



Crown Heights Community News

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EDITORS' NOTES

In this issue we deal with the moment when art interacts with business. Back in the summer of 2023, Kevin Walters, the owner of SoulBK, and I came up with the idea of supporting a group of twelve restaurants on Nostrand Avenue that were to be called Restaurant Row. We also came up with the notion that this effort should be backed up with a mural that we had hoped would be painted on the wall of Key Food along St. Marks Avenue. We got Tsipi Haim of CITYarts to agree to the creation of the mural and she brought in Robin Alcantara to be the muralist. The idea was to have the logos of the twelve restaurants included in the painting. The mural would be a symbol of the idea of Restaurant Row, and we felt quite sure that it would make the idea stronger, create a sense of an interesting area where the customer looking for a meal would come back over and over again to try out all the possibilities. This first attempt came to an end when the owner of Key Food, Ari, decided against the mural in favor of a large-scale renovation of his store. CITYarts departed along with Alcantara, but the idea persisted. And now the idea has come to life in a new way. Aleathea Sapp-Jimenez has painted a version of the mural on canvas. There are three panels each measuring 10X10 feet. Instead of the party theme that had been contemplated for the first version, this second effort has the theme of time on two different levels – the passage of a day and the passage of a life. The question arises: how does one display a mural when there is no wall to paint it on? How does one present the symbol of an idea when there is no obvious place to put that symbol? Our first answer is that we will present the three panels in a nearby art gallery. January 26-28 the three panels will be on display at My Gallery NYC, at 587 Franklin Avenue at the corner of Pacific Street. Then, second, we must figure out what comes next.

Another pressing matter has to do with issues related to crime and prison in various ways. We are doing a profile of Peter Anekwe, a man who spent a lot of time in prison and is now trying to help people who are still incarcerated. Jenn Peck is doing an article about the organization Family and Friends of the Wrongly Convicted. We want to explore the work they do and try to help them out. There is already a connection between Peter and this outfit. We are hoping more develops. And then it turns out Jenn has a cousin who was in prison for a long time based on the eye-witness testimony of a woman who thought she understood what she saw. The cousin was later released because of a DNA test as part

of a defense by Barry Scheck of the Innocence Project. In addition we are still hoping for a meeting of Pastor Williamson of South Brooklyn SDA Church with members of Community Board 8 with the hope that the latter can find some funds for the program the church runs for ex-prisoners in the Bedford Armory.

There is also much else of import to pay attention to. We cover a rally near City Hall led by the Progressive Caucus of the City Council to protest against Mayor Adams's budget cuts. We cover another failure of our government which has been to allow thousands of illegal stores to be established that sell CBD products. Most of these stores don't have licenses and don't collect the 13% sales tax. How can legitimate stores compete with them? We do a profile of Feler Dureus's business Rehab Haven. We cover the Friends of Brower Park Toy Giveaway and Treelighting, the Kreyol Bazaar run by the Haitian Cultural Exchange at Five Myles Gallery. We also cover various efforts in the world of art.

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THE MURAL PROJECT ABOUT RESTAURANT ROW; EXHIBITION AND FUND RAISER

The mural project to symbolize Restaurant Row moves forward with a show of the three panels, 10X10 on canvas to be shown at My Gallery NYC. The show will take place over three days, Friday to Sunday, January 28 to 30. It will include works by four other artists besides Aleathea Sapp-Jimenez, the muralist. They are Victoria Pierre-Jean, Glori B, Miguel de la Cruz, and the photographer Katie Godowski. They were chosen because their work is in different ways close to that of Aleathea; to use an expression Aleathea often employs, their works are in "conversation" with her work. One can get an idea of what the show will be like by looking at the websites of the five artists. The artists I am familiar with were all basically self-taught; they are realists, painting readily recognizable figures, mostly people. The three women painters all have connections to the Caribbean, and their use of color seems to me to owe something to a Caribbean sensibility.

The show will have a different idea to it each day. Friday will be a preview. It is for those who mostly want to look at the art works in a quiet atmosphere without distractions. The artists will be there to answer questions. There will be no music or refreshments.

Saturday will the opening celebration, there may be as many people as the gallery can hold, which is 100. In particular we hope the owners of the restaurants will be there. There will be refreshments, wine and some things to eat. Also Chloe, the beautiful singer, will perform some songs. Envelopes will be distributed asking people to make contributions to the Restaurant Project. The Hispanic artist will do drawings of people on the spot if someone wants that. One will need to negotiate the terms with him.

Sunday would be the day to close the deal for those who are thinking of buying. The atmosphere will be business-like, with the idea that buyer and artist need a calm but focused atmosphere conducive to negotiation. However, this would also be a time to look again and confirm what one thought or find out that what is there is somewhat different.

The center piece of the show will be the three panels painted by Aleathea. Each panel contains the logos of four restaurants on Nostrand or in one case nearby. The panels are symbolic of three times in the day – morning, midday, and night. They are also a presentation of the life of a

couple. The meet in the first mural, are married with children in the second, and are an old couple dancing together at the 50th wedding anniversary in the last panel with children and grand-children in attendance.

