

Amaryllis



Summer, 2021

Amaryllis, a newsletter for the Penn South community, was conceived, and has been researched and written by Jane Hogg since 1996.



Ardent Activist

Tito Delgado has lived here in Chelsea for almost a dozen years. He was born in Puerto Rico, and when we first talked, he told me about his own beginnings.

“My dad was the oldest of twelve. He left home when he was eleven. No choice; he had to help support the family. For years he was a sugar cane cutter. Eventually, he became a truck driver, which paid more. Finally, when he had enough saved up, he took the ferry to Brooklyn.

“First, he needed to find housing and a job. For starters, he was able to share a tiny room in an SRO, and the next morning he was hired at a nearby factory. Working hard, when he had enough money, he was able to fly his wife and their infant son, Tito, to join him.”

They lived on the lower east side in a neighborhood where numerous languages were spoken. When I asked which ones, Tito reeled off, “Yiddish, Spanish, Italian, German, Chinese, and Russian. One thing they all had in common. None spoke English.

“By the time I was six, we’d moved to Clinton Street. Most of our playing was done outside. Boy stuff. Marbles, maybe stick-ball, hide-and-seek, johnny ride a pony, tag.

“Lots of the buildings had small stoops. Often there’d be mothers out there keeping an eye on all the kids, making sure no kid got hurt or into trouble. Looking back, I think that experience had a lot to do with my adult attitude. It led me to have a world view, an international one.

“School made a big difference. Learning to read and write. Having grown-ups in charge of teaching





me things. A new language, too, because many were speaking English on the playground and in the lunchroom. They'd been in the neighborhood for generations. I got teased too; unusually tall, really skinny, and I wore glasses."

Obviously, he liked school; elementary, then high school, and eventually City College. Bi-lingual, comfortable with new situations, he was hired by the New York City Human Rights Commission.

After a chunk of years on the job, the city made major budget cuts. Newly out of work, Tito went to the local unemployment office. Weekly checks, constant job hunts, finally it was suggested he go to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) because they had some entry-level positions listed.

Once again, Tito was employed. The Fair Housing Division of HUD hired him to investigate complaints of discrimination based on race, color, national origin, familial status, and disability.

Knowing little about tenant groups, much less organizing them, I asked him to explain.

"The Metropolitan Council on Housing was on East 4th Street. I went there, and the woman in charge told me to get a group together, and once that was done, to call her. They'd send an organizer to speak to the group.

"Took us some weeks to establish a group; then I called. The woman said she'd send over an organizer. Maureen, this blonde with bright blue eyes, arrived. I was amazed. She wasn't even a New Yorker. She'd walked into this dilapidated building alone. She had guts.

"She talked to the group and explained their rights as tenants. Told them to have a picket line in front of HPD right across from City Hall.

"It took several weeks to organize the line, and NBC News covered it. Interviewed me, but HPD refused to meet with the tenants. The next day they came and did all the basic repairs. They fixed the broken boiler, so we had heat and hot water. Bit by bit, they did all the rest of the repairs; plastering, painting, plumbing. The ball started rolling."

It rolled on for years.

Macular degeneration is a slow process. Its victim knows it's happening because more and more sight is vanishing. In 2010, Tito was certified as legally blind. When I asked if that meant he'd gotten anything, he said yes; he'd been given a reduced fare Metro Card.





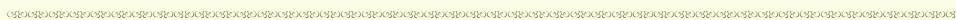
Soon after, he was referred to *Visions*, an agency providing a range of services to the visually handicapped. They're located in the Selis Manor building on 23rd Street. Immediately they gave him the clearly noticeable red and white walking stick and then began his lengthy mobility training, which takes years.

When he felt comfortable walking alone in nearby streets, he began to take computer classes at *Visions*. His computer at home had long been useless. They provided him with the computer software, which allowed him to use his computer without seeing the screen. I wondered how and he told me his computer now talked to him. Next, he purchased a smart cell phone. *Visions* training taught him how to use all the accessibility modes.

