



Drawing: Maggie Block

Amaryllis

Summer 2020

For me . . . a first time

Not one bench I didn't stop to sit on. Clearly these shopping bags are way too heavy but finally I'm at my corner. Get as far as the powerhouse steps and sit down again. Only one long block and I'm home.

"Can I help you" asked the young woman walking behind me. By now I'd hoisted the handles of one bag up over my shoulder so I said "great. If you just took one strap of the bag and I took the other one it would really lighten it a lot for me."

"Don't be silly. I'll carry it myself. And give me the other one too. I'll carry them both."

"How far are you going I asked. I'm only going to the walkway that leads to the building up ahead. Just dropping them there would help tremendously."

Obviously, that's not what she had in mind as she proceeded to the outside lobby. Getting my key out as the door opened, she advanced ahead and said "let me take them up to your apartment for you. I'm in no hurry."

Neither elevator was at ground

level. Both seemed to be heading north and going to the 20s. "I'm fine now. Really. But you amaze me. No one has ever offered to help me before. Are you new to the city? Where were you going?"

"Just up 9th Avenue a bit to Holy Apostles. I moved here this weekend and starting this morning I'm to volunteer at the Soup Kitchen two days a week for a while."

The elevators still hadn't arrived and she looked at her watch. "You're sure you're ok? Then I suppose I should leave. I'm supposed to be there at 9:30. Hardly look good to be late first day."

And with that she was gone. I hadn't even gotten her name. All I knew about her was that she was tall, slender and had reddish brown hair. ☺

Amaryllis,
an occasional
online-only newsletter
of the Penn South community
is conceived, researched
and written
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Wonders never cease

Seeing a blind person walking unassisted is not unusual in Chelsea. If you're new to the neighborhood you might be unaware that Selis Manor on the north side of 23rd Street is a thoroughly modernized high rise providing housing and a vast array of services to the visually handicapped.

No doubt I'm not alone in asking a blind person about to cross a street if assistance might be appreciated. However, when I looked across 23rd Street late one afternoon . . . plunk in the middle of rush-hour traffic I panicked when I spotted a blind man crossing the street mid-block. I raced across, arms flying in all directions hoping that cars would notice and hopefully stop before hitting me as I screamed *STOP!*

Not wanting to startle the endangered person I simply patted his available elbow and said, "you may not know it but you're standing in the middle of a two-way street. Let's go back to the curb."

To my which way are you headed he answered he was waiting for his Uber-pick-up which was taking him to Brooklyn. Not an Uber user myself I had no idea what the driver knew. I assumed he might have been told it's the tall blind man wearing the dark blue jacket and he'll be in front of the pizza restaurant with the flashing bulbs above its windows that's about 30 feet east of the corner.

"The driver knows I'm in front of 262 West 23rd Street." In fact, I didn't see a building number anywhere. When I asked how

he'd know when the car arrived, he said he honks his horn. Cell phone in hand he explained, "the driver always calls . . . keeps me posted . . . like now I know he's late because he's stuck in traffic but he's at 21st and 7th and will be here soon."

Less nervous now I began to relax. Seconds later a car with an Uber sign in its window pulled up to the curb . . . announced his name and said, "don't worry. I'm just coming around to open the door on the other side. Then I'll walk you over to it."

I'm the suspicious type; I'll believe it when I see it.

Passenger inside, the driver asked if I was going too but I just shook my head and shouted "Goodbye. Enjoy your ride." ☺

Street Symphony

Much has happened since I first began to think about how much noise the garbage trucks made in our neighborhood or more specifically in the streets lacing through Penn South. Bit by bit I realized that my own hours, given my routine of when I woke up, made coffee, where I sat to drink it . . . and best of all . . . what I could see while I drank it! That's when I began taking notes.

I live in Building 5, the last

one on the northeast corner of 25th and 9th. My kitchen window faces the back of Building 6, directly across from the rear driveway where their garbage bins are located.

Monday, Wednesday and Friday, just about 5:00 each morning, I hear the muffled sounds of a truck jockeying into position. Garbage from the large green bins in my building is being hoisted up into the white mechanized monster.

What determines the operation's speed? One of its crew keeps a steady eye on the corner. Making sure not to create a traffic jam he waits for the light at the corner to turn red. A sharp click announces a heavy metal bin is emptied. It's a single building so most days there are fewer than five waiting in line.

Minutes later I can hear the truck being repositioned. Again, someone makes sure the light is red. The truck slides diagonally across the street to pull into the

Building 6 driveway.

Timing is everything. The last thing the maintenance workers will do before their shift is over is to make sure that all the blue recycling bins are pushed aside, curbside if necessary, and the green ones are lined up. Often quite heavy, two workers make

for easier shoving. Snow, freezing concrete needing to be salted, heavy rains so crews clad in bulky outer garments . . . year-round weather covers lots of bases.