The logos / images are distributed as follows:

Morning: Rosalia, Cielito Lindo, Chris, and Oistins

Midday: Nosrand Avenue Pub, La Napa, Hing Hung, and Savvy

Evening: SoulBK, Uotora, Blue Finn, and Suite 704

One idea of the mural is that life in small things is made up of changes. A day goes through an enormous number of alterations in light, atmosphere and mood. Those changes are marked by meals which are sociable and usually occasions when different foods are served. Coffee and juice help one to get going, to awake to the day and face work or the other activities that follow. The midday meal is usually lighter, more a bridge between the beginning and end of the day -- a sandwich, a bento box, chicken wings. Drinks are usually light. And then after the work of the day or other strenuous activity, comes dinner, usually a large meal and one that might be accompanied by alcohol and entertainment. People like to unwind and enjoy themselves until they get tired.

Another major idea is that life is also made up of large changes and these are often marked by parties where food is served. An engagement party, a wedding reception, a baby shower. These might be followed by children's birthday parties, graduation from elementary school and high school and maybe even a graduation from college or graduate school. And then later on there are wedding anniversary parties, parties for promotions, house warming parties and retirement parties and then the miracle of grandchildren and it all starts over again. All of these occasions usually involve food and might be celebrated at a restaurant. So having restaurants mark the changes of life does not seem odd at all; a restaurant might be just where these events take place.

In what follows I want to present images of the murals, but we have found that taking a picture of something so large is difficult. Sometimes something gets left out, and sometimes the picture is not as clear as it should be. So first I want to show the images that exist now, but I also want to insist that the actual artwork will be better in various ways. What follows are the three works in order of morning, midday, and evening.



Morning



Midday



Evening

The photo of the morning does not cover the logo for Rosalia. It is above the clock and Oistins is also left out. The next two photos show the omissions:

The midday photo is bit blurry and it is hard to make out all the logos, so here they are: La Napa off to the left, Hing Hung in the middle, and Savvy and Nostrand Avenue Pub off to the right.



Oistins



La Napa Large scale



Rosalia



Savvy and Nostrand Pub

Finally in the evening picture, one can readily find, going left to right, SoulBK, Uotora, Suite 704 and Bleu Fin.

Let me reiterate seeing the actual panels of the mural will be quite different than looking at the photos above.

After the show at My Gallery NYC what comes next? I am not quite sure, but I would like to get the mural panels shown on Nostrand Avenue, perhaps all together or perhaps separately, or maybe with some variation between both. The mural project has been a long road, with blockades, changes of direction and substance, and I still am not sure where it will end.

A JOURNEY INTO BEAUTY: REVIEW OF “THE PLACE WE LIVE” AT MY GALLERY NYC — by Jenn Peck



Aleathea and Jenn

On a chilly and introspective day, I sought to change the narrative by immersing myself in the soulful streets of Brooklyn. My journey, from Bedford Stuyvesant to Crown Heights, led me to a gem at the corner of Franklin, adorned with the words “My Gallery.” Instantly, a sense of connection and belonging washed over me, compelling me to step inside and explore. The power of a name became evident as I crossed the threshold – “My Gallery” emanated a profound sense of community, self-reflection, care, love, and beauty. The intention behind the name resonated even before entering, setting the stage for a remarkable experience. Inside, I was warmly greeted by the ever-stylish artist, Ms. Aleathea Sapp-Jimenez. Her friendly words and infectious smile created an immediate bond, leaving an indelible mark on my heart. As I embarked on my journey through the current exhibit, “The Place We Live,” the seamless way it drew me in was truly captivating.

The multimedia pieces, curated by the gallery’s owner, Ms. Darla Ebanks, depicted the intricate journeys we navigate in life, both literally and figuratively. The exhibit explored the spaces we occupy at different times and how those spaces, in turn, shape us. Each piece invited contemplation on the

spaces we aspire to inhabit and the realms in which we operate as individuals.