The last time I saw Tito was Labor Day. Dreary outside, it was just beginning to rain, and he was sitting at a sheltered bus stop, carrying a large plastic bag filled with signs, heading to the lower east side.

Stopping to say hello, I said, "You're in luck. Your bus is coming."

Bus stopped. He boarded it, turned around, waved goodbye, and was gone. His Metro Card sure gets a lot of use. ☺



More at Muhlenberg

If in doubt, just go to [NYPL.org/summer](https://www.nypl.org/summer). Summer Learning 2021 is in full swing. Mask-up, walk up the stairs, and right there on the counter are wonderful packets filled with endless suggestions. Invitations for everyone to imagine together.

Interested in crafts? Just ask the librarian. You'll be provided with all the materials necessary for a number of projects.

Nearby is the *2021-2022 Parent's Guide to NYC*. Covering all five boroughs, it mentions numerous walking paths, museums, and places of interest. Many are free, and those that aren't give exact costs.

Book browsing is allowed now. The very youngest need only ask the librarian to select a personalized book bundle. Miss hearing the children's librarian read books aloud? A phone call away: 917-ASK-NYPL, option 6. Not just one language, it's a brimming basket: English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese. ☺





More Meandering

Front fence at *Trailer Park* just got a new paint job. Possible prelude to a bit of curbside dining where maskless in the outdoors is doable.

Psychic sitting curbside holding small sign... **Walk-ins Welcome.** Her sign has an arrow pointing to a narrow flight of stairs, but opposite her is a small chair. Does it cost less if you remain street level?

Spot a walker nearing Muhlenberg carrying a big bag with a neat message; *If you have a garden and a library you don't need anything more.*

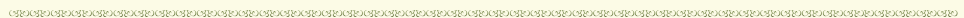
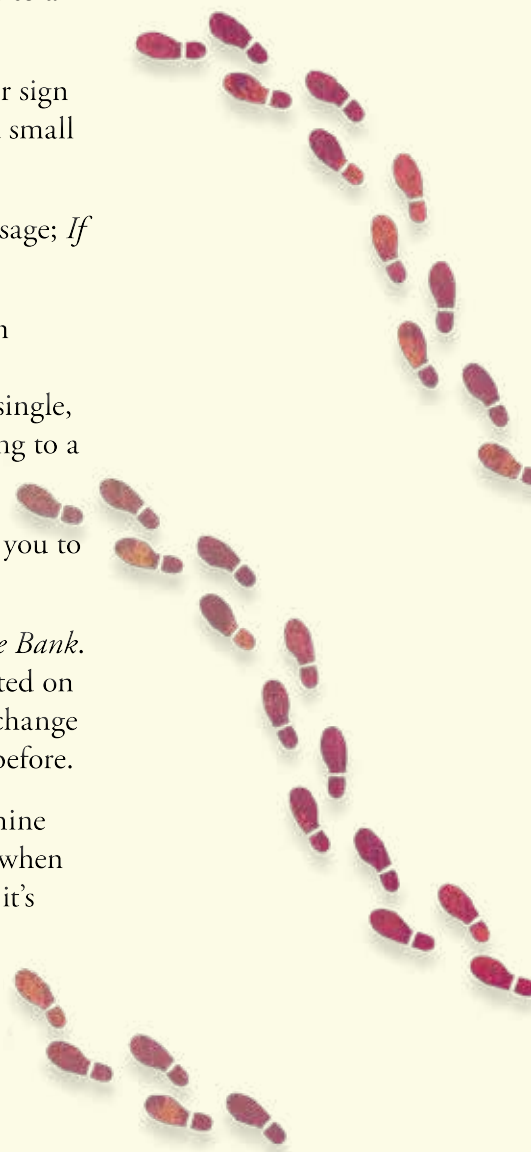
Blick Art is saying hello to summer with a multi-faceted window. Ryan Davis, a NY-based painter, skirts what's traditional by exploring an imaginary world through repetition. The current display centers on a single, large, and a formally framed piece surrounded by smaller works relating to a similar theme.

