



Drawing: Maggie Block

Amaryllis

Fall 2020

Perfect Postal Person

Here's her early life tied up in a neat package which could be labeled Bronx. The middle one in a three girl family, after high school she got a job at a nearby Foot Locker. For 5 years she was the assistant manager and she knew the borough of her birth well.

A predictable paycheck goes a long way. An apartment of her own, enough cash to cover food, clothing, recreation . . . balance all that against another option. The post office, with its job security, benefits and opportunities for advancement loomed large.

Our federal government always needs new workers. Alexandria, with a chunk of time at the same job looked attractive. In 2013 the Postal Service hired her.

Pure delight! For her first 3-1/2 years she was a driver. "I loved driving. My entire route was Manhattan. I'd gotten an apartment in Washington Heights, which put me on a direct subway line to my morning check-in spot, ruling out all the transfers necessary commuting to work from the Bronx."

Conversion time, going from temp to becoming a regular is different in every borough. It's at least 2-1/2 years. Temps get paid less, have fewer if any benefits.

After 7-1/2 years in one category she was switched to a foot route. "Now I'm a regular City Carrier." She clocks in each day at James A. Farley.

Knowing she was due to work Saturday I waited outside but gave up when she hadn't arrived, assuming maybe she was ill . . . a worrisome notion in these pandemic days.

That's when I saw her approaching. She responded to my "whew, I was worried about you" with a laugh. "Saturday is often an overtime day. Sometimes our sorting is much heavier and takes longer. Then maybe I have to cover a car-

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rier's call-in or vacation day. Today will be a 12-hour one for sure."

Her route covers everything west of 8th Avenue on the north side of 25th Street, starting with the church properties and then her only Penn South building, the one at 25th and 9th.

Looking ahead, say 10 years from now, I wondered whether Alexandria would still be a postal worker.

"No way. I'm interested in

criminal justice. John Jay College isn't far from here and I want to figure a way to take classes while I'm still working."

Then she explained the reasoning behind that plan. "It would be an out-of-pocket expense for me and I want to avoid graduating with a crippling student debt hanging over my head."

Determined. Organized. Plans ahead. After all . . . even though she has a locker at work she

arrives wearing her uniform. Says it's easier that way. She doesn't have to spend time in the morning figuring out what to wear.

In my mind's eye I see it happening. First in the family to graduate from college . . . knew how to drive . . . followed the route . . . never got lost . . . definitely, this time wearing a cap and gown, she'll get to the finish line. ☺

Ardent Activist

Twelve writers in the area presented a range of their written work at a virtual event in late September. I read one, originally published in *Amaryllis* in the Fall of 2001, called *Ardent Activist*. The person described still lives in Penn South and remains as active as ever in the area.

Carr Massi is a committed member of ADAPT, a group fighting for legislative reform. They seek to re-direct funds, presently slated solely for nursing home facilities and instead make it possible for those needing skilled assistance to get it in their own homes.

This latter arrangement would mean those preferring to remain in a familiar environment could continue to do so. If monies were made available to help cover the costs of necessary home aides, everyone would be a winner. Government would save dollars

since home care is far less costly than full-time institutionalization, and people would be able to maintain their full sense of dignity, having exercised their right to choose.

Twice each year ADAPT stages a well-organized action pursuing its goals. The one mentioned here happened in Fall 2000 in Washington, D.C., where the President was considering providing \$1 billion for nursing homes. ADAPT's position was that these funds should go directly into the communities and be used to enable recipients to pay for required attendant care in their own home.

Nearly 500 demonstrators arrived in D.C., replete with canes, walkers, wheelchairs, guide dogs, all testifying to the uniqueness of this group. In participating, they are fully aware they might be arrested. The year before 62 were detained by the

Washington police, taken to jail in special wagons with lifts to accommodate their chairs. The jail was too small to hold them all, so some were kept in a nearby garage until they appeared before the judge.

That year ADAPT could first be seen marching from their hotel to the headquarters of the Republican Party, site that night of an invited audience gathered to view the presidential debates. They wanted to know where Republicans stood on disability issues so they surrounded the building. Neither the anticipated audience nor the caterers could enter before ADAPT chose to disperse. Politicians had no choice but to take note of their opinions.

