



Amaryllis

Winter 2020

Raheem Soto

Secure Security

He grew up in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, living in a six-story building with 10 apartments on a floor. Early on he knew about working. The Super paid him to clean the halls. A well-developed work ethic was woven into his life. He had a good role model too...his mother.

His father had left by the time he was three leaving him the only child of a working mom. Before he was ten, he knew all about the need to earn pocket money.

Raheem attended nearby P.S. 7 and Jr. High 141. His classmates were his street buddies and most of them went to the neighborhood high school. That's when his mother stepped in.

She felt if studies were more challenging high school could make a significant difference. She enrolled him in Riverdale's Columbus High School. For sure he made new friends. Better yet he played football, guaranteeing popularity.

In his senior year life took a sud-

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den turn. His girlfriend was pregnant. When he was 18, they moved in with her mother; their son was born. One thing was obvious. Raheem intended to be a good provider even if it meant balancing 3 part-time jobs at a time.

Immediately after graduation he went to work at a men's clothing store, a small family business where for 2 years he did everything: cleaning, stocking and eventually moving up to salesman. His income made it possible for them to move into an apartment of their own, then a second son was born and finally a daughter.

The next job was Skatelandia...a big skating rink where once again Raheem did everything: maintenance, supervision, overseeing parties and numerous kid's events. Those 15 years looked good on his resume.

Just as times change so does the job market. As luck would have it, Raheem drove into Manhattan heading for a midtown security company. Spotting an available parking spot, he asked a nearby uniformed guard if his car was OK there. His "sure...how long" got a quick reply. "Not too long. I just want to leave my name with an agency looking for applicants." Luck again. Two talkative men

face to face.

HVAC at Penn South was about to begin. Extra staff would be needed to augment the regular crew. The guard put in a call to his supervisor. "This guy looks good...come talk to him." Security Chief Larry O'Neill came out curbside and was impressed. Following a formal interview and background check Raheem was hired part-time for three months in October 2011.

Part-time became full-time and next came permanent. Patrolman led to officer...sergeant...and last year, his 8th on the job, Lieutenant.

His three children are now all grown. The oldest lives in Atlanta pursuing his acting career. He's already been in a couple of movies. The middle one lives here in the city. They talk regularly. And the youngest, still living at home with her dad, is a full-time student at John Jay College, majoring in forensic science. On weekends she teaches dance at nearby Westchester Square.

What's different on the home front? No longer in Riverdale, he'd moved to another Bronx area, Throggs Neck. In 2008 he married his long-ago high-school classmate and after a few years they moved from a rented house to one of their own. Set on a tiny cul-de-sac, you can see, smell and hear the close-by lapping water

With perfectly matched work schedules, he drives his wife to work as he heads to Penn South. When he hits home well after

midnight, he's able to sleep for a few hours and then drive over to pick up his wife, an RN who works 12-hour shifts in a Bronx hospital. When asked if they ever spend time together Raheem laughs; "We meet in passing, share weekends and annual vacations."

Some years ago, as I walked my granddaughter to the C train after dinner, amidst commotion on the platform, in the distance an EMS crew raced from the far end. As her train departed an arriving passenger, seeing the man being attended to, informed the EMTs, "I know him, he's my neighbor, he's a diabetic."

I noticed Raheem as I exited the station. Walking up the stairs together I said, "I'm a diabetic too. I always carry glucose tablets

in my pocket." He said he knew all about them. "My wife's been diabetic since early childhood."

Flash forward a few years. My neighbor, leaving her apartment, had just seen me stagger out from the elevator and collapse in front of my door. She called security and Raheem arrived. He took one look at me and told her to get me some orange juice. "I don't have any," she replied, her anxiety rising. "Then get some chocolate!" She returned with a box. He took a piece and put it in my mouth. "Suck on it. It tastes good."

I don't remember being loaded onto the gurney but I do remember Raheem, there in the lobby as the ambulance crew arrived, holding the door open for them. ☺

Jessica Berghorn

Pursuing a Passion

With gallery row having carpeted the west side of Chelsea, it's easy for this wanderer to ignore their existence. That's why one shady summer afternoon when I was walking east along 16th Street I stopped. There was something new. And what a sight it was. A skinny slot of a space, Blackbird Gallery, with an eye-catching window display and a wide range of framed pieces marching towards the back on facing walls.

