involve the effective coordination of many different stakeholders. The



formation, in April 2018, of Mayor de Blasio’s NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force recognizes this fact—laying the groundwork for us all to better address what has always been a challenging public health and safety issue.

To help inform the task force’s strategic thinking, Community Access held a Crisis Services Forum on January 18, which brought together 75 people with lived experiences of using emergency and 911 services to brainstorm ideas about how to reform crisis responses and how to develop community-based networks that matter. The brainstorm resulted in identifying five main areas of focus:

Alternatives to Police Responding to 911 Calls

People in distress are often experiencing mental health concerns that need either social workers or peers, not law enforcement. One would not expect the police to be able to treat high cholesterol; therefore, police should not be responding to mental health support calls. Trained peers have strong track records in de-escalating mental health crisis issues. Peers understand the importance of respectful communication, especially in working with people in distress. Most peers are trained in trauma-informed care and can respond without re-escalating the trauma of people in distress.

Pre-Crisis Alternatives

Because many mental health recipients fear hospitals, we need more pre-crisis centers. When people cut their hand they go to an urgent care center for stitches. Why can’t we have mental health urgent care centers in the city?

We have senior centers, why not centers for those living with mental health concerns? And why don’t shelters offer programs to those in distress? Shelters push people outside and expect them to manage from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with nowhere to go. We need the 40 to 70 percent of the homeless population who live with mental health concerns to have resources.

Alternatives to Calling 911

A new number for mental health concern calls will result in fewer calls to police and fewer police interactions

with people in mental health crisis and reduced number of violent interactions. The new number should be easy to remember. A new number will create an environment that changes how people think about and respond to crisis and engage people in the fight against stigma.

Peer Involvement

Involve peers at all levels of implementation of the task force roll out of initiatives. Engage peers in policy discussions and policy decision-making of NYPD and the city relating to CIT. Increase salaries and supports for peers in CIT work to be on par with other professionals. Increase access of peers in CIT work to well-designed training: recovery training, cultural competence, and ethics.

Enroll in CIT Training All NYPD Officers and All City Government Security Officers

All NYPD should be trained in identifying mental health symptoms, practice responding to acute crisis calls and learn that every family has someone who experiences mental health issues so that people with mental health concerns are not considered second-class citizens.

We recognize that in some very few instances police will need to respond to a crisis call. When a person in crisis has a gun pointed at someone police will be called, so we want all NYPD officers trained.

But it was the clear consensus of this brainstorming group that as much as possible, the mental health community no longer wants the police to respond to most calls. We need non-police alternatives to this public health crisis.

If you would like to stay informed about our advocacy work and the progress of the city’s efforts to reform the 911 crisis response system, please sign up for our email list at communityaccess.org/connect.

If you would like to share your own experiences with a 911 incident involving a person in an emotional crisis, or would like to share your ideas for improving the system, please write to crisisresponse@communityaccess.org. You can also ask your organization to join our Campaign: www.ccitnyc.org.

demand better policing

Angela's Answers continued

brought nothing except positivity into my life. Even when struggling in my darkest hours and days I am able to get relief. Recently, my self-esteem has improved dramatically based on the opportunities that have come from due diligence to my work. I also have come to realize that I have no choice. I must create art in order to survive.

2. I'm inspired by movies, books, other artists and my relationship to color in addition to many other subjects and people.

3. My home is my studio basically. When I paint, I go to a studio in Long Island City. At home, my main tools and materials are: wire, string and scissors. In the studio, I would have to say a good brush, white, black and red paint.

4. I'm from The South so I would have to say "the legends" of gothic and ghost stories.

5. Currently, as we speak, I am sewing a corset. It's for the Outsider Art Fair. Attached is a whistle. There are wire hands around the waist with military-like badges sewn on.

Gavin's answers continued

In 2015, my wife saw that I had more talent than just posting my name in the streets. She encouraged me to do paintings. As you know, getting your work in a gallery can be nearly impossible. One of my therapists mentioned Fountain House to me and thought I should apply (the mental health clinic I attend referred me to Fountain House). I finished my first canvas in 2015 and in 2016, I was in my first show, "The Art of Democracy," at Fountain House Gallery. I realized that I liked making paintings more than doing graffiti in the streets.