Next they continued further downtown, demanding a meeting with a government spokesperson. John Podesta of the White House finally agreed

to sit down with a small group of ADAPT representatives.

The final target was the AARP building where, though they didn't block the elevators, their presence was clear. Here they sought support from the giant retired

persons advocate for the Mi Casa bill, a proposal that would allow a Medicaid recipient to get money for home care directly from community resources rather than being forced to opt for an institutional care facility.

Was this strong show of unity successful? Well, a month later President Bill Clinton signed a bill providing one billion dollars to community services for home care. Come to your own conclusions. ☺

Get a Flu Shot

... But where? Easier said than done. My doctor had warned me to avoid the network of chain store pharmacies. "Remember. That means walking into a large space with narrow aisles where hundreds of people have wandered through." Standing at 8th and 24th I was considering my options, if any.

Chelsea Apothecary . . . certainly a large space . . . no narrow aisles . . . notice said only 5 persons at a time. Maybe they provided flu shots.

Behind a clear plastic shield at the rear of the shop a young woman asked if she could help me. To my "do you give flu shots" she said yes, gave me a clip board with a standard sheet to fill out, showed me to a seat and said the pharmacist would be with me shortly.

Sheet indicated several shots. I checked both pneumonia and flu. Handed back form plus my Medicare card and sat down to wait.

Minutes later a masked gentleman came out, introduced himself as Bhavin Antala, the pharmacist, and asked me to step inside. Seated beside an arm level padded surface, next covered

with thick cloth removed from a sealed wrapping he asked which arm I preferred. "Left is fine," and I shoved my shirt sleeve up to my shoulder.

Swabbing the area with alcohol, he said this will only hurt for a second, unpacked the syringe, injected, re-swabbed the area as the needle was withdrawn and covered it with a small bandage. The second shot was intramuscular. Injection procedure was the same.

He explained some people have minor discomfort in the area, slight swelling or itching and if anything bothered me to feel free to call him. His card along with a receipt indicating what I'd been given were handed

to me and I left.

Next day I decided I really wanted to learn more about this helpful establishment. Late afternoon when they were closing up I came in to talk to him.

"Do you really own this shop? It's not a chain store?" No, he explained. "It's an independently owned family business. We have several other locations in Manhattan and one in the Bronx. My wife is a pharmacist also. Her shop is in the village. My uncle and my cousin, both pharmacists, are in different locations. But if you ever have questions feel free to stop in and speak to me.

Knowing I wasn't a potential customer I said my medications were bought from a mail order company suggested by AARP United Health.

He smiled. "I'm happy to be helpful. That's what makes me feel I'm doing a good job."

Think of all those TV commercials saying speak to your local pharmacist. It's a pleasure to find a real one in the neighborhood. ☺

Amaryllis

*Take the bulb...
store it safely...
re-pot it...
put it out there
☺
watch it burst
into bloom.*

Engaging Encounter

Moving here from Albuquerque is a long haul. But for BarbaraAnn Mercier it meant more than sharing an apartment. She'd be sharing her life with her Penn South sister.

How to stay fit in a small apartment? Not to worry . . . she'd figured it out.

The first time I saw her she'd just come out from the front of Bldg 5. Both hands gripping her red rollator she was running east towards 8th Avenue, obviously late for something.

Minutes later when I was coming home from the vegetable vendor at the corner she passed me once again. Odd.

Odder still, when I finished getting my morning mail she entered the lobby from the back hall. We were the only two there, and the elevator was empty. She pushed 3; I'm 4. Curious, I got out when she did.

Friendly, I introduced myself and asked if she was new to the building. "Just a few months" she said as she reached in to get a towel from beneath the walker's

seat. And no, she didn't have a balance problem. A new city and Covid19 made taking runs in new places a problem. So she stuck to a route she was familiar with . . . she circled the block.