Curious about the concept? Wander within, and personnel will direct you to printed and virtual explanations.

Continue walking east on the south side of 23rd, and you'll pass *Apple Bank*. A world away from banking, as many of us once knew it. Neatly painted on their glass doors are dozens of options they offer. Foreign currency exchange from eighty different countries at competitive rates. I'd not seen that before.

After hours, so they were closed. I was looking for a bank with a machine that would count the coins in my sack of quarters. Gone are the days when buses and coin-operated laundry room machines accepted such. Now it's either cards or paper bills.

Pardon the pun, but times are definitely changing. *TD Bank* recently removed its coin counting machine. ☹️



Free Mammogram

The Free Mammogram Scan Van will be making its West Side run in early Fall. Covid concerns caused the July date to be canceled.

On October 4 the van will be located outside Penn South on West 26th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues. Call 646-415-7932 to make your appointment. ☹️



Backpacks

Weeks ago, a local free newspaper ran a full-page article describing the ten best backpacks for NYC kids heading back to school. While public school education is free, school supplies a pupil has to lug around seem to be growing.

Broken down into nine specifics, backpack designs began with nursery, next came pre-schoolers, then one which was perfect as a hand-me-down, on to middle school, then elementary school (touted totally recycled nylon webbing, cording, and polyester labels, 16" wide), weatherproof (with one designed for children older than six) and finally, one perfect for high school and beyond.

If prices are a factor, most were in the low \$20s to high \$40s. Recycled materials cost a bit more at \$50, and the one designed to carry a student beyond (wherever that might be) is the most expensive at \$130.

Distinctive and described as "perfect for elementary schoolers," was a backpack for \$5. Available nearby, it came in several colors too.

Surely, some Chelsea families can breathe a sigh of relief. ☺



Seen from My Window, and What a Scene It Is...

Early morning a young girl stands by the high fence on the 25th Street side of the garden, holding her backpack. Probably waiting for a sidewalk buddy who needs it. Then she removes it and drops it down to the sidewalk. Now what? No one there to pick it up. I watch and wait. Surprise. She jumps the fence herself, picks up the bag, and walks away.

Maybe it's a trend. Next week mid-day, two guys, not particularly young, one sort of chubby, both carrying roller blades. Taller one jumps the fence, and when he lands, the other hands him both the blades. He jumps and they both blade, mid-block, heading to the subway. ☺





Buy, Buy, Buy

Bed Bath & Beyond, now newly renovated, is back in Chelsea. Street-level and another one below has high ceilings and wide aisles so shopping is easy. Well stocked carts were everywhere, with buyers rather young, so perhaps a new wave of possible purchasers will flood the area.

Relatively few new items where I was walking but color counts. Blue bowls were big last year. This year similar ones are shown in brown. Does that mean toss and replace is the expectation?

Robot vacuuming equipment has come alive. Press a button, and it rolls around, underneath things, around corners, not too noisy so it doesn't scare the cat or wake the baby. Want to see it in action? Watch it on a nearby video screen.

Bedding was down below. Frustrated, my search for single-earth-tone fitted cotton sheets was unsuccessful. The only one they had was in a sealed pack which included both bottom and top with two pillowcases. A helpful attendant said that color was called vanilla or crème, but no, they didn't stock single sheets, just packs. So much for being able to cross off one completed task. ☺

Birthday Surprises

For one Chelsea-ite, waking up in the hospital was a big one. On the eve of his 94th birthday, he'd gone to bed planning his upcoming day. Carelessness caused him to knock over the light next to his bed. It fell on his face. Broken glass all around, some of it in his good eye. (The other one had lost peripheral vision long ago, so only dead-center remained.)

Where was he? The Mt. Sinai nurse, most helpful while she fed him, explained he'd been brought in after midnite. Much of his head and side of his face were bandaged because so much splintered glass had been removed.

Minutes later, the nurse returned, carrying something with a bright light in its middle; a candle. Next, much of the floor staff seemed to circle about his bed. No. It wasn't his imagination. They were singing happy birthday.