Being creative helps me clear my mind of my many mental struggles. Art gives me a reason to live. It is a boost to my self-esteem and confidence when I am selected to a new show or sell one of my paintings.

2. My wife inspires me the most. I write her name on the side of every painting. The letters in the alphabet inspire me. I have great fun playing around with the letters and making them my own. I enjoy creating my abstract symbols. Colors inspire me to create a natural or multi-colored background. Calligraphy- and other graffiti-writers and their hand-styles inspire me too. The artists I fancy the most are Monet, Basquiat, Jackson Pollack, Retna, Faust, Base and Badygnose just to name a few. To hold the power of creation in my hands and bringing something to life that has never existed before is the power of art.

3. I always need an assortment of markers and paintbrushes. I love markers and the smooth, even lines they provide. I have all different types of markers: skinny ones, fat ones, medium ones, and squeeze-drippy ones. I have markers with small tips, broad tips, wide tips, and needlepoint tips. I must have a broad colorful mix.

Brushes are very important. I have paintbrushes of many sizes from very fine to paint-rollers. I have a

wide assortment of spray-cans in all different colors. Spray-paint gives me different blends and techniques from wide spray to droplets.

I like to mix all three of these mediums together: acrylic, spray paint and markers.

Each medium has its own strengths. It is a delicate balance to make these mediums all mesh with each other.

4. It is hard to be a minority in the art world. I think when people see my work they may associate it with graffiti. My work has some graffiti aspects, but it is more than just letters that people may see scrawled on a building or stickers. My work embodies calligraphy, different cultures, and an assortment of languages. I come from my African American, West Indian, and African roots. I think my cultural background shows in my affinity for symbols and different languages.

5. I just finished a painting for a political show. Most recently, the show I was part of was a pop-up holiday art-sticker show. I worked very hard for both shows. I am always submitting to art shows. I am not sure what the next painting will be. I am thinking it might have something to do with immigration problems in America.

Aracelis' bio continued

and enjoyment. Also, educational therapy at the School of Visual Art where they gathered around to see my art and the pleasure of showing yet another way. The art was more therapeutic. HAI or Healing Arts Initiative, promoted my nature of creating art. The doors opened the field to works and criticism, a generous and rewarding way of doing art. My greatest reward was to have my art presented at the MOMA and the Whitney museums, as a person who has suffered with mental illness. I find that it is great pleasure to have someone participate and give me a chance to view work at these two places.

I have created works of art all these years wholly and in part with the help of friends and teachers alike; professors who know how to show me that it is in me to bring out the best. My joy of reading about artists like Michelangelo, Monet, Goya and other famous impressionists' or about abstract art has encouraged me to work hard at doing what I do best.

I understand that my art, either by selling it or by giving it away as a gift, is reward enough, however, showing it at a museum is splendid.

Aracelis' Answers

1. Being an artist has impacted my life by giving me a chance to make new friends and create art.

2. Inspiration comes from the moment that I wake up to the end of the day, life and the need to live.

3. Paper and a canvas with paint and mostly a pencil to draw. A rule is to have something in mind to focus on.

4. Culture is important because I do not want to forget where I came from. Being an artist of Puerto Rican descent, I paint with festive colors, different shades of yellow, different

shades of orange. My favorite color is purple. I use warm colors to reflect the Puerto Rican culture. I see warm beaches, blue water and palm trees as opposed to the American culture with streets and skyscrapers. I see my art as festive, colorful and musical.

5. I am currently working with the Fountain House Studio on a show about community. The piece I am working on is about different cultures in the neighborhood. This is shown in my piece with people in a pizzeria and a wine store.

Boo Lynn's answers continued

any encouragement or support from my family. My schools never had art classes and since it was pre-internet, there was no access or exposure, resources or mentors that could have guided me or supported my development.

My mother was bipolar with terrible mood swings and in the 70s when I hit my rebellious teen years, listening to rock and roll and attending peace rallies and anti-establishment protests, I became heavily influenced by surrealism—we inevitably clashed. This resulted in her taking me to a psychiatric institution and presenting my artwork, proclaiming my rebellious, sensitive nature to the doctors demanding that I be medicated and forcefully institutionalized. I was not institutionalized, but it was recommended that I take "happy pills" to desensitize or stabilize my reactions to the world. I refused because, although those feelings and emotions are often very intense and uncomfortable, it is that sensitivity and empathy that inspire me to respond creatively.