"On a good day I'm up to four." Laughing, I did the math. "In Manhattan there are 20 numbered blocks to a mile and 6-7 avenue blocks. If today was a good day you did a bit more than a mile." And explaining I lived just above her I headed for the stairs. ☺

Seen from my window

... and what a scene it is! Casually roaming the streets of Chelsea, for me not done since shelter-at-home became the new norm, I count myself lucky. My living room picture window overlooks the immense park area between 25th and 26th streets. Vast green grass areas are set back from the seating area where 8 benches are set around a wide concrete walkway that surrounds a meticulously landscaped central area.

Seven months of viewing now so I have a sense of the regulars. As Summer faded into Fall some new activities began.

Every morning sometime after 7:00 but long before 8:00, a young woman arrives in the park

with her grey dog. They go out on the grass where she removes his leash, takes his orange ball out of her pocket and tosses it way off across the lawn. Dog races to retrieve it, returns to the pitcher, ball in mouth, and sits down. Now comes the waiting game. Nothing happens. Eventually Fido walks closer and drops the ball at her feet. Ah-ha! That's what he's been trained to do. The pitcher throws again. An uninterrupted back and forth continues for 20 minutes or so; then he's re-leashed and they leave the park. Clearly, he's not there for toileting . . . it's pure exercise. Don't know where they live . . . only that they head north along the pathway adjacent to the parking lot. Viewers can catch a

repeat performance a bit after 4:00 most afternoons.

There's my neighbor, the early morning coffee with a cigarette guy. Even drizzle doesn't deter him.

Mid-morning comes the solitary walker. He paces for a short while, then stands still. Bit by bit his furry buddies come forward from behind the benches and out of the plants. Never more than a dozen, he feeds the squirrels nuts for about 10 minutes. When he leaves they head up the trees to their nesting places.

Dog owners are a different breed. One woman walks her dog along the pathway, chooses a convenient bench and sits down. Then she picks up her dog so it

sits next to her, spends 20 minutes drinking coffee, viewing cell phone, petting dog, then departs walking dog along pathway.

Another arrives early afternoon, carrying a bowl, a shirt and a magazine. She sits down, puts shirt on the cement part next to bench so dog can sit or sleep on a cool surface, puts water in the bowl near him and proceeds to read the newspaper.

There's one I've only seen twice. She has a large, long-haired dog and comes carrying a bulky black bag. Dog sits next to bench while she lays out a range of tools at grass edge. Then dog stands and she begins to groom him. Brushed, combed, and then clipped. Scissors make sure there are no stray edges. Finally, she's down to his paws. Clippers shorten his nails; a file guarantees they're smooth. The process takes almost an hour. Completed, she takes out a bottle of water, pours it over his head and shoulders, takes out a hand-held hair dryer and blow-dries him as she

combs the area to make sure he's fluffy. His reward; a large dog biscuit as they head home.

Not often but memorable is Mom walking dog into park. She sits down, makes a call on cell phone while dog lies down at her feet. Minutes later a man arrives, babe in arms, Mom kisses offspring and she and dog depart. Now dad puts child down on the grass to crawl while he kneels a few feet away and shows ball to baby. Object seems to be encouraging tot to move towards ball. Bit by bit it becomes ball from greater distance so crawls get longer. After 40 minutes Dad stands up, takes baby's hand so he stands too . . . able to toddle? Not quite. No problem. Dad picks him up and they leave just as they arrived . . . babe in arms . . . time to head home. I've no idea how far away that is.

A few late Saturday afternoons in August when it was hot and humid a banjo player was there. Watching him I tried to figure out if he was practicing or com-

posing. Went down to talk to him and he explained it was a bit of both. Worried, since banjo is really loud, that it might bother people in apartments above. Strum away I say. Sure beats the sound of fire engines or revved-up motorcycles.

Each evening shortly after 6:00, three or four uniformed NYC policemen enter the park. They have nothing to do with Penn South. They are Traffic officers nearing their shift change, remain until 7:00 and head west when leaving.