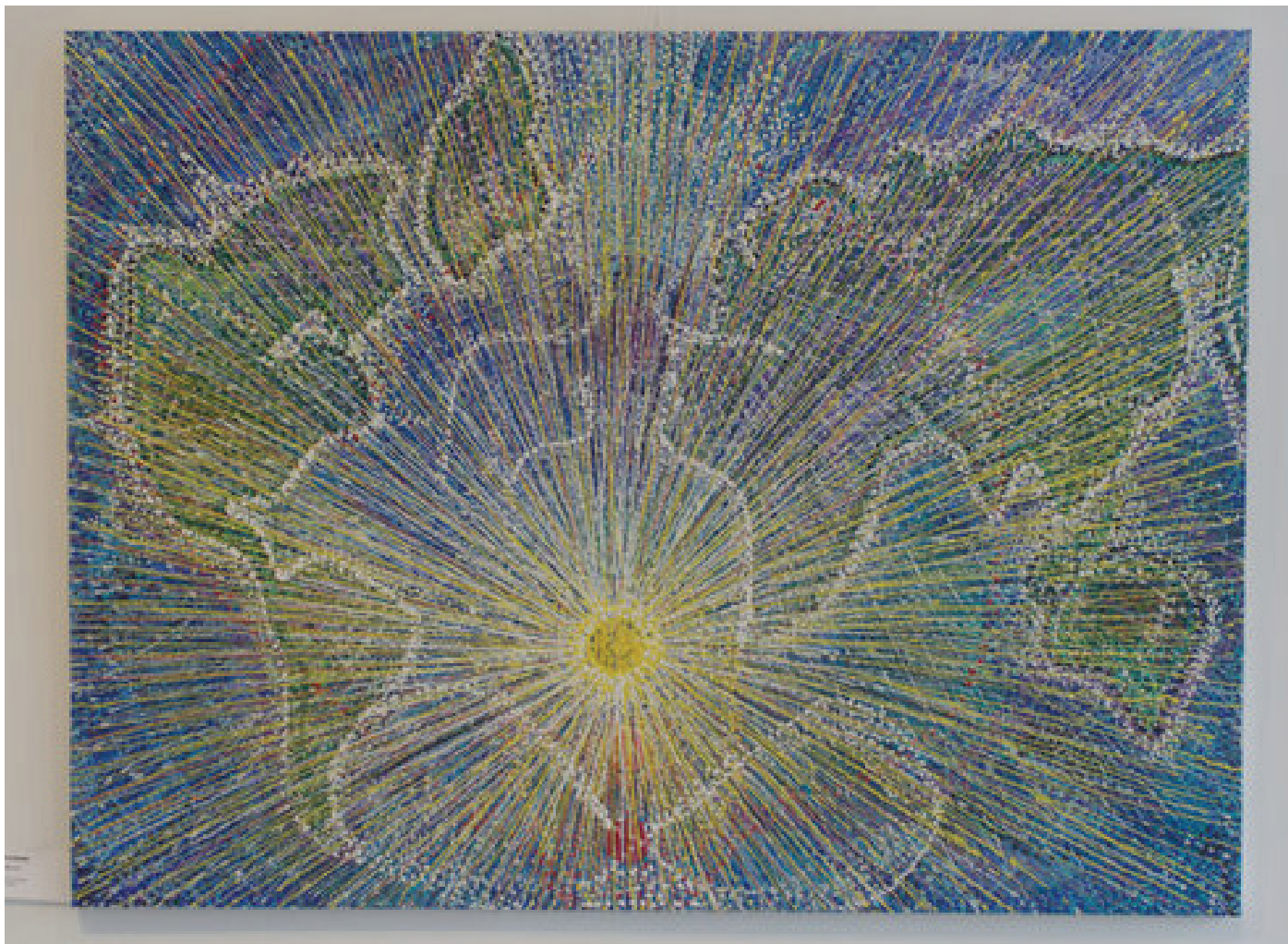
Ms. Ebanks’s work, notably “The Place We Live,” transcended physical space, providing a spiritual elevation akin to Stevie Wonder’s “Higher Ground.” The exhibit showcased works by artists Patricia Fabricant, Ed Grant, Louella Jones, and Doba Afolabi, all offering personal connections to their histories and collective narratives. From sculptures to abstract art, each piece masterfully told a rich and profound story.

Before bidding farewell, I had the privilege of conversing with Ms. Darla Ebanks and longstanding artists and community members John DeWind and Aleathea Sapp-Jimenez. The exchange of energy, the shared experiences, and the affirmation that “My Gallery” belongs not just to me but to all of us left me profoundly thankful for the experience.

“The Place We Live” at My Gallery is a testament to the transformative power of art, community, and self-discovery. It invites all to partake in the beauty it offers, creating a space that truly belongs to each and every one of us.

DARLA EBANKS: OWNER OF MY GALLERY NYC

— John DeWind



Beaming figure in the middle of the world

Darla Ebanks, the owner of My Gallery NYC on Franklin Avenue, began life on an island that is part of Honduras. She was the fourth of five children in the middle of an extended family. Her father was a tailor and her mother a domestic in private houses. As she told me, “If someone had told me, you will be the owner of an art gallery in Brooklyn, I would have said, ‘Whatever you are taking, you better cut down.’” The only indication of her future was that she liked to paint, and this came to an end when she was around twelve years old. Her mother left the family when Darla was six and went to Brooklyn with the idea of eventually bringing her family along too. In the meantime Darla came under the influence of her aunt, who was in charge of her religious education in a Seventh Day Adventist church, and her sister Leah. Her aunt told her about all the different parts of life that were sinful, and the sister told Darla that she was good and everything she did

was good. Darla said her education consisted of her getting around the teachers. Her method was to talk at length until they stopped paying attention. What she learned about managing people was perhaps more important than the academic subjects.

When she was sixteen she joined her mother in Brooklyn. It was then that her education became more serious. At night school she improved her English and studied hard until she got a high school degree. Then she went on to community college and got an associates degree, and from there went on to Brooklyn College and after that to Richmond College where she ended up with a degree in biology. Her family headed her toward becoming a nurse. She had taken a job as a nurse’s aide when she arrived in New York for \$27 a week. When she graduated, she first worked as phlebotomist and then as a lab technician.

Some time in her late thirties or early forties, she became bored and tired of her work and formed the first of several partnerships that moved her life in a new direction. She and a man named Danny Garcia founded an exercise studio. He provided the money, and she got all the necessary permits and ran the place. After about a decade she traded her share of the business for ownership of the building. And so began a new career in real estate and rentals. Some of the buildings she acquired she also lived in. A dizzying list of properties followed; there were places on New York Avenue, Macon, Putnam, and Gates. There was a coop on Berkeley Place and more, and in the course of this work, she acquired a property at Pacific Street on Franklin Avenue.

Another important development came in her early sixties. One night she woke up and it became clear to her that she must start painting, something she had not done for fifty years. This she did, using her bedroom as her studio, and, for about eight years, she did this work completely in secret. Eventually she wanted to show her work and find out what people thought about it. She did this, and everyone responded positively telling her she had real talent.

