

Reminiscing



I board the elevated train at **177th Street** alone and ride into the underground to the **92nd Street Y** to take modern dance lessons. Again there is the occasional flasher, but I know how to handle it.

Subway travel continues through my years at **James Monroe High School**. Every day, we walk the many

blocks to the station, past the shops, the buildings with their gargoyles, and **Zaro's Bakery**. By age sixteen, we have boyfriends and are sophisticated enough to take the subway to Wolman Memorial Ice-Skating Rink.

On Saturday night, girls dress up in a straight skirt, a sweater complete with neckerchief, a topper coat, and spike-heeled shoes. On the subway, we are hanging on straps or leaning on poles, joking around. Sometimes, we walk from car to car to find the best one, no mean feat in spiked shoes over the windy gaps.

The biggest thrill is going to Birdland and Basin Street, where we get to see the biggest names in jazz: Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Thelonius Monk, Duke Ellington, and Dizzie Gillespie. We sit at tiny, up-close tables for a small cover charge. We love to order Canadian Club and ginger ale, no questions asked. We smoke cigarettes, crossing our legs in a sophisticated way.

The subway trip home is a real joy ride. It's late at night, the train is empty, and we are slightly tipsy and giggly, laughing all the way home. Not a flasher or mugger in sight. As we step off the train, our heads clear in the cool night air. The girls take off their shoes to walk the long stretch home. When I arrive home at 1:00AM, my parents, unaware of all of the evening's events, feel secure in the knowledge that I have been safe.

The Bronx of the early '50s, just like the rest of America, finds young people transitioning from silly games to actually falling in love. Sometimes it takes many trial and error experiences.

At age thirteen, I am in eighth grade. Flirting in junior high is comprised of smiling, bumping into someone you like, or receiving a punch in the arm.



Fordham Roller Skating

Love words consist of, "Do you have the homework?" or, "The teacher is a real jerk, right?"

I know Kenny likes me because he writes that I'm his favorite kid in the class slam book. Everyone has a slam book where you keep records of classmates' favorite things, like colors, sports, friends, and

foods.

I like Kenny too. He is tall and has brown, stick-straight hair, and blue eyes. Knowing he likes me leaves me a little confused, bewildered because nothing happens. It is not until the eighth-grade dance in June that we actually dance and speak at length. After the dance, Kenny walks me home. It is a warm spring evening; a soft breeze blows as we meander along my tree-lined street. We are holding hands and quite gracefully stop to kiss. It is a warm, dry, perfect kiss. Kenny moves to Kentucky the following week and I never see him again.

High school starts in ninth grade. Boy-girl relationships are changing. Now there is real dating. This includes going to the movies, out for pizza or ice cream, and going to parties. The protocol is the boy calls the girl on the phone a proper few days before a Saturday date. Some people make the commitment to go steady, but most of us play the field. There is a wide variety of kissing techniques and experiences to deal with. It is always the boy who is the initiator.

I remember Robert Stackhouse, who asks me out on a date. We have a fun time at the movies and go out for a slice of pizza. He walks me home to my apartment building. He cordially rides the elevator with me to the 4th floor. We are awkwardly smiling but have nothing to say. We step into the hallway near my apartment: 4B. Robert gently grabs my shoulders and presses me against the wall. He leans in for a kiss. I'm thinking, "Okay, I can do this." Suddenly, he thrusts his tongue into my mouth. He begins licking with his tongue along my upper teeth, as if to clean them. I pull away and he laughs. He is still pushing against me. I am unable to move.

I am screaming as my father opens our door. "Gotta go! Bye!"

What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?

By Joan Migden Brock, joanbrock@juno.com

After spending all our lives in New York State, my husband Howard and I find ourselves living in Albemarle Plantation in Hertford, North Carolina. As both of us were born and raised in The Bronx, I on **Bryant Avenue** near **174th Street** and him in **Parkchester**, this area comes as quite a shock. We lived in our house in Chestnut Ridge in Rockland County for fifty-two years, where we were surrounded by people from The Bronx. On my street, there were six houses lived in by people raised in The Bronx. All my close friends were from The Bronx. We always laughed at the same things and no explanations were ever needed. We all had the same frame of reference: street games like jump rope and potsy, cake like black-and-whites and charlotte rouses, food like lox and bagels, corned beef and pastrami, whipped butter, and mustard like **Nathan's**. Now, all that has changed.