How long does the clatter continue? Even on a day when nothing seems to go right it's rarely

longer than 6 minutes before the garbage truck slides back, the last man jumps aboard and as his door slams shut, they slip away silently heading east on 26th Street. ☺

W-I-Necessities

With the hunt on for gloves, masks and Lysol spray with bleach (the only one suggested for coating the bottom of shoes when returning home after being out on the street) buyers are urged to report any establishments attempting to price gouge. When this directive came front and center, shelter in place was already six weeks old.

Early April major pharmacies were just beginning to get masks and shipments were scanty. CVS allowed customers to purchase no more than two priced at 2 for \$5.00. New London Pharmacy had two choices: a black washable one for \$10 or a pack of 5 disposable ones also for \$10.

A week later I learned the discount store on 8th Avenue charged \$10 for a pack of 10 or \$40 for 50.

April 16th the Penn South senior center had a Zoom event. Viewers watched a Registered

Nurse do a one-hour session on healthy safe in place procedures. Proper hand washing was shown (it took nearly 2 minutes) and then how to safely re-use the paper masks was explained. (Necessary equipment for that was 5 small paper bags.)

Plastic gloves: I bought the only box CVS had: \$29.95 for 120 Nitrile Exam gloves. Hours later I found vinyl synthetic powder-free gloves high up on a rear shelf at New London Pharmacy. A box of 100 cost \$9.99.

Immediately returning to CVS I tried to return the overpriced box

I'd just purchased. They wouldn't take them explaining they could no longer accept any returned items. But now I had numerous ones including several reams of paper. They still couldn't accept any saying perhaps in a while company policy might change.

Then, about 6 weeks later, it did. Now they could accept them all and since they'd all been charged to my credit card, I suggested they just credit it back that way. They couldn't.

Why not? Because I didn't have a receipt for one ream of paper. Then just credit all the other things to my card. They couldn't do one thing differently.

In the end what they did was give me a store gift card for the entire \$49.97 but, they explained, I could use that at any CVS store.

After 3 weeks of occasional purchases it's whittled down to \$11.19. ☺

Amaryllis

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

Minor Meanderings

Now Chelsea is skinnier but stuffed with relevant neighborhood information. For those sticking with our Mayor's stay-safe-at-home policy it was great to learn he'd come to an agreement with City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, piggy-backing on the recently revived Open Streets program.

West 21st Street between 9th and 10th Avenues and West 22nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues are a stone's throw away from Penn South. Depending on what errands you planned to combine with warm weather ambling here's two to remember.

London Terrace post office is

nearby and even if it's pouring rain, you'll have an umbrella-less trip. The entire south side of West 24th Street from 9th to 10th Avenue has been shedded over for months.

Another great find; a really large CVS, open until 10 pm most nights, spans the southwest corner of 23rd and 10th.

Wanderers be prepared where to go when you have to go . . . Supermarkets are still there with restrooms available. If not shopping . . . cancel Best Buy because it closed, but Home Depot and PC Richards remain possible.

Many restaurants have closed and even those that are slowly

opening are mostly providing containers to go with no customers allowed to enter the premises. Probably that's why a wealth of paper products, found in the pharmacy feminine care aisle, are flooding the market . . . no pun intended.

How's this for a happening! Banners announced the Grand Opening of 2-Brothers Pizza on the east side of 8th Avenue just south of 25th Street. \$1 a slice. Remembering two others, one straight east at 6th Avenue and the other, near 19th Street and 6th, both with happy customers munching nearby, I suspect this one will do as well. ☺

Seen from my window . . . and what a scene it is!

 usually 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 placed around a wide concrete walkway that surrounds a meticulously landscaped planted area.

6:30 IN THE EVENING. Everyone has gone but parents (both wear-

ing masks) and child . . . seems to be about 7, not wearing mask but carrying small bucket with large plastic dipping stick. He goes out onto the grass area and spends his time blowing soap bubbles and then running to try to snare some of them. The harder he swings the stick the higher they rise so it gets him lots of exercise as he jumps and runs. Good game for one. Lasts about 20 minutes. During this time parents are sitting on bench, not too close, just talking. When grass activity ends parents add bubble

stuff to backpack, they all drink water and leave area.

Another adult arrives with child about same age as one who just left. Neither are wearing masks. Father carrying plastic bag containing take out meal . . . some sort of pasta. Intention seems to be to feed little girl dinner. Parent eats some of it and little girl spends most of her time in grass area swinging just removed jacket around, cape like . . . and between swings returns to get next mouthful of food, immediately taking off to twirl

about again in grass area. After nearly 20 minutes food is finally finished. Girl puts jacket back on. Parent collects refuse and returns it to plastic bag not noticing napkins which remain on pavement beneath bench. They leave park and as he passes garbage can he puts their trash on top of what's already in it . . . not pushed down but if it doesn't get too windy perhaps it will remain until day maintenance crew empty can.