Two connections propelled her into establishing a gallery. First, Darla had a "hiking buddy" with whom she had hiked in the U.S., Latin America and Europe, and this person told her to start a gallery. She further told her how to do it – paint the walls white, reach out to artists, figure out the business. At first Darla didn't feel up to it, so she handed over management to a couple, Hannah and Gino. Hannah showed her how to do it. After Hannah and Gino had a terrible shouting fight in the gallery, they left, and Darla took over herself.

The other connection was a well-known artist from Italy who came to the gallery and looked at Darla's work. She told her that she did everything wrong, but that the result was very good. She warned her not to take classes and offered to show her work in Germany and in Rome. This was too overwhelming, but her opinions gave Darla confidence. She also got to know Hanne Tierney, the owner of Five Myles Gallery, and Hanne helped her with advice and made connections for her. Soon she was putting on regular shows and the gallery prospered. I asked Darla if she had become a non-profit, and she said no. She reasoned that she didn't like the idea of being answerable to a board that would have the power to fire her. Darla had stopped working for a boss when she gave up the health profession. Doing so allowed her to follow

her own path, which has allowed her to have a very remarkable set of thoughts and insights about herself and the world she lives in. She would never want to do anything that would compromise her freedom to find out more. Her eight years of private painting had largely been self-exploration. She treasured that.

Darla's painting method is somewhat amorphous. She says she starts by finding colors she likes in combination. As she works with these, she begins to put in lines. However, the technique does not lead to abstraction. Sometimes she ends up with elements of a landscape, or with what look like maps, islands seen from above. One of her most impressive pictures includes a map of the world, and in the middle of the work are radiating circles. Together the circles make the outline of a figure. When Darla was young, she believed she had wheels inside her that turned in different parts of her body. She later found out that she had independently discovered chakras and she began a formal study of the metaphysical and religious literature in addition to regularly practicing meditation.

Darla's painting was first of all an exercise in self-discovery, this study was a purely private one. The painting of the chakras in her painting of the world began as an attempt to paint an angel, but the angels wings became the continents of the earth, and Darla regards the numerous dots in the work as different versions of her life, some of them outside the earth. As Darla has made her discoveries and eventually made them public, I wondered if she had any interest in being a teacher. She said no, that in revealing her own experience of religion, she has become an anti-evangelist. Her own journey has been very individualistic, and she would not want to impose her discoveries on others. Perhaps her way of connecting to others is her gallery, a place where other artists can make their own discoveries. Her current show has five artists. I asked what unifies the show, and her answer was basically a certain use of color and lines, each very distinct but also in conversation with the other works.

Darla has now had the gallery for three years. She wonders if there are further adventures ahead. One important source of support is her sister Leah, someone who has had the same job and lived in the same place for her whole adult life. She is sometimes worried about Darla's adventures, but she has continued to approve of her to this day. Having that stability behind her gives Darla a solid base as she tries out different ideas and travels the world. She has been to Europe and Latin America and has seen a lot of North America often climbing with her "hiking buddy." No doubt more discoveries are to come.

DECEMBER 11TH DEMONSTRATION AGAINST BUDGET CUTS ——— John DeWind

On December 11th at 9am I arrived at City Hall to attend a rally against Mayor Adams' proposed budget cuts, according to him made necessary by the influx of immigrants and the end of emergency funding provided by the federal government during Covid. Adams had pleaded with immigrants to stop coming to New York City because they were "destroying the city." Adams has shown no interest in increasing taxes on the wealthy and large corporations to make up for the shortfall. The rally was organized by the Progressive Caucus of the City Council made up of some twenty members of the council including Chi Osse and Crystal Hudson of Crown Heights.

At first I had trouble locating the protest as it was not on the steps of City Hall. Indeed the steps seemed to be closed off, perhaps for some construction. The rally was taking place in the arcade of the building right next to the exit ramp of the Brooklyn Bridge. The Caucus had set up an ambitious program of speakers to cover six areas affected by the budget cuts. These were Education at all levels, Childcare, Housing, Parks, Libraries, and Sanitation. For each one a council member was making a presentation, sometimes followed by a person from an advocacy group. Of these there were about thirty backing

the rally – unions such as the United Federation of Teachers and the Professional Staff Congress from CUNY– advocacy organizations like New Yorkers for Parks, New York Working Families Party, Asian Americans for Equality, El Puento, and Make the Road New York. A crowd of about a hundred had assembled as well as a good showing of media to cover the event. The crowd was pumped up, often breaking into chants. The most popular was "Care not Cuts."

With fourteen speakers scheduled and twenty more waiting for a chance, the speeches were short – displaying a lot of anger and disgust at Mayor Adams. Jumaane Williams, the Public Advocate spoke about how lower and middle class New Yorkers depend on city services to have a decent life. The cuts are primarily an attack on them. At the same time the wealthy have the full support of Adams. "The City of Yes" is an attempt to give real estate developers just what they want. He seeks to get rid of zoning, residential vs. business and manufacturing distinctions, get rid of community input in questions of development. The same with the financial industry, the main center of world banking and investment. Don't bother these billion dollar companies with taxes or regulations.



Budget cut demo



At the same time the Mayor wants to cut spending on all the services ordinary New Yorkers depend on. The CUNY system provides a pathway to a good education, which opens up all kinds of possibilities, but the cuts are getting rid of faculty, particularly in the community colleges and also of all kinds of students services. The same is true for elementary and high school education. New Yorkers depend on childcare – this frees parents to work and make a decent living. Cutting back could mean that a parent has to quit work in order to take care of their children. Rents in New York have sky rocketed since the end of Covid, but the Mayor has done nothing to help those with low incomes. His idea of low cost housing is a joke; as one person put it; “It is actually a subsidy for the middle class.” The city has built virtually no low cost housing, and its management of NYCHA housing is a disgrace. Broken elevators, mold, mounds of garbage pile up, so that developers now point to it and say private development is the answer. Mayor Adams seems to agree. Parks now are becoming filthy, libraries are closed Sundays and are letting staff go. Sanitation is taking trash bins off the street, and Adams wants to close central sites used to collect compost. One item has been left untouched; overtime for the police is sacred.