In 2019 in anticipation of Howard's retirement (I have been retired from teaching for years), we decided to move to a place where we could have a little nicer weather, pursue our boating hobby, and pay much, much cheaper taxes. We did not want Florida, as I have MS, which is a heat-sensitive disease. Our search, like all other searches today, started on the internet. We wanted south, but not too far south, and discovered the inner banks of North Carolina. It is an area with good boating waters, few hurricanes, low taxes, and weather that really did not include more than a dusting of snow. The search was on.

We visited various developments and decided on Albermarle Plantation. In the sales office, they had a map and pins indicating where all the residents had come from. Overwhelmingly, they came from

four states: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. This development is called **Yankee Stadium** by the locals, and to the locals that's not a compliment, but to us it was perfect.

I always knew I had a Bronx connection in North Carolina. Two of my Bronx friends, who, by the way, do not know each other, had both moved to North

Carolina (not near me, but to this state). My friend Marilyn Drucker Feig from **Bolton Street** moved here many years ago. She and I taught at **James Monroe** in the '60s. She later taught on Long Island. After she retired, she and her daughters moved to the Cary area. She says she loves it and can get ethnic food in her area. In my area, ethnic foods are very limited.



P.S. 50, 1550 Vyse Avenue

They have what they call bagels; they are skinny, flat bagels. There is no whipped butter, no hard rolls, and no kosher-deli-style corned beef and pastrami.

My other friend, Geraldine Khaner Velasquez, was from **Vyse Avenue**. She and I went all through school together from Kindergarten at **P.S. 50** through **Hunter College**. When she retired as an Art Professor at Georgian Court College in New Jersey, she and her husband moved here to be close to her daughter, who had been working in N.C. with two of her grandchildren. She, too, does not live near my part of North Carolina, but both my friends are close enough to visit, when this pandemic is over.

The pandemic has been very restricting. I have met a number of people in this development, but socializing has been limited, so my husband and I have many more people to meet. Even with all these restrictions, I managed to make another Bronx connection. After forty or so years of not playing Mah

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Jongg, I started to play in a refresher game in order to meet people. I, like many of my fellow Bronxites, learned to play the game at my mother's knee. She played every week. As an adult when my children were young and I hadn't gone back to teaching, I played regularly. One of the first people I met was a woman named Anne, and where was she raised? You guessed it. Both she and her husband are originally from The Bronx.

Anne Hughes Marini is one of five children. She has one brother and three sisters: Maureen, Tommy, Theresa, and Kathy. When they were very young, they lived on **Clinton Avenue**, and then they moved to **Ward Avenue** near my alma mater **James Monroe**. They all attended parochial school, **St. Martin of Tours** on **Crotona Avenue**. When it came to high school, all five of them went to **Grace Dodge Vocational High School**. I asked her about her favorite memory, and she said it was hanging out with Dion and The Belmonts before they were famous. The group would practice their harmonies on the street corner.

As a youngster, she never gave a thought about ethnicity or race. If you had a jump rope, you were part of the group for girls. If you had a broomstick and a Spaldeen, you were part of the group for boys. Bronxites had blinders when it came to with whom you played.

The other thing she credits with growing up in The Bronx is her toughness. Nobody takes advantage of anyone raised in The Bronx.



Bryant Avenue & East 174th Street

She married a Bronx boy named Jeff Marini. She left The Bronx after she got married. First, for many years, she lived in the Boston area, and then, after spending vacations at the outer banks in N.C., they found Albemarle Plantation. She too appreciates having a lot of north-easterners here.

She is the first person I met here with a Bronx connection, but I am sure she will not be the last. If there are any Bronxites reading this article living in Albemarle Plantation, please contact me at joanbrock@juno.com. We can talk and remember all the good times growing up in the biggest small place in the world!