As I pushed open the door a

young woman walked towards me. "Hello. I'm Jessica. Welcome to my gallery." In the months that followed I began to learn who she was, where she came from, how she landed in our neighborhood.

Until she was 20 Jessica Berghorn lived on the outskirts of San Diego. Her regional high school provided students with an option to an academic degree. You could go to a trade school. She chose cosmetology because it sounded familiar. Her grandmother had done that and now

was duly licensed and employed. Having successfully completed that program Jess, too, was licensed and knowledgeable in a number of areas. Hair styling was one of them.

In 2006 she moved to New York and rented a room in an apartment on 16th Street. Worked at a number of scattered jobs, some in pop-up shops, one selling expensive watches.

Her friend Madison had a hair salon on the block and he hired her to cut hair which she did for the next 8 years.

More education came first. City colleges. See who offered what and where was it least expensive. Her entire education was out of pocket and paid for by herself. She didn't intend to borrow. Borough of Manhattan Community College was close to where she worked. Then later she transferred to Hunter where she got a B.A. in Studio Art in 2011.

Jessica knew she wanted more education. Art was part of it but so too was business. Savannah College of Art & Design in Savannah, Georgia offered the perfect curriculum. She enrolled and during her first semester worked part-time as a receptionist in a day spa. After that it was full-time school, that and only that until she earned her graduate degree combining Business Design and Arts Leadership in 2018.

But when it came to settling in Savannah the idea began to pale. Most galleries showed pretty much the same sort of art. Jess, hoping to open up a gallery of

her own, wanted it to be different. She thought of herself as a mover and a shaker. New York was where that was possible.

That skinny, high ceilinged, unpainted spot at 219 West 16th Street with its bare concrete floor seemed to call out to her. She wanted to have a gallery where local artists could show their work. Sale price would be evenly split between artist and gallery owner. Here was a space waiting for her.

Obviously somewhat of a do-it-yourselfer...she knew how to use tools and follow directions. Confident, she was certain she could do the work herself. Once completed, the gallery she'd dreamed of having would be hers.

Clean white floor to ceiling walls suggested spaciousness. A contractor friend, one of Madison's clients, provided names of sturdy materials. For the floor she chose a medium grey leveling agent, a product which comes in a fine powder ready to be mixed with water and stirred constantly until it is a smooth liquid.

The final part, a three-person

team working for a number of hours, happened the last Sunday in March 2019. Closest to the front door Jess and a friend, with a stack of buckets nearby, were stirring away, two buckets set before them. Each time one was ready it was passed back to the contractor who was at the rear. He leveled and smoothed it working his way back towards the street, eventually making him the last one out the front door.

Can't walk on it until it hardens and sets. Suggested wait time is 24 hours but Jess was taking no chances. She waited 72 hours. Result...entire gallery is this smooth shaded grey all the way back leaving the stairs and below hair salon area carpeted.

Some things are meant to be. May 2nd, 2019 Blackbird Gallery opened with its first show. Tradition continues. New shows open the first Thursday of each month. See for yourself. Something delightfully different is at 219 West 16th Street.

New Year's Eve, when the last show ended, Jessica closed to remove the unsold pieces, their nails, etc...spackle, smooth, and repaint...scrub down the floor and apply a single coat of sealer which dried for 12 hours. The stage was set and the next show could be installed.

2020 was just beginning. Watching her determine her decor I asked what she was feeling. "Grateful. I'm just grateful that every day I get to live my dream and help artists to pursue their dream of showing and selling their work." ☺

Amaryllis

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

in our neighborhood . . .

Muhlenberg Library

TIMES HAVE CHANGED. No longer the place where you went merely to browse through bookshelves and borrow a book. In fact, there are relatively few books on the shelves.

Instead the library has become a place that invites people to come in, sit down, and investigate an idea. The upstairs areas provide space for a wide range of events and classes.

The Knit & Crochet Club for instance meets every Saturday from 10:30 am to 1:00 pm. What should you bring? A project, an idea or just a desire to learn.