All these change, worthy of a Republican administration mean that ordinary New Yorkers have worse lives because they have to struggle harder to make ends meet, to get an education, to play sports or enjoy nature, to live in a clean city. As these cuts happen, wealthy New Yorkers continue to accumulate wealth. Adams has no trouble with wealthy people. Again and again he has been caught having a special relationship with someone with money. Right now he is being investigated for getting campaign money from Turkey. It would seem that whatever Adams controls is up for sale.

Several speakers were especially effective. Adam Ganser of New Yorkers for Parks was good on importance of the way parks in the city are places to play sports, study nature, take one’s dog with all the social life that goes on with other dog owners, as a place for all kinds of events also a place of beauty where one can experience nature – hundreds of different birds as well as squirrels and there are trees, flowers and other vegetation. What a waste to let these places grow over and become filled with garbage and homeless people.

Jumaane Williams was very good at laying out the costs of that austerity has in making things worse. Cuts don’t save money, but actually cost more. Immigrants can become a source of strength if supported so they can get on their feet. They start businesses and work incredibly hard, or take jobs and save money; they create prosperity. If unsupported they drag down the economy as they develop chronic problems and become homeless. Young people with college degrees also create wealth, they can start up businesses that hire people and put money in the economy. What does someone fired from a library create, or a school, or the Parks Department; they become part of a loop leading to economic decline.

Two Crown Heights politicians spoke eloquently. Chi Osse and Crystal Hudson both moved the crowd with a call to keep fighting and not give up. I thought Jabari Brisport and Zohran Mamdani gave good speeches, one a state senator and the other an assemblyman. News reports said that the Finance Committee had come up with hundreds of millions of dollars that Adams had overlooked. A big fight looms ahead. One hopes that Adams’ regressive plan can be undone and an alternate budget that truly supports New Yorkers can be put together.

ILLEGAL SALE OF MARIJUANA

— John DeWind

It is now legal to sell and use Marijuana in New York State. However, to be a legal merchant of the product one needs a license and one needs to pay a 13% tax on each sale. One is also subject to testing to insure that the product one sells is safe according to New York State regulations and has only a limited amount of THC, which is a hallucinogen. Thus far only a few dozen licenses have been granted, but the number of stores selling CBD products in New York City is estimated to be somewhere between five and eight thousand. During a survey on Nostrand Avenue from Eastern Parkway to Fulton Street,

twelve short blocks, I spotted 17 stores, many of them brand new and many of them having added the product to a store that is a small grocery store or deli. The trade is apparently very lucrative, partly because these stores do not collect the 13% tax the state says they must charge, and partly because the product has not been tested for harmful by-products. The worst of these may be Fentanyl, listed as the strongest opioid available and also the source of numerous overdose deaths.

At the beginning of the year Mayor Adams declared he was going to go after four stores in the 9th precinct. In the

face of thousands of such enterprises, this would seem to be a bit of a joke. In addition these store are very good at coming and going. If a letter arrives at one address threatening action, the operation can be somewhere else in a matter of days. Two delis on Nostrand have a reciprocal relationship. One sells beer and the other sells weed. A weed customer at one is sent to the other, just as a beer customer is directed to the first place. If deli two got a threatening letter, it might just switch roles with the brother deli. The police seem to have little interest in pursuing these cases; thus, doing a dance like this might be enough to send them looking elsewhere.

The stores often have a certain look to them. Very often the customer is cut off from the vendor by thick walls made or fiber glass or some other bullet proof material such as is often found in banks or liquor stores. These stores typically deal in cash as most people do no want to leave evidence that they have made an illegal purchase. Thus the need for lots of security. Also many times the proprietor puts other barriers between him or herself and the public. In one store I went into on Nostrand Avenue, I found the sales person did not know who the owner was. She was hired over the computer; she is paid through direct deposit to her bank and has no relationship with the government – there are no deductions for federal, state or city taxes or Social Security. She is paid without any deductions from her salary and has no health insurance. For her this is a supplementary job to other employment she has. The police, might arrive and arrest her, and the owner would have no exposure and might just continue doing business at some other store or stores.

The package that the illegal stores sell is quite different from what the legal stores sell. The packaging for the latter looks very much like medicine. There are health warnings and the look is that of a plain wrapper meant to convey information. Also there are guarantees that the product meets the standards set by the State of New York. The illegal packaging is quite different; it seeks to convey the excitement of trying a mood enhancing drug, with graphics and names that get across that one is about to go on an adventure that sharpens the senses. Some packages have no name – for example there is one that just has a picture of Bob Marley. Another has a picture of a one-eyed pirate with an old fashioned pistol. Here are some names – Pink

Kush, Dark Side, 41 Cherriez with the attached comment “Oh, Juicy.” Space Man Exotics and Runts are two others. Some of these are shown in the attached photo. Two others not there are Black Ice and Spooky Treats, while Premium Gas promises the fuel for a great trip. Thus, marketing is yet another way that the illegal operations surpass the legal ones.