Paddleball

(continued from page 6)

lovely Laura came to my rescue, slapping his face and saying, "You get the Hell out of here before we call the police!" And that was that. He was gone, and she and my friends helped me to my feet. I was so humiliated, to be attacked like that in front of everyone, and saved by a girl, of all things. Oh God, how would I ever live this down?

Well, it was nothing to worry about. Apparently, Laura liked me, and she became my first girlfriend (a whopping two years older than me). My other friends were mad at the bad sportsmanship, so "the Refugee" and his son were never seen again. It was never spoken of again either.

Paddleball was a big part of my life and gave me a lot. It was the first time I got to interact, and make friends, with adults. I got very fit and learned good sportsmanship. There were a lot of firsts. My first sprained ankle. My first girlfriend. My first kiss. My first beer (on my 18th birthday, when my friends took me into the local bar). My first McDonald's (after our games). My first nickname.

Yes, The Bronx was a really special place growing up. I loved it, and even though I live far away now, it holds a special place in my heart. It was where my whole family arrived from Europe, raised their kids, their grandkids, and lived their lives. From **Sedgwick Avenue** to **University Avenue**, **Kingsbridge** to **195th Street**. It's where I went to elementary school, junior high school, and **Bronx Science**. It helped open new worlds for me, and I hope that it still does for others today.

Bob Abrams: The Luckiest Guy in the World

A Book Discussion By Stephen Samtur

When we became aware that a prominent Bronx boy had written his memoir, The Luckiest Guy in the World, we thought our readers would like to know how our favorite borough weaned Robert Abrams. He served as Bronx Borough President from 1970-1978 and was elected New York State



2000 Holland Avenue, then & now

Attorney General in 1978, the first time in forty years a Democrat was elected to that post. He was subsequently re-elected three times, in 1982, 1986, and 1990 by record-breaking margins. He was a nominee for senator in 1992.

Bob grew up in **Pelham Parkway**, attended **Roosevelt Hebrew School** on **Wallace Avenue** (where he was Bar Mitzvah'ed), went to **P.S. 105**, and then to **Christopher Columbus**, where he was elected president of his class, graduating in 1956. His GPA at **Columbus** was high enough to get a free ride at Queens College. However, he also was accepted to Columbia College, where the \$750 yearly tuition was quite steep. His parents owned a popular coffee shop/luncheonette at the corner of **Holland** and **Bronxdale Avenues** and made a modest living, so the tuition represented a financial hurdle. They felt that getting into Columbia was a great honor and would provide a top education, so whatever the financial sacrifice, he should not turn it down. Bob worked as a waiter in the Catskills to cover the tuition.



Bob's sister, Marlene, ten years younger, graduated **Columbus High School** and Long Island University and became a teacher. She taught at **P.S. 11** in **Highbridge** and at **P.S. 7** in **Kingsbridge** and became an assistant principal at **P.S. 86** in **Kingsbridge**.

Bob's father Ben Abrams, who died in 1984, spent many years as an active member of the **Bronx Pelham Reform Democratic Club**, and volunteered at **Our Lady of Mercy Hospital**. He also engaged in a petition drive that helped secure new benches along **Pelham Parkway** and **Bronx Park East**, among other things.

Bob's mother Dotty, who passed away in 2003, was a member of the Ruth Kizon Group for Handicapped Children, selling raffle tickets and attending annual luncheons to help raise funds to provide support for children afflicted by disease and physical handicaps. She was also an active member of the **Pelham Parkway Cancer Society**, raising money for various programs.

And from morning to night for more than 20 years, the couple also operated one of the most beloved neighborhood luncheonettes and candy stores at **2000 Holland Avenue**. The store sold everything from candy, magazines, newspapers, and comic books, to cigars, cigarettes, razor blades, and playing cards. In addition, it offered school supplies,

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Ben & Dotty Abrams Way

toys, greeting cards, ice cream sundaes and frappes, sandwiches, pies, Danish pastries, and bottles of soda. Behind the counter, they made fountain drinks, egg creams, cherry Cokes, ice cream sodas, and malted milks. At an early age, Bobby was taught to work the soda fountain, making the famous egg creams.