A book, maybe one you've read or heard others talking about... first Thursday of each month there's **Book Discussion** from 5:30 to 6:45 pm. Jacqueline Woodson's *Red at the Bone* is the February selection and in March it will be Jeanine Cummins's *American Dirt*.

Last Saturday of each month movie goers might enjoy a matinee from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. **Films** shown are often ones based on books. Doors open at 1:45 and late arrivals are not permitted.

Thursday afternoon at 2:00 pm there's another **film opportunity**. Never oldies, these are current ones. Remember...no late arrivals.

LGBT Philosophy Forum meets the second Saturday of the

month, 2:45 to 4:45 pm. Texts to be discussed or links to the texts can be found at the group's website, philosophyforumlgbt.org.

Open Mic, from 2:00 to 4:30 pm the first Saturday of each month is a time when writers can share their poetry, short stories and songs. Hosted by the National Writers Union, it's open to all adults, whether you plan to present or just come to listen.

Third Friday of the month from 2:00 to 4:00 pm the **Muhlenberg Poetry Club** meets. Those wishing to be involved are asked to bring 12 copies of their poem so this collegial group can read and work together.

Coffee & Connections meets the first Thursday of the month from noon to 2:00 pm. For people experiencing homelessness or those who know someone who is homeless the library hosts an ex-

pert available to answer questions and provide useful tips and information. Coffee too...check it out.

The library opens six days a week at 10:00 am. It closes at 7:00 pm Monday through Thursday, 6:00 pm Fridays and 5:00 pm Saturdays. In addition to books, which may be reserved from anywhere on line with a library card, the main floor has computers available for use as well as daily newspapers to read. Upstairs is a children's library where, in addition to an impressive collection of books covering all reading levels, there are numerous scheduled activities including times when the librarian reads books to pre-schoolers. An elevator provides easy access for carriages, strollers and wheelchairs. Library cards are issued free to all New Yorkers at all public library branches. ☺

COMPARISON PRICING

1 qt. whole milk ranges from least expensive \$1.29 (at Ideal and Trader Joe's) to a range of stores, the most expensive being \$2.00. Unique to CVS, if you have a 25% or even 32% reduced coupon good for entire purchases that includes milk too.

Cereals, the chosen morning starter for many, is a whole other category.

Cheerios (called by many names but all made of oats) is a good place to start. Name brands are costlier and Gristedes tends

to price higher than the other supermarkets. Nowadays pharmacies have added food aisles too. Neighborhood prices range from \$6.89 for an 8.9 oz, \$5.99 for 12 oz and \$2.99 for 17-1/2 oz. at Trader Joe's.

Shredded Wheat Bite Size are another one that calls for reading the small print at the bottom since most of the boxes are similar in size but not so in amount contained. \$6.49 for a 16.4 oz, \$5.99 for 12 oz and \$2.99 for 17-1/2 oz at Trader Joe's. ☺

... more neighborhood

Congressman Jerrold Nadler

Town Hall at Penn South

Congressman Jerrold Nadler appeared at a Town Hall meeting before an overflow audience in two packed Community Rooms at Penn South in late December.

Much of his initial presentation focused on the then upcoming Senate impeachment hearings, particularly relevant since many in the audience were concerned about elections.

The remaining hour dealt with a range of specific issues. Included were climate change, gun control, Medicare for all, disinvestment and privatization of public housing, the Israel/Palestine situation, assisting Puerto Rico, how listeners could get rid of Senator Mitch McConnell and the Iran nuclear agreement.

Finally, two actively engaged

young listeners asked to be able to hand deliver their questions, neatly written down, to Nadler. Catalina and her younger brother stepped forward to ask, "How can we help you carry out the things you are doing?"

Since both were at least a handful of years away from voting age they were advised to remind adults around them to be sure to vote.

LEAPSNYC videoed Representative Nadler's presentation. ☺

Details of a disappearance

Ninth Avenue had another death. The lease holder of these 600 square feet of space knew that at month's end his rent would near double because property taxes, which are tied to property values, had risen sharply with neighborhood gentrification. No way he could handle it so he was forced to close November 30th.