Marijuana is an industry worth billions of dollars and could be a source of an enormous amount of revenue for the state, but to accomplish this would mean a massive amount of enforcement and regulation that is just not there. The City Council just passed a law that would allow the state to sue landlords who rent to illegal stores. One more law, one more regulation, but who is going to enforce it?



marijuana photo

KREYOL BAZAAR AT FIVE MYLES

The Haiti Cultural Exchange shares space with Five Myles Gallery. They occupy the rooms behind the gallery. Starting in June, the Exchange will take over the whole building while Hanne Tierney takes some time to try out different enterprises – curating shows elsewhere, traveling, and taking some time to think about the next chapter in her life. On December 10th there was a preview of the new relationship to come. The Exchange created a Kreyol Bazaar made up of about a dozen vendors to showcase Haitian goods and businesses. The event was to run 12 to 5pm and it took place during an on-going show. “Three Artists” with work by Susan Newmark, Deborah Everett, and Nina Meledandri was temporarily eclipsed by the Haitian vendors. For a show that seemed to me to be about loss, the fate of the works that day was not entirely inappropriate.

Who was it that blocked the artists? My incomplete tour began with the food to the right of the doorway as one entered the gallery. Maryse Felix of Bell’s Kitchen provided an array of spicy treats for those who were looking to combine lunch with their shopping. Having just had lunch myself, I took in the wonderful aroma but nothing more. She listed a menu under the name of Earthshine.



HCX Food

My next stop was at Les Chocolateries Askanya; the owner was behind the table; her name is Corinne, and she told me all the ingredients for her chocolates were grown in Haiti and that the farmers receive a share of the profits. She provided samples of a milk chocolate and one mixed with sea salt. The latter seemed especially tasty to me, and I bought a bar of it with the idea of giving it as a Christmas present. I thought its distinctive taste would be very pleasing.



HCX Chocolate

Across the way from Askanya was VivLiv Books. There I met Justine A. P. Louis, the writer of roughly a dozen children’s books on display at her table. She is also the owner of the publishing house that puts out her books. There were many remarkable titles but the one that grabbed my attention was titled “Queen of Dominoes.” It is about a girl named Melody who has been trained to play dominoes by her grandfather. When she is eight she enters a tournament to play the game. It would ruin the story if I told you how it comes out, but it is a thoroughly happy book. Just in case the young reader is inspired by the story, Justine was also selling a dominoes set. Thus, the book could be the beginning of an interest in a

game that is played in the Caribbean by people of all ages. Justine told me that she was born in the United States, but she spent her childhood in Haiti and that experience is the source of all her children's books. Again, with the book and the game a Christmas present was taken care of .



Edwina, Justine and the book

As I left Vivliv, my attention was caught by a musician in the corner playing beautiful music solo. It was slow and thoughtful and I stood and listened through three complete songs. I found out the musician was Wooly Saint Louis Jean. How could I not get one of this CD's. I was in for a surprise when I played the album at home. All the songs had vocals, just as charming as the solos he had played in the gallery.



HXC Guitarist

From the music, I drifted over to a nearby table and there I bought a large clam shell with flowers painted on it. I did not get the name of the vendor nor did I get her picture. However I do have a photo of the artwork. I hope that seeing that makes up for my not paying enough attention to the artist.



Painted Clam Shell

And finally in the back room I found a striking papier mache vase. It was in a small store called Art is a Network, owned by Nathalie Tancred. She called over the artist, a man named Pierre Edgard Satyr. He lives in Boston but had come down to Brooklyn for the show. We were warned not to put water in the vase, but it could hold dried flowers or a small glass could be put in the top holding a flower in water. However, the vase would be gorgeous all on its own – a piece of work hovering between art and a useful household good.

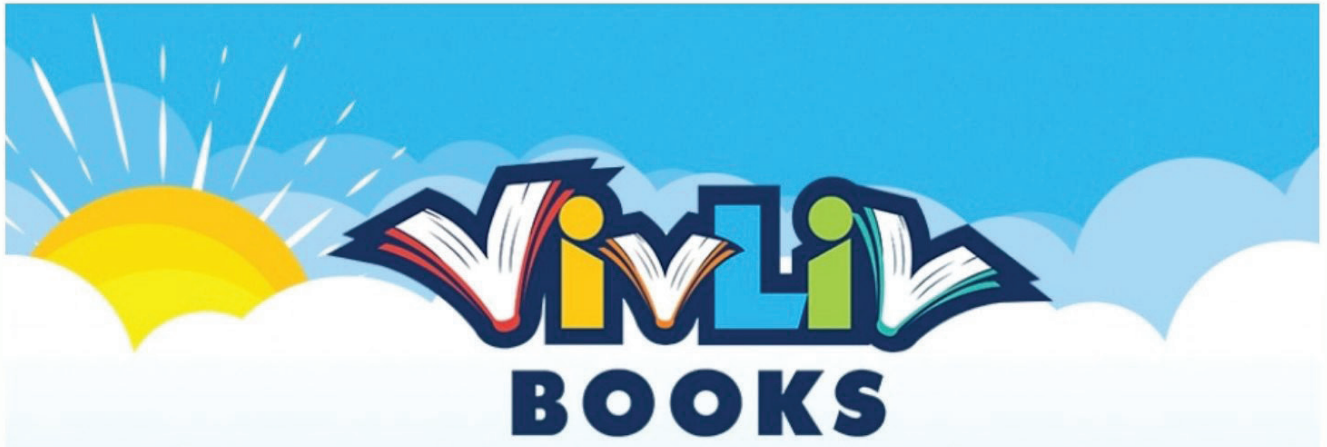


HXC Vase Artist

Thus, my wanderings through the show came to an end. I spent some time talking to Hanne and her assistant Ruby, both seeming a bit uncertain now that they did not have their usual roles, but happy to see all the wonderful work on display. One now wonders what they will be up to in the next year or so and also what will be going on now that Haiti Cultural Exchange will be doing shows in the whole space.