In 2013, Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed into law the re-naming of the intersection of **Holland Avenue**, **Antin Place**, and **Bronxdale Avenue** to “**Ben and Dotty Abrams Way**”, not too far away from the **Regis Philbin Avenue** sign. The legislation was unanimously passed by the City Council. This honor came at the request of Councilman Jimmy Vacca, as recognition for the couple’s 60+ years of community service in the **Pelham Parkway South** neighborhood. “Ben and Dotty Abrams were staples in the **Pelham Parkway South** community for many years,” Vacca said.

Bob Abrams was a delegate to the 1972, 1976, 1980, and 1984 Democratic National Conventions. At the 1972 DNC, he was the co-chair of the New York delegation and was at the microphone to cast New York’s 267 votes for George McGovern. In 1980, he was the chairman of Senator Edward M. Kennedy’s primary campaign for president in New York and led a strong victory over incumbent President Jimmy Carter. In 1988, he was a presidential elector, voting for the Michael Dukakis/Lloyd Bentsen ticket.

Abrams built a reputation as an activist and consumer advocate, taking on environmental polluters, charity frauds, discrimination in housing, and various illegal activities in the marketplace. He is also well-known for the manner in which he sensitively and professionally handled an extremely difficult assignment, that of the special prosecutor



Regis Philbin Avenue

investigating the claims of Tawana Brawley. Governor Mario Cuomo directed him in 1988 to investigate the claims of Brawley, a black teenager who claimed that she had been abducted and raped in upstate Dutchess County by a gang of white people. A lengthy grand jury inquiry supervised by Abrams’ office later concluded that she had fabricated her story.

During his tenure as Attorney General, Abrams received numerous awards and honors, and he earned national prominence rarely achieved by a state-level official. He served as president of the National Association of Attorneys General and was selected by his colleagues to receive the coveted Wyman Award for Outstanding Attorney General in the Nation.

Susan and I first met Bob at one of the four Pelham Parkway reunions in the 1980s hosted by Chuck Gitlin and Howie “Deuce” Cohen, co-editors of *Pelham Parkway Times*. Bob has been a subscriber to *Back In THE BRONX* for several years, and we have had several conversations pertaining to The Bronx.

During one such phone call, he mentioned that his public information officer, Ethan Geto (Clinton ’61 and classmate of mine, and long-time subscriber), accompanied Abrams when he had lunch with Robert Moses. When they got there, Moses told them that he was going to move the Hall of Fame of Great Americans, a signature landmark in The Bronx, to the New American wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Abrams told Moses, “Hell no.” That was 40 years ago, and any Bronxite worth his salt will tell you that if one wishes to walk through the Hall of Fame today, it is still at the same location, up on the hill on the campus of Bronx Community College. For any old-timers, you may remember when that

Metamorphosis of a Bronx Cop

By Joseph Cirillo, joeactor27@gmail.com

I want to talk about NYPD patrolmen, as they were called when I was a youngster growing up in the **Mott Haven** section of the South Bronx. Today they are called police officers, more commonly known as “cops”. I will not go into how the name “cops” or “coppers” came about, because there are several variations as to how that name was given to them, and by now you have probably heard most of them at one time or another. As teenagers living in the confines of the **40th Precinct**, we did not like cops. That is right; we did not like them, but we respected them. We had to, as our parents had ways of correcting any signs of disrespecting them.

As a teenager, I grew up on **East 148th Street** between **Morris** and **Courtlandt Avenues**. Halfway down the street, **College Avenue** separated the block so that we were on the eastern half of **East 148th Street** and the other part was the western half. As kids, we enjoyed many street games, such as Hide-and-Seek, Ringolevio, Johnny on the Pony, and others.

The biggest game of all was stickball. Almost every street in The Bronx had a stickball team. We were called the Vampires. On the western half of **East 148th Street**, the team called themselves the Alpines. The 4 Aces was another neighboring team, and they played with only four players. Our team, and many others, usually played with seven players. Stickball was played every Sunday morning against a neighboring team, and the game was competitive. We usually pooled our money together, and that money was bet on the game.

Like I said, almost every street in The Bronx had a stickball team, so occasionally we would travel to other sections of The Bronx to play a team. I recall playing a team called the Jesters, who were from **Watson Avenue**. It was quite a distance away, but either we had to go there to play a game, or they had



Officer Joe Cirillo

to come to **148th Street**.