Ever curious I went downstairs to talk to them. Learned they work for the police department but are assigned to traffic. For cars parked illegally in their route they write the tickets. It's a long day during which they get both a lunch and dinner break plus two shorter coffee breaks. At day's end they lump all their breaks together and when they leave our garden area they walk up to 42nd and 12th to clock out. ☺

Kleenex

Last month CVS sent email: I was such a valued customer they were giving me a gift. One Kleenex Mega Jumbo. When I asked where I could find it a clerk pointed it out to me. Hmm. I had no idea that Kleenex even made toilet tissue. No question but it seemed larger than many on the same shelf. Unwrapping it at home came the

surprise. A tissue so thin you could see through it. Use it myself? Not usable. Re-gift it? Laughable.

But then school began. Virtually. I could give a neighbor's child the perfect assignment. Take one square of the Kleenex product and one square of whatever tissue was available at home and compare them. Which one was thinner? How much thinner? How many squares of the Kleenex product,

when weighted down, did you need to make it as thick as the other tissue?

Days later I learned he'd been busily occupied and enjoying the project. Encouraged to write about it, language arts was working its way to the forefront.

The former teacher in me is now overseeing a productive development. I'm curious as to how an imaginative youngster can use the materials at hand to broaden scholarly endeavors. ☺

Walk a While

Wanting to get a sense of what a postal deliverer's route is like I walked with Alexandria one day. When she finished Bldg. 5, her only Penn South building, she crossed to the west side of 9th and then started on the SW corner which covered all the street level shops and the buildings above them. The stores, if closed, have mail slots and no one up above on that street appeared to get mail.

After the Chinese restaurant on the corner she headed west on the north side of 24th Street. This wasn't her block. She was just walking down it to get back to 10th Avenue, walk a block north and then be at the south side of 26th Street, the next part of her route.

First there are a few of the original brownstones. All those front doors are up a flight of

stairs with mail slots in the door. Lots of stairs, up and down, "great for leg muscles" she says.

Then we pass Chelsea Rec . . . a guard comes out to get their mail . . . and the next building is a high-rise built about 10 years ago which has an entire wall of mailboxes so it takes quite a while.

From there to the corner there are a few of the original tenements now chopped up into small, most often one room apartments with mailboxes on an interior wall. By now her delivery route is almost done.

She crosses 9th Avenue heading east again passing Bldg. 5 which she did first, gives mail to the rectory and the Church, then to the school in its midsection and finally to the convent area at its far end. All involve walking up stairs and ringing doorbells.

At the east side of 8th on her final block she hands mail to a few of the shops below 24th, enters one skinny building with 5 upper floors, and the final stop is Rite Aid Pharmacy. Hands a clump of mail to the cashier; the rest is all for Amazon in their lobby.

For each package she holds the barcode beneath an electronic viewer and a single drawer slides out in which to place the package. To do all six packages takes several minutes and then she's done. Says goodbye and heads back to 9th near 31st to check out.

She's sort of in a hurry too because she has to pick up her 7-year-old nephew at school. "Fall semester has just begun. Today was a 3-hour in-school day. The virtual part doesn't begin until tomorrow." ☺

Corey Johnson

COREY JOHNSON, DECIDING NOT TO RUN FOR MAYOR, THREW HIS ENERGIES INTO ENDLESS PROJECTS. For a number of Fridays he arranged for take-out meals enclosed in micro-wavable plastic containers provided by a variety of lower east side restaurants. Hundreds were distributed in the walkway leading to the Penn South Senior Center.

As the weather cooled, he requested people donate warm clothing for the increasing number of homeless people directly to his 30th Street office.

Medicine recycling drive in partnership with Aid for Aids for 3 hours on October 28th encouraged people to contribute their unused and unexpired Anti-retrovirals and any other

medicines for acute or chronic conditions including gastrointestinal, respiratory, neurologic, or psychiatric conditions, diabetes, elevated cholesterol, Hepatitis C, etc.

They would be delivered to people in other countries who lack access to them. Those donating were told to wear masks and practice social distancing at the NYC Aids Memorial on West 12th Street. ☺

Dial a Doctor

Years ago it was simple.

You picked up the phone and dialed the number. Someone, sometimes crisp, often cheery answered Doctor so-and-so's office. May I help you?