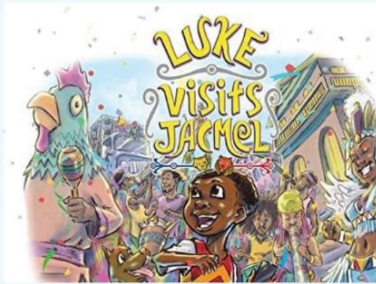
— John DeWind

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FELER DUREUS AND REHAB HAVEN

When the officers of Brooklyn Avenue Block Association decided it was time to expand past the single block we started with, we looked for people from the new blocks to be officers. On Brooklyn Avenue between St. Johns Place and Sterling Place, we decide that person should be Feler Dureus, the owner of Rehab Haven. He agreed and came to the next block meeting on November 19th. Having gotten to know Feler, I decided to do a profile on him and his business. We had an interview on December 2nd.

I started by asking about the family that Feler came from. His father got training from missionaries to become a dental assistant, and this became his work in Haiti. His mother was a seamstress and made clothes – wedding gowns and every other kind of garment. Together they had ten children. Feler was the youngest. The family decided to move to the United States, and they came up a few at a time. Feler arrived at the age of eight in 1988. He didn't speak English very well, but he got a lot of help from a friend of his – James. For elementary school he went to St. Francis, then Lafayette High School. From there he went on to Long Island University, first as an undergraduate and then to get a graduate degree.

He married Rachele in 2003, and some of his far flung family came to the wedding. His parents came from Texas and a brother showed up unexpectedly, coming all the way from Kuwait. Over the years Feler and Rachele had five children; they are now aged 14 to 4. The oldest has started high school at Murrow and the second one is in the process of looking for a high school. All the children have been home schooled. Rachele has taken the lead with the children's education. The family joined a group of home schoolers, and this way they could get the expertise they needed in schooling, and the children got a wide social life by interacting with the children from the other families.

Feler's career began with a job with the Board of Education doing physical therapy with autistic children all over New York. The traveling was difficult, and at one point, Feler had a motorcycle accident on the Brooklyn Bridge. Despite being thrown for a block, he came away unscathed but determined to get another job. For a time he worked with a Russian doctor, but then he established his own business on Brooklyn Avenue, which is also where he lives.

Feler gets some patients by referral from doctors, but increasingly he gets people who come directly to him. He



Feler

does marketing on several social media sites and prefers to get cash customers. Dealing with insurance companies is very difficult; it involves an endless amount of back and forth with a large bureaucracy that is slow moving and unresponsive.

The patients that come have a wide variety of problems. Accidents, operations, the difficulties of old age – a whole range of mental and physical conditions – mean that people need help to get all the parts of their bodies working.

Feler's family attend the V1 Church in Bushwick. It is a very dynamic and active church that seeks a lot of involvement from its flock. Feler does what he can, but between his business and his five children, he doesn't have much time.

Over nine years his business has grown and become more successful, and Feler has put down roots on Brooklyn Avenue. He has been there since 2014, and has gotten to know the people in the neighborhood. He is especially keen to keep older residents informed about what is going on and get them involved.

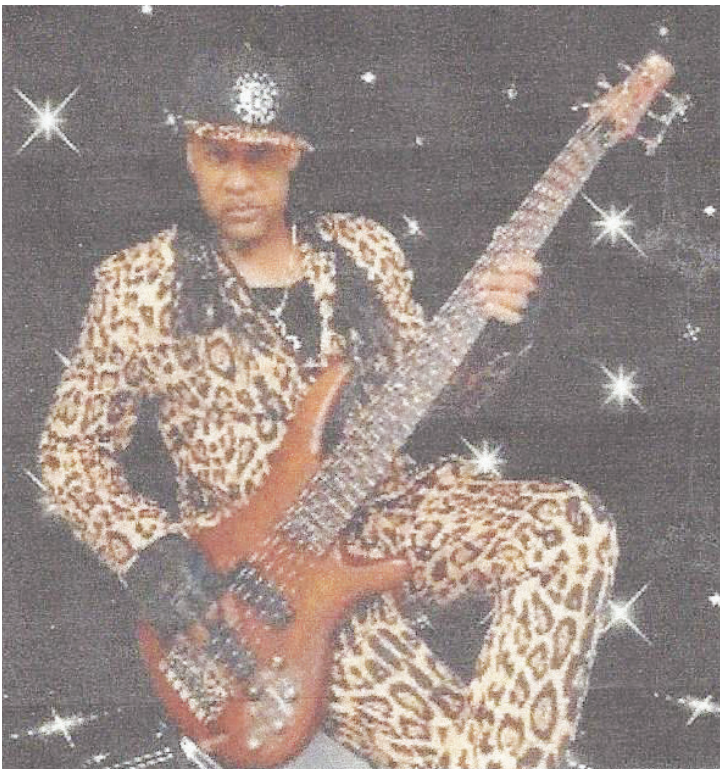
It turns out Feler was just the right person to form a connection between the block association and the people on his block.