MEMORIAL DAY PARK HAPPENING. On a bench man wearing mask and playing guitar but several feet away there's young boy with a small guitar. Aha. Man teaching boy how to play. Sitting on the pavement with their backs to the inner planted area are two masked adults watching . . . parents of boy? Maybe.

Long lesson. Near 2 hours. Packing up time. Male parent stands up and reaches down to help woman up. Teacher and student ready to leave. Adult puts on big backpack which includes his guitar. Student's soft covered guitar is strapped to his own back . . . they mount their nearby bikes, wave goodbye to parents and pedal away.

FATHER, MOTHER, FIVE YEAR OLD SON AND TWO YEAR OLD SISTER PLUS SMALL LEASHED DOG ARRIVE. Both backpacked adults wear face masks and plastic gloves. It's late afternoon so the elderlies have gone home.

At last! Somewhere to let the kids play safely. First come the pairings. One parent takes dog and son to the far side securing pet's leash to a bench. Mom and

toddler, along with stroller piled high with gadgets and rarely-used plastic scooters have parked themselves at a bench on the opposite side.

Imagination ignites. She gets out the box of colored chalk and sketches out a big set of attached squares . . . looks sort of like what when I was a kid we used to call hopscotch except there are no numbers . . . just blank boxes. Toddler, sitting down on the pavement with her favorite doll, seems happy to watch. Oh . . . Mom has handed her a tiny plastic bottle. I see. Little one can feed her baby.

Dad has chalk too. He's just scrawled six large, irregular shaped boxes and now, with a blue chalk, he's beginning to color one in. Son goes to chalk box . . . takes out a red one, chooses his own box and colors away.

OLDER WOMAN WHO LIVES IN MY BUILDING, I see her walking round and round the paved walkway everyday (except when it's raining.) Gave up counting and I just went over and asked her how many times she went around. "20 laps. Maybe if we're staying safe and at home much longer I'll consider adding another 5."

HOLY APOSTLES DOING WHAT IT DOES DAILY . . . handing out lunches. Where to eat? That park area just 2 blocks to the south. Warm and sunny and no one else seems to be there so the eater settles down.

First off, out comes the sandwich. He eats that slowly and

occasionally takes a drink from the soda can. That part finished he gets up, carrying the sandwich wrappings to the nearby garbage can.

That done he returns to the bench and pulls out the next thing.

Cardboard cup, inside ice cream with scattering of nuts atop! He eats that slowly with a plastic spoon. When finished he opens a skinny plastic package and slowly eats the 6 peanut butter cracker sandwiches. Done.

Collecting all those wrappers he returns to garbage can. Clearly he's no litterbug.

Now comes the final goodie. A candy bar covered with nuted chocolate. Too good to eat the whole thing . . .

Once halfway through it gets neatly wrapped and put in his jacket pocket before he stands up, pulls his hoodie over his cap, checks out the bench he's been sitting on, picks up the now empty plastic bag, puts the soda can in it along with the used napkin and makes sure they're securely shoved into the garbage can before he departs the park.

SUMMER SEEMS HERE AGAIN . . . HIGH 80s TODAY. First to arrive come at noon: it's ladies who lunch. Two sit far apart on bench and the other two, having brought folding sling chairs, are mindful of social distancing. They're on the paved walkway establishing a nice group.

Each carries a stiff-sided carrying bag . . . within, the variety of their midday meal. Masks

removed . . . eating time begins.

Definitely not the grab, gulp and run types. This is leisurely eating . . . tiny mouthfuls. They taste as well as talk.

Clouds roll in. Will rain ruin it all? Luck is with them. Sun returns and lunch continues.

By now other people come and go . . . at times all eight benches are occupied but no others remain for long. Two hours later the ladies have packed up, folded their chairs, put masks on and said goodbye to each other as they leave the park.

FOR MANY YEARS EVERY DAY SOMETIME BETWEEN NOON AND 1:00 PM SEVERAL MEN ARRIVE . . . usually no more than five. The small park area next to Bldg. 5 in PennSouth, the one which faces

both 25th and 26th Streets works well for them. Obviously businessmen, they wear suits and formal leather shoes and carry, if anything, briefcases.

The first person to arrive begins immediately. Clearly the process takes about 40 minutes. They stand on the paved walkway about six feet away from each other because what happens involves movement as well as standing straight up and never speaking.

In a formalized routine they stand silently performing an articulated series of movements involving mostly arms but occasionally legs. They also stand motionless so it appears to involve meditation as well as movement. Rain does not

deter them.

Though they do not arrive together they always remain together until the process ends. Leaving their things on two benches next to each other they stand on the paved walkway in a line with their backs to the benches. Their eyes are closed. They do not speak.

When they enter the park they aren't wearing masks though in recent weeks they do have one hanging from an ear having been spoken to by a Security officer. No one leaves the group before it is finished. Then they pack up their things and depart. Some head east, others west, occasionally one crosses the street to head north. ☺