The long haul ahead, surgery and rehab, seemed softened by a totally unexpected birthday surprise. ☺





Chit Chat on the Street

These days, most adults walking Chelsea streets are fully vaccinated, so when out in the open, masks are less likely to be used. Great for anyone walking nearby—overhearing conversations is easier.

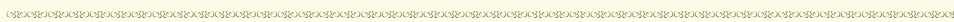
“Big deal. Gas prices are going up. What’s that to me? I’m a subway rider.”

“Look at the dollar pizza place! \$1.50 now!”

Next street down, the permanently closed CVS bookends the block. Rumor has it that *Target* has signed a long-term lease for the southern corner. But all that is just a tiny part of what’s ahead.

The company that owns the site has a permit for demolition due to begin this coming January. Not yet a matter of record are construction permits. Then, days later, big signs cover all the window areas—ASBESTOS ABATEMENT. Logical lead-up to what’s ahead.

MTA is probably pleased because their outdated subway station is a short flight beneath the sidewalk. Modernized to merge with what surrounds it must be a given. ☺



Chicken Chase

Buying the perfectly roasted chicken, so all you have to do is carry it home, put it on a plate, and serve it. Decided to see just what the neighborhood supermarkets were showing. They all had one thing in common: weight. One pound, twelve ounces, and, if mentioned, they came from Perdue.

Gristedes were \$8.99, but if you’re a senior and it’s Tuesday... do the math. *Ideal* is \$7.99. *Whole Foods* gives you a choice... regular is \$7.99, organic \$9.99. Finally, *Fairway’s* is \$8.99 but, not known by many, if you go to the store after 7:00 PM, all of their cooked-that-day packaged items are re-priced with a 30% discount. Lucky lookers might find a \$6.30 roasted bird... maybe none are left... but don’t forget to glance at the nearby fish. ☺



Lampshades

In my building's recycling area, I spotted a lampshade—not a garden-variety type but one lovelier than anything I'd ever seen. Woven raffia and beads, custom-crafted, but being tossed away? Whew! Hours later, it was gone. Happily re-housed.

Weeks later, an email blast. Subject line: "Lampshades." Short message: Absolutely free. Is anyone looking for a new lampshade?

The sender explained she used to make lampshades. In these pandemic days, she was emptying a storage closet to create space. Lookers were invited to email or phone.

No naked lamps in my home desiring to be dressed, but I'm hoping some of the shade seekers provide amusing trivia for me to lighten up the *Amaryllis* Summer edition. ☺



More Seen from my Window—A Facial

I've never had one. Never even seen one. That is until one early Sunday morning down in the garden below.

A woman arrived, pushing a double-decker stroller with two small tots inside. Sat down on a middle bench, her back to the grassy area so everything she did was visible to me.

Right off, she hauled out a black bag... unzipped it and laid out a series of tools: tweezers in several sizes, two hand mirrors (later I realized one magnified things), several small jars, one bottle (which must have contained liquid because she shook it), a box of wipes, and a pair of thin plastic gloves.

Gloved, head thrust back, she poured the liquid on her face. Then she massaged the area for a minute or so, and next, she opened a small jar and fingered out a blob of gook. Ah. A second massage, except this one took longer.

Now, with a tiny brush, she shaped her eyebrows. Once well ordered, she began to tweeze them. Magnifying mirror exactly showed which hair was to go. All this was followed by additional massaging.





Finally, she was ready to deal with her entire face. An eyeglass wearer, she had two pairs, one for close-up work. (I could relate to that. Ever try to read the tiny print on directions with a standard pair?) She was pulling out dozens of hairs on her entire face. No wonder men just use a razor!

Every few minutes, she'd reach in and remove a large white sheet and wipe her face clean... not just one wipe but several (inspecting the sheet to make sure everything had been removed) before placing in a small plastic bag.