His role in the neighborhood? From the floor way up to the high ceiling the walls of Chelsea Convenience Hardware were stocked with all those supplies and tools sought by the wide variety of a constant flow of customers...a flow that began to slow down a few years ago thanks to online ordering.

Who were the customers? Not just the apartment dwellers living nearby but the supers, plumbers, electricians, locksmiths and handymen who repair and maintain the buildings in the area.

Unique: simple advice and suggestions. Years ago, I remember my frustration when my much-loved fliptop glass coffee bean container wore out its rubber gasket. No kitchen supply company stocked them; it wasn't a standard size. This shop owner smiled...showed me a 4x4 inch rubber sheet and said "buy this."

Puzzled, I watched as his young store attendant inverted the jar, carefully drew an outline of its top, then another outline 1 inch wide within that circle and

finally, with a sharp cutting tool created a rubber ring. Placed atop the jar, top flip closed, he gave me my fully functional item. Total cost? Way less than \$1.00, including tax.

By the second week of November 2019 passersby noticed the window signs. 30% discounts. Everything on sale. After another week signs read 50%. The saddest of all...75% thru Thanksgiving. Finally, because he was still in the shop boxing all the remaining items, he put a notice on the open door: 90% off on anything.

No more anything...just a steel shutter shielding what used to be. Another death by gentrification in Chelsea. ☺

... more neighborhood

Health Help

Urgent Care

Urgent Care is quicker than an Emergency Room. Nowadays they are sprawled throughout our city and open every day. Staffed with PAs, some have no MDs on the premises. Simple things, cuts, scrapes or bruises, likely require nothing more than cleansing, disinfecting and bandaging. Minor ailments, sprains, seasonal allergies, nausea, these too can be handled. There are two located on 23rd Street.

West of 7th Avenue is an Urgent Care affiliated with Northwell Health. Not insured? No problem. \$150, the procedure fee, can be paid by cash, check or credit card. If covered

by Medicare you'll be billed 20% of that amount.

East of 6th Avenue is CITYMED. No appointments are necessary. They serve adults and children and Board Certified physicians are always available. They accept most insurance. Uninsured walk-ins are charged \$200, payable by cash, check or credit card.

Pediatric Dentistry

Empire Pediatric Dentistry is right here in Penn South. It's in Bldg. 5 on West 25th Street. Alice Lee, DDS and Ron Chang, DDS plus a dental hygienist and always busy desk personnel staff the small but cheerful office.

An initial visit includes examining, cleaning and fluoride

treatment and costs \$315.

Most patients live nearby but relocations and referrals bring some from Queens and even New Jersey.

Chelsea Pediatric Dentistry on 26th Street close to 7th Avenue has two Board Certified pediatric dentists, Loren C. Buonocore, D.M.D. and Natasha A. Larson, D.M.D.

Books, games, manipulative materials, all provide ample distractions in the large waiting area.

Children usually begin after their first birthday. Some will eventually need braces. Obviously, given the nature of the practice it is usually a long-term relationship. ☺

Shopping

Beats a Bargain Basement

Garage Sale, open daily at 247 West 16th Street, must once have been a garage. Now it's dozens of small areas selling well-marked items... no longer manufactured metal things including typewriters and cash registers... framed objects... mirrors, even paintings... lots of metal numbers and letters... fabric items some even wearable, guaranteed surprises. Wander within.

Salvation Army, one on 8th Avenue just below 21st Street and the other at 208 East 23rd are

heavily stocked with clothing and accessories and a smattering of household items.

Housing Works, open every day, is at 143 West 17th Street. Days ago I found a perfect pair of jeans for \$7.50 and when I removed all the tags the original one was \$45. Wonders never cease. By the way, every Tuesday all their shops throughout the city give seniors a 20% discount on all purchases.

Goodwill on 25th just west of 6th Avenue, open every day, has an unusual return policy. Any

item, including clothing that has not been worn and has all tags in place, if returned within a week gets a full store credit.

Angel Thrift at 48 West 22nd often has unusual things. How's this for someone who loves model trains and has both time and inclination to border them with meticulously created German mid-century vintage pieces. There are entire residential communities complete with buildings, houses, even churches. Ranging in price from \$10 to \$30, the shop has so many the manager assures me there will still be some around all winter. Beats a bargain basement. ☺