— John DeWind

PROFILE OF HOT ICE ——— John DeWind

Through the diverse activities I follow in Crown Heights I became aware that there is a celebrity living in the area by the name of Hot Ice. Hot Ice is of course a pseudonym, and on the one hand, the purpose of a public name is to protect the private person. On the other hand, one wants to get to know who the person is behind the name. So our attempt here is to balance these two considerations. We want to convey something about the personality without doing any sensationalist journalism.

For an interview on a rainy Sunday, Hot Ice drove me to a restaurant in his Hummer, and we had a talk. Here is some of what was said. Hot Ice was born in Brooklyn of Panamanian parents who were entertainers. They had a group called the Melodiers. Hot Ice was the oldest in a large family almost entirely made up of brothers. He went to local public schools and then Canarsie High School. After that came Kingsborough College where he got a degree in Computer Science and Music. His musical education began early. In school he learned to play a long list of wind instruments, including the trumpet, different kinds of saxophone, the flute and more. In addition he started to do some drumming. When he was twelve, his father, noticing the success of the Jackson Five, founded a group called the Jordan Three. Hot Ice was twelve and the other two brothers were ten and eight. This group continued to play until Hot Ice was seventeen. While Hot Ice was playing with this group, he picked up a broom and started to pretend that he was strumming it. His father got the message, and at Christmas, he gave his son a lead guitar, which became his signature instrument.



Hot Ice with a Bass Guitar

The boy joined a band in high school that competed in a contest called “The Battle of the Bands. The name of the band was Hot Ice. After competing, the other members of the band walked away until the only one left was Hot Ice, and that is how he got the name. He has kept it his whole career. An article in The Prayze Factor magazine tells of numerous artists that Hot Ice has played with and the many venues where he has performed. It also lists the different roles he has played – song writer, band leader, producer and singer. Increasingly, as time goes by, it seems Hot Ice has taken an interest in the business side of music in addition to the artistic side. However, I first asked him about some of the high points in his various roles.

As a song writer, he has had a lot of popular songs; some of the biggest ones are “Made in America,” “Turn You On” in two versions, R&B and Reggae, and “Love Thy Neighbor” which is gospel. Hot Ice plays in all genres – you name it, he has done it. As a band leader he is most proud of his own band called “The Hot Ice Band.” As producer he has founded his own production company called Guitarzan Productions, which is a division of Hot New Entertainment, <https://HotNewEntertainment.com>; a recent release is “Let GOD Have HIS Way.”



Photo of the single

As a singer, Hot Ice has performed in every possible way – solo, singing in a band, and with an orchestra.



at key board

One can hear his music in every way possible; there are CD's, he is on Spotify, Amazon, iTunes, as well as Twitter. Also his work is played on many radio stations, just to give a few examples: Synergy 1 Radios in Chicago, SoulSpiration Radio in Atlanta, Lonely Oak Radio in California, Good Music Radio in the UK.

Hot Ice has begun to take an interest in the internet as a business ever since Twitter was acquired by Elon Musk and it became X. Suddenly users were being asked to get a check mark for which they had to pay a fee. Hot Ice came up with the idea of setting up his own social media company that people and organizations could use for free. This he did by forming a social organization and a news outlet. Here is his website as well: <https://NewPostABiz.com>



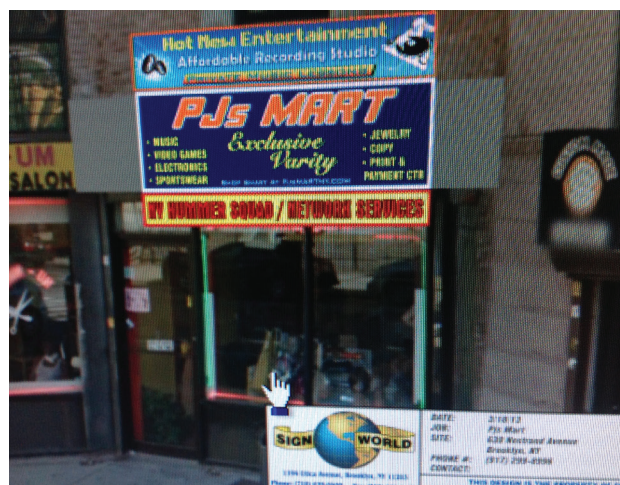
social media



news outlet

Advertisers pay a small fee according to how many people sign up and how often they use the sites. I put Crown Heights Community Organization on the social site, made a post, then clicked on the Hot Ice tabs to follow him. In just the last two days I have gotten fifteen followers.

The media sites are not Hot Ice's only venture into business. For a long time he had a store on Nostrand Avenue called PJ's Mart. It closed in 2014; perhaps it was ahead of its time. That setback did not deter him from other ventures. Hot Ice has enormous energy. He is like a river; he will find his way to the ocean one way or another, taking as many twists and turns as it takes.



Ice Cube's store PJ Mart

Joining the efforts of different people and organizations is what Hot Ice is into now, and it makes the world a better place.

TREE LIGHTING IN BROWER PARK

— John DeWind

Tree lighting in Brower Park was announced to me in a flyer that told me the event was sponsored by Chi Osse and the Friends of Brower Park. Down below the headline some half dozen other groups were listed endorsing the idea; the leaflet laid out a three-part event running from 3pm to 7pm. The three parts were a food giveaway at 3