Now, you must be wondering what all this has got to do with disliking cops. Whenever we had a stickball game, the cops would suddenly appear and take our bats (which were broomstick handles) and either break them in two or confiscate them. Then we were told to break up the game.

Disliking the police did not stop there. In the very hot days of the summer, many a “johnny pump” (fire hydrant) would be opened. One of the older teenagers would either place a barrel over the hydrant or cup his hands under the opening, which would create a tremendous shower. All the neighborhood children would frolic under the cooling spray.

Even adults would accompany the smaller children to enjoy getting cooled off. Here again, a police cruiser would arrive to shut down the hydrant. If they saw a wrench, they would take it. There were boos from all present, but nonetheless the cops still shut down the flow of water.

As teenagers, we mostly hung around under the lamppost on the corner of **Courtlandt Avenue**. We were not boisterous or disorderly, just enjoying conversation, but for some reason the police would arrive and tell us to “break it up”. We had to leave the corner and either go home or go to the local poolroom.

Occasionally, we would have a game of shooting craps (dice). Yes, we knew it was illegal, but we enjoyed gambling. When doing so, we always had to have one person looking out for the cops. There were times when the cops would sneak up on us and we would have to run away, leaving the cash and dice on the floor. In the neighborhood, we had a few bookies who would take bets from us. They too had to avoid police contact.

When we were a little older and we owned cars, the police would ticket our cars when we were in violation. This of course added to our dislike of the men in

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blue. At the time, I had girlfriends in the **Fordham** section of The Bronx. We would often frequent “lovers’ lane”, in the vicinity of the **Botanical Gardens**. If you proceeded north from **Southern Boulevard** and **Fordham Road**, you would approach the old **Fordham Hospital** and proceed to an **Allerton Avenue** exit. Approximately midway at a railroad station was a circular driveway, and at night many cars would park there for some lovemaking. Unfortunately, a **52nd Precinct** police car would come by, and the cops would exit their car and shine their flashlights into our cars. They then chased all the parked vehicles away. This happened to me quite a few times, and it really increased my distaste for the police.



Author and his friend standing at 148th Street and Courtlandt Avenue, where they congregated by the lamp post

And now the irony of all this: On June 28th, 1957, I was sworn into the NYPD as a patrolman. Hard to believe, right?

While I was in the Police Academy, the city was faced with a serious problem of gang fights in The Bronx, and we were taken out of the Academy and sent to the **42nd Precinct** to do patrol duty. I did not mind going there because it was the neighboring precinct of the **40th Precinct**, where I grew up. Occasionally, an old friend or my brother or sister would come to my post to say hello. We spent the whole summer on

the streets of the **42nd Precinct** and did not return to the Academy for a few months.

While in the **42nd Precinct**, I was detailed to go to the **52nd Precinct** to do a late tour. I do not remember why, but I was happy to get away from the **42nd Precinct**. I was assigned to a radio car with a regular precinct police officer. When we went out on patrol, we were assigned to the area which included my old lovers’ lane. I asked my police partner if he would do me the favor of taking me there to do something that had been done to me many times in the past. He smiled at me and said, “Let’s do it.” And there I was, with my flashlight

out, shining it into cars and telling the kids to leave the area.

I must say that, as a police officer for 20 years, I never encountered a stickball game and broke their bats or stopped them from playing. I never ever shut down a fire hydrant that was open while children ran under the cooling shower. If I saw a dice game, I looked away or drove past it. Nor did I ever chase teenagers from the corner where they were congregating. I always hated it when the cops did that to me, so I never wanted to do that when I became one of New York’s finest. But I will say, I did enjoy being on the other end of the flashlight that night in lovers’ lane.