Planning to make an appointment to see my cardiologist I dialed his number . . . well, not dialed . . . pushed buttons. I contacted the office number and received an initial announcement referring to COVID-19 and then a menu with six options. The third one said "to make appointment push 1." The next recorded voice said "give your date of birth" and that finished, a recording said "your zip code."

After a slight pause another recorded voice gave a list of doctors. I pushed 3 for mine. A new

recorded voice came on asking "Have you ever seen him? Push 1 for yes, push 2 for no." The next recorded voice asked for my name, my address, then phone number.

Then, the same voice but clearly not a recording asking "when would you like to see the doctor? I'm told he only sees patients on Wednesdays so I make an appointment for the following month. Then I ask if they're still in the same place? He says yes and repeats the address. I ask should I bring my new Medicare card and voice says "unless you have it in front of you now." Amused, I say "you never asked for my waist measurements." He laughs. I laugh too and say I'll run to get it. Gotten,

I give the new number. Then he asks if I have the same primary care physician. I say yes, and repeat his name. He says he has it. I say he did blood tests 3 weeks ago and will gladly send them. He says no problem, I'll get them.

I say, "it sounds like you've been there a long time. More or less how long?" "Long," he answers. Then continues saying "I'll see you on the 5th. Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed." "Masked," I say. "But the rest of me should show. Bye now."

No doubt since casual conversations are so limited these days even talking to a receptionist becomes an exciting event. ☺

Best show ever!

It runs longer than an hour.

Soft buzz in the background so I know that Bancroft Tree specialists are nearby. For days they've been hedge-trimming and removing dead tree branches throughout the development. Minutes later I see several of their ground crew drag in rope lines, several long poles and sawing tools. They're headed to the sprawling tree anchored behind the northernmost bench in our Bldg. 5 garden.

Bit by bit they haul the sawing

guy up to the top part of the central tree trunk. I live on the 4th floor; eye level to the worker. Binoculars in hand I watch as he searches out small broken or dead branches and for some gets close enough to use really large hand clippers.

Needs tool now. Doesn't yell down to ground guys. He speaks to them on cell phone. They attach tool and adjust series of ropes so they move it up to him. Each branch he cuts drops to ground below and gets added to truck-mounted device so it

is chipped.

Maybe he doesn't need clipper now but needs the saw blade. That too can be sent up. Finally needs the long pole which can be attached to saw blade handle. This too can be pulled up. The process is time consuming because there's no place high up he can park a tool when he switches to another.

Binoculars in hand, I have a front row seat to the entire performance. By the time it's done I know the location of every mole or freckle on his face. ☺

New faces on 9th Avenue

Chinese restaurant fills the corner at 24th Street, but new awnings, flashy above doorway signage, sometimes just a new name, what was once bland is now brilliant. **Pet Central**, a narrow slot, is windowed floor to ceiling so someone curious gets a clear idea of the store's stocked items. **Laundry Club** comes next, not something you join . . . but small signs in the window explain it's more than just a do-it-yourself location. They fold and deliver too. **The Boilery**, a seafood and grill restaurant with a wide expanse of curbside windows suggests a bit of elegance. **Chelsea Grand Barber Shop**, another narrow slot and since whatever was there before had nothing to do with hair everything is new. Pre-pandemic one had to walk east of 8th for a barber so this is nearer. The narrow **Jewelry/Shoe Repair**, conveniently open Sundays, which seems to have been there forever,

still boasts shoe and leather work done by a fine craftsman. It's squashed next to **Chelsea Framing Art Gallery**. Wonders never cease . . . or at least not for me. An Art Gallery? I've never seen anyone go in. Next comes another skinny one . . . **Choithrams**. They get lots of business, much of it from the neighborhood, small writing on the front door says they sell gifts, newspapers, candy, lotto and beer. Pasted flyers, all over the windows, speak of authentic

purest natural fibers, and raw unrefined rolling papers. Then, if you're window shopping, a wall of glass shelves inside are loaded with everything from water pipes with attachments to vials of grain products, each clearly labelled. The steady flow of customers must know why it's a useful location. **Champion Martial Arts** (which must be upstairs) and next comes **Dunkin Donuts** with **Empire Food and Deli** rounding out the 25th Street corner. ☺

SECURITY STRUCK

The assailant, if you can call him that, was as much surprised as the security guard.