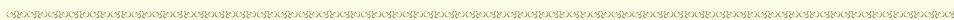
Watching was wearing me out. More globs. More tweezing. More massaging and more wipes. She glanced at her watch. Time to go. Two final wipes. Tossed her head back, pulled her hair into a tight, mashed down ponytail, and secured it with a skinny scarf.

I even knew what those wipes were. TV ads always show them being used by teenagers concerned with sucking out blackheads.

The woman re-packed all her beauty preparations. Glanced around to be sure the bench was bare. Picked up the plastic pack of discarded wipes and dropped them in the trash barrel as she left the garden area.

Neither she nor the babies live in the building because once she was curbside, she crossed the street and headed north along the passageway.

How's that for a happening! ☺



Clean Carpets

Call it an emotional attachment. For me it was a small white wool Moroccan carpet purchased a dozen years ago. Since *Fabra-Cleen* had long been the vendor of choice for the large development where I reside, I phoned the company, asked the price, made a date for pick-up.

Their degree of organization impressed me. The driver even took pictures of the rug before he carried it away. Days later the company emailed a form-letter explaining that due to the heavy stains, it was possible that all might not be totally removed. My \$125 check would indicate I agree to this condition.

O.K. It was a done deal.



The day the rug was returned I was leaving for a week’s vacation. In fact, I was heading out the apartment door, cat carrier in hand, heading to my car downstairs. The friend standing behind me said not to worry, she’d have the driver unpack it, lay it out and make sure to lock the door behind them.

Carrier in hand, I waved goodbye and left.

When I returned and saw the rug I was shocked. Scratch that! **Flabbergasted.** It looked much the same as the day I first bought it. A few of the fringes had become unbraided; no big deal I can re-braid them myself. The sheer weight of the carpet keeps it in place.

Surprise came days later while I was vacuuming. Buried beneath the edge of a drop-leaf table where it was positioned an 8" strip of carpet had been torn away from its edging. All that remained was its rigid insert.

Originally, I’d written to the company owner telling him my immediate reaction to their cleaning capability. This time my letter described the damage; I invited him to stop by and see it if he was ever in the neighborhood. They offered to pick it up and attempt repairs. A weaver myself I knew such wasn’t possible.

The company does heavy duty machine washing. Delicate doesn’t happen. Don’t know if I’d feel comfortable suggesting someone with a thin woven silk carpet give them a call, but for me... I came away a happy camper! 🍷



Darling Dancer

Suddenly, Manhattan had its own island. Right here in Chelsea. Just go to 14th street... walk far west. There it is. Officially opened in mid-May, the ribbon-cutting made network news. What a wonderful place to have a major festival showcasing any and all of the arts.

Happen it did with the final performance on September 4. Read on, and you’ll meet Chelsea-ite Jaki Soreff, one of the dancers. Slim, lithe, and obviously a senior... very senior person. When I asked how long she’d been dancing, she laughed.



“I think I was born dancing.”

Reason enough to sit down and talk.

Sarah Dahnke was organizing a dance group called *A Part of the Main*. They’d be dancing on Little Island in a joint venture with Hudson Guild’s Jim Furlong. The group consisted of eight dancers, three choreographers, and one stage manager.

All the dancers come from New York. There were lots of interviews and auditions. Jim Furlong had never even seen Jaki dance before he told Sarah she had to talk to her.

“Why?” she asked.

“She’s in my Lively Arts class at the Guild, and she’s enthusiastic, vibrant, full of life.”

In fact, he didn’t even know if she *could* dance. Wonders never cease.

Most of the dancers are in their mid-twenties, maybe a shade older; Jackie is eighty-four, and the next older dancer is sixty-eight (but looks younger). Four are probably professional; the others do it for love. What does the audience see? A total mix of colors, sizes, shapes, and heights. Their group performed three weekends during the festival.

Jaki is one of the solo performers. And they don’t dance on a stage but rather everywhere else... on the grass, paths, even boulders. As she dances in, the performance has begun, and she continues dancing in a wider area as she welcomes the audience. When she performs next, it’s as one of a trio and a third time as part of the ensemble.