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Trading in The Bronx

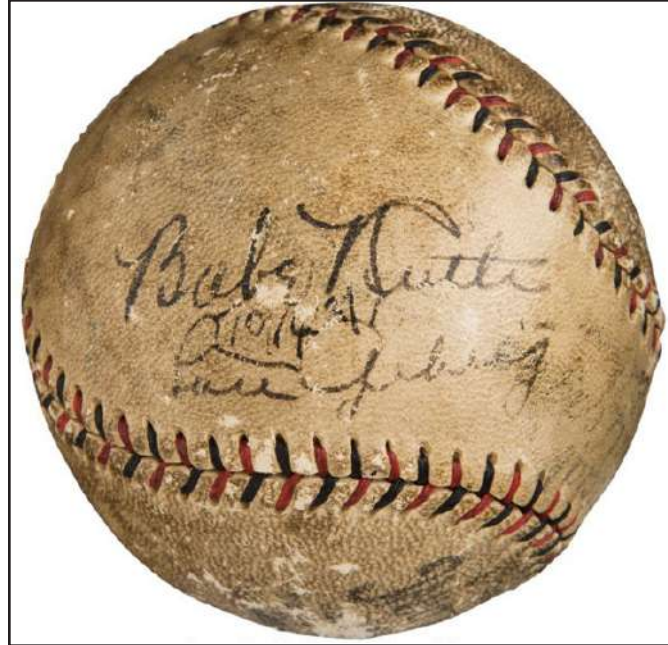
By Eugene Wagner, orapik@aol.com

George Gershwin's cousin lived on the **Grand Concourse** next to the **Concourse Plaza**. I lived at **117 West 197th Street** between **University Avenue** and **Clafin**, in what was referred to as "**Kingsbridge Heights**". I was within walking distance of **Hunter College**, **Kingsbridge Road**, and the **Reservoir**. My true hangout was the schoolyard of **P.S. 86**.

Growing up in The Bronx in the mid- to late-1940s through early 1950s reminds me of how I first became a collector of memorabilia. My wife and children can attest to the fact that I never throw out anything from my past. I just store them away in my many closets, or wherever I can find wall space. I guess this is my way of holding onto the past. I don't think I am alone in accumulating what some people refer to as "stuff". Maybe it's a Bronx thing, or maybe it's just part of the aging process.

I started at an early age, trading collectibles with other kids in my Bronx neighborhood. Growing up in a small apartment rather than a house was a tremendous disadvantage. Space was at a premium. I had to be creative, selecting only items that not only were of interest to me, but also were small enough to stash away conveniently. I could not afford to buy in bulk; thus my inventory was limited. I also had to be constantly aware of my mother's obsession to clean and organize our apartment. I had to be vigilant that none of these items would be thrown out. How many of my peers are reminded how their mom tossed their prized baseball cards and comic books away, only to learn how much they would be worth today? I was very lucky that my mom never tossed away my valuables. I think it might have been considered "Jewish Guilt".

Comic books were a common item to collect and, costing only pennies, were quite affordable. The most desired of the comic books were, of



Babe Ruth & Lou Gehrig baseball

course, the superheroes like *Superman* and *Captain Marvel*, followed by the classic comics. I'd spend hours negotiating trades, never knowing which ones might command great value today. We never thought of our hobbies as collectibles for future value. It was the enjoyment of the hunt. I remember going to a flea market not long ago and telling my wife that I wanted to buy *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* comic on the table, as it had such great memories for me. Her reply was, "You really want to spend \$100 on that?" I still wonder how I let that one get away.

Then, of course, there were the baseball cards that we all collected and traded like Wampum. The pleasant aroma of the "double-bubble gum" on a fresh card is something that still lingers in my olfactory memory to the present day. Baseball cards were distributed by the Topps Company. We traded our cards over and over until we got our desired player. This was not necessarily the best player in the game, but could have been a personal favorite. Mine was Sid Gordon, most likely because he was one of the few Jewish baseball players in the game. I had tons of his baseball cards. My Italian friends collected Joe DiMaggio and Phil Rizzuto, so you can see that I wasn't a good judge of talent or of the potential value of baseball cards at the time.

Many of the players that I had were mediocre at best, but they were also nice guys who always signed autographs at the games. There were a few baseball players who actually lived in our neighborhood, one being Johnny Mize: a big guy who looked out of place in my neighborhood. He was a true gentleman and loved kids. Years later, he entered the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

This gets me to one of the best trades that I never made. There was a kid whose name was Kenny T. (don't want to mention last name). He was a small,