When I ran away from my foster home and came to New York City, the only way to gain exposure was through art galleries and they were not interested in artists that were not deceased, particularly if they were female. I didn't feel welcome in the exclusive, champagne, commercial art world. I continued to create my artwork in isolation, attended several art schools in a patchwork of non-matriculated classes, backpacked around the world and supported myself as a go-go dancer.

As an adult I had to make necessary sacrifices and choose a more traditional path, becoming an administrative assistant in order to provide financial stability, attend college for my sociology degree and raise my daughter. There was no time or money for the artist in me to be expressed. Although those choices had their rewards, I longed deeply to be creating and take back my artistic power.

In my late 50s I had a series of traumatic events occur: long-term unemployment, painful physical impediments, poverty, increasing social isolation and the impending doom of homelessness drove me into a state of prolonged depression, lethargy and hopelessness. I was financially, mentally and physically unable to function or create and lost all hope. I'd hit rock bottom and

was referred to a suicide prevention network that provided guidance and support to access resources such as public assistance, physical and mental health services.

During this dark period, I discovered Fountain House and the Fountain House Gallery which provided invaluable support, validation and encouragement. It is through this engagement in the past few years that I slowly regained my confidence and my SELF identity and renewed purpose in my quest as an artist.

Through my participation in this community I've been able to consistently sustain my artistic practice for which I have received several scholarships to attend the Art Students League, granted a studio residency, the opportunity to teach and learn through their inventive, supportive workshops, and the opportunity to submit my work to renowned curators for the Gallery's inspiring exhibitions that give us exposure. I'm so proud of the work we collectively produce together and sales not only help support us, but the gallery as well—so it's a very thrilling time for me as a mature, emerging artist.

2. I react to the world within and around me and globally; what we as humans are doing politically and environmentally. Locally, I'm always actively searching for fleeting beauty, the pockets of nature, the juxtaposition of old and new architecture in the New York urban landscapes. I'm consciously looking as I walk or ride my bike for the unusual, unexpected, discarded or overlooked. I'll often stop and take time to appreciate the view because I'm conscious that the moment will never exist again. I'm inspired by the sun bouncing off glass and steel, distorting reflections, or the impossible angles of the megaliths that are under construction, dwarfing the older buildings everywhere and marveling at the way these shapes cut the clouds and blue sky into such pleasing perspectives. Everywhere I see light and shadows forming abstract shapes and colors.

3. By far the most important tools an artist possesses are imagination, discipline; fortitude and belief that regardless of our perceived satisfaction or others judgments about our artful activities, the process of creating is paramount and core to our nature and purpose. In addition, self-motivation, community engagement, ongoing development, and mastering one's craft are important components to sustaining our practice as creators.

4. As a child I've traveled the States with my mom, so naturally I continued to travel overseas, mostly backpacking alone on several continents and islands. Bringing my sketchbook with me and sharing that little travel journal with the people I met along the way opened many doors and created connections with artists and craftsmen world-wide that overcame language barriers. For example, in Indonesia I stayed for nearly a year, learning Chinese ink and batik techniques that

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 15)

still show up in my work. Living in New York has exposed me to so many cultures and lifestyles, I'm constantly stimulated by the diversity and cultural wealth packed into this city. In particular I seek out the low-cost or free events and concerts and am constantly inspired and amazed at the diversity of creative expression that finds its way to New York.

5. I'm currently focused on improving my health and maintaining my daily practice of art-making, showing my completed work, coupled with part-time classes at The Art Students League. In 2019 onward I'll be working additionally on increasing my online visibility, researching opportunities to exhibit, developing contacts with mentors and perhaps finding a patron and beginning a very daunting project of photographing and creating an inventory of all the work I've completed over my lifetime.

Miguel's answers continued

2. Heroism. I don't mean famous stories. I mean regular people who stand up and do the right thing, even though they might get nothing in return. Just helping someone. Maybe, say, someone you will never see again. Helping them down the stairs with a bag onto the subway. I think kindness is heroic. And when I see it done it does something to my heart, makes it feel larger somehow.

3. Well, they are all important and without all of them I wouldn't



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be able to get my work done, but I would say I pay close attention to my brushes. Because of the way I work, it is important that my brushes be in supreme working condition. This means that I rinse them out well on a regular basis while I'm working. I never let them sit bristles down in a cup of water, and I clean them well at the end of every painting session, sometimes halfway through.