Talking about her trio, she says it’s a visual study of difference. Two young, one old! Two tall, one short! But all three delighted to be doing it.

What did Jaki do during the eighty years leading up to *A Part of the Main*? Originally her family lived in a small house in Brooklyn. She started dancing when she was in the Girl Scouts, but that was mostly Folk dancing.

Later, when her two sons were in elementary school, she moved to Freeport because that year, a major strike caused the entire city school system to shut down.





In an adjacent town there was a Methodist church. A group of Wesleyan dancers was connected to the congregation, and often they were an integral part of their service. The dancers are all adults, well trained in modern dance. Jaki was part of the group.

She likes to dance. Any and all kinds appeal to her. That's how she met her husband. As a freshman at Brooklyn College, she met this guy a few years ahead of her, but he was the best Mambo dancer with whom she'd ever danced. She never forgot that.


In her working life, there were a variety of jobs. For several years she was Director of Education at the Abigail Adams Smith Museum on East 61st Street. A creative jeweler, she was teaching crafts at a few different Manhattan locations. For a number of years, she spent entire summers doing just that at the Workmens' Circle Camp upstate in Hopewell Junction.

Trapped in a slow elevator together, I noticed her jewelry. First, her necklaces—some short, some long, but all made up of carefully crafted chunky ceramic beads. Earrings, a marvelous mix of colors but always delicate and drifty. Commented on them and asked where she'd gotten them. When she said she made them, I asked, "Do you still do that sort of thing?"

Next time we ran into each other, there was a nearby park bench, so we sat and talked. Told me about her jewelry, how she'd had a gallery show in Manhattan, but costs were so high her puny profit proved it pointless. In the 1990s, she began to sell at weekend crafts shows nearby but finally gave that up too. "Each piece takes so long that it becomes a part of me. When it's sold, it's gone. I'll never see it again."

The conversation ended when I left to pick up a DVD at the local library.

Months later, when I saw her, she couldn't talk because she was late for rehearsal. That's when I heard about the Little Island project.

Which brings me back to this article's beginning. Call it a circular column completed. 





Dental Delight

A new Sign on 23rd Street. *Space for Lease. First time available in forty years. Plumbed dental office—3,200 square feet ground floor and basement. Call or text owner.*

Will dentists come flocking west again?

Months ago, I searched most of Chelsea looking for dental offices. Pediatric dentistry was everywhere but obviously age-related. Several were specifically orthodontics, hardly a senior citizen's priority. Finally found one at 23rd and 9th... garden variety dental care. Great. I made an appointment. Thursday at noon.

What I wanted was just a routine check-up. The receptionist smiled hello and handed me a routine form to complete. Two pages which, once passed the basics, got into endless questions relating to diseases, conditions, medications, etc.

Right off, I made it clear. No dental plans, and I'd pay in full. Minutes later, a professionally attired woman came out, introduced herself as Sherry Gaskin, dental hygienist, and settled me into a chair. For the next half hour, I got the most thorough periodontal work-up imaginable. But what most impressed me was her willingness to be accommodating. I said being able to watch what she was doing made me more comfortable, beat boredom, and gave me something specific in which to become absorbed. No problem. She handed me a 5" x 7" hand-held mirror.

Finally finished, Dr. Galperin arrived. I explained I was phobic, having been tortured by a dentist when I was only four. (I had a large space between my two front teeth. Procedure back then was to cauterize the muscle just above it. Live flame and no anesthesia. But I was determined not to cry because the dentist was my father's closest friend, and I didn't want to embarrass Daddy.) The dentist said it's still the same procedure, just not one that grown-up patients seek.

Meanwhile, he tapped, poked gently, and prodded. Had me stick out my tongue, examined all sides of it and the surrounding area. Asked when I'd last had x-rays and suggested I have them emailed to him.

Session ended as he shook my hand, said it had been a pleasure to meet me, and reminded me I should return in six months.

Sweltering 90° when I left his office. Mid-winter when I see him again. Wonder what the weather will be like then. ☺