A squirrel, busy collecting nuts to store in his winter nest in the tree above, was perched on a slim branch when it cracked.

Launched downward he land-

ed on a stunned officer's shoulder, departing immediately to the landscaped area in front of him.

Watching from my window above provided me with something to laugh about in a period when unnerving is overtaking the new normal in today's pandemic times. ☺

Easy Edibles

Conveniently close to Penn South, Ideal is a market where I often find the unexpected. Kretschmer's Wheat Germ, which most local supermarkets don't stock, meant the only place I could find it was Gristedes. Not so anymore. Ideal has it and at a much lower price.

What to do with it? Sprinkled lightly over many things it makes for a crunchy topping. Yogurt lovers . . . try it atop this. And for real unadulterated whole milk products you'll find Chobani Greek Yogurt, a delightful choice if you want to avoid the army of sweetened or

added fruit alternatives.

As cooler weather closes in, and it appears likely we'll still be safe-in-place soup and sandwiches looms large. Ripened teeny tiny avocados at Trader Joes spread like butter on toast and topped with a sprinkling of Hormels Bacon Bits (another Ideal item) makes for a tempting treat.

Oh . . . and finally . . . a half

gallon of whole milk at Ideal (along with Trader Joes which isn't nearby) is now the lowest price in Chelsea. Check it out.

In pre-pandemic days there was a loaf of multi-grain bread I'd buy every week at Whole Foods. But by early April, no matter what day or time I came

there were none in the case. Finally, when I questioned a clerk I was told it was no longer available. More than merely taste, there were two other things I liked about it. It was solid, even difficult to slice, which meant it kept its shape, perfect for sandwiches, and meant the whole

loaf could be used. When Muhlenberg Library re-opened for grab-and-go I'd often dash into the bakery area but still . . . no luck. Then, October 9th . . . success! Coated with ripe avocado that's sprinkled with red chili pepper sure puts a smile on my face. ☺

Meanderings

IRISH REP IS DARK BUT SOME THING ELSE, BIG AND NEW IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS. Ink'd, a tattoo parlor covers all bases. First thing a browser will see is a front counter filled with jewelry, a range of possibilities perfect for earrings or body pierced parts. Nearby are skin tight shirts and a variety of garments appealing to the body art population. At the rear are the tattoo artists, available by appointment only but the shop, open all seven days, makes scheduling simple.

On 27th Street, west of the FIT dorms, Guitar Shop replacing what used to be patterns and such for students.

23rd Street is a work in progress. A bit west of 8th on the south side is the USA Vein Clinic specializing in varicose, spiders, swollen legs and fibroids. Continue east on the north side of the street huge

banners announce Operation Falafel landing soon from Dubai to NYC.

A mirthful moment. Boarded up and now vacant space requests looters to wear masks and gloves before entering.

Thanks!

My last check-out slip from CVS had a \$3-to-be-used-as-you-wish offer good until Oct. 7th. Went to buy large box fold top sandwich bags \$3.79. Gave cashier my barcoded 25% discount good until Oct. 16th. Now I only owed \$3. Handed her my \$3 use as you wish coupon . . . zero owed and box was free. Call it bargain day at CVS. ☺

Mammogram Morning

Project Renewal brought its van to Penn South for two mornings at the end of September. All one had to do was call up to make an appointment. Medicare, Medicaid, uninsured . . . it didn't matter. They were there to serve. Everything about the procedure was organized and speedy. Chairs placed curbside made waiting comfortable.

The lucky few, anyone over 65, got a take-home kit designed to

detect early symptoms of possible cancer in ones digestive tract. The packet included clear directions with all the necessary equipment to secure a stool specimen in the privacy of ones own bathroom. Then there was the plastic container to store it in and the pre-paid padded envelop to mail it to the government testing laboratory. Results are sent directly to the patient plus, if requested, to the patient's primary care provider. ☺