4. Fortunately, I live in New York City. The Melting Pot where we have a great mixture of ideas. When there is something outstanding, we talk about it at great length. In order for there to be change, ideas need to be discussed openly, without judgment. I believe that art is a great stage for political discussion and change. In my work I discuss topics which affect us all and which many people feel passionately about. I do this because, just as with activism, protesting some injustice happening in the world, through

standing up and having our voices heard, our opinions felt, we can effect change.

Being a Latino man who grew up in the inner city, I am very aware of the need for community and for the voice of the individual to be heard. That is why I call myself Miguel, to identify myself as a Latino artist and to advocate for social justice in my work. It is an unfortunate aspect of being a Latino that we are often marginalized, therefore it is important to stand up together to have our voices heard.

5. I am putting the finishing touches on my first public work, a painting I have titled "Stand Up." It is a painting that reflects the political climate of the world. It touches on issues of racism, sexism, and oppression of all forms and it casts a bright light on the heroes who stand up to be counted and have their voices heard in that climate. In the first scene an African American man covered in chains, undaunted

by the weight, waves his hand and shouts defiantly, "I will not be oppressed!" In the middle scene, a female protester is having a face off with a riot cop during a demonstration about a woman's right to have control over her body. She is calling him to task, unphased by his threat of force. In the last scene, in the midst of a melee with riot cops, a woman, my friend Betty Eastland, is taking a riot cop's baton away. Only she is not using force. Instead she uses reason, understanding, and benevolence to relieve this presence of his destructive instrument and cancel his volatile momentum. She represents a step forward in the evolution of mankind. This painting, when ready, will be scaled up and featured on a billboard that will measure 14x48 feet and displayed (if all goes well) somewhere in the Times Square area.

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QUEENS COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH SOCIETY: For information and referrals (718) 454-0705

Advocacy

NYAPRS: statewide mental health advocacy group that sponsors events and organizes the annual Legislative Day. To join call Carla (212) 780-1400x7726

MHASC: coalition committed to providing advocacy to consumers in special housing units in jails and prisons. Call Jennifer (646) 602-5644.

THE ICARUS PROJECT: join to help redefine mental illness as a "dangerous gift." Visit www.theicarusproject.net

The Arts

ARTWORK BY CONSUMER ARTISTS: Fountain Gallery, 702 Ninth Ave at 48th Street in Manhattan (212) 262-2756. Tues-Sat 11-8, Sun 1-5.

MOVIE CLUB/POETRY CLUB: NAMI NYC Metro, 505 Eighth Ave, (212) 684-3264 also library@naminyc.org

CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP/MUSIC/MEDITATION/PUBLISHING SERVICES: Creative Women's Network offers one-on-one and group writing workshops, editing and publishing services, empowerment and meditation classes by experienced professionals. We also seek vocalists and musicians to perform original songs and

covers. Currently working on a musical theatre production. Feel free to contact us at (917) 881-5134 or CreativWomenNtwk@aol.com. Visit www.creativewomensnetwork.com for basic information.

Support Groups

ZAPPALORTI SOCIETY support group for gays/lesbians/bisexuals/transgendered peers with mental illness. Saturdays 2-4, LGBT Center 208 W 13 St. Call Bert (917) 286-0616.

HEARING VOICES SUPPORT GROUP. A group for people who hear voices. Call (212) 684-3264 for info.

MOOD DISORDERS SUPPORT GROUP: for people with bipolar disorder and depression, as well as the friends and family of those with these disorders. Suggested \$5.00 donation for non-members. We also offer a group designed for people under 30, (212) 533-6374, info@mdsg.org, www.mdsg.org

DOUBLE TROUBLE meeting for anyone with a mental health challenge and chemical addiction. Gouverneur Clinic, 227 Madison Street in lower Manhattan. Enter at Clinton Street and take elevator to 12th floor, conference room A. Come join us for Coffee and discussion. Email Petersa9@nychhc.org

Social

THE FRIENDSHIP NETWORK: If you want a friend or need a friend, then meet a friend through the Friendship Network. Call Alice, Nancy or Barbara at 516-326-6111 or www.friendshipnetwork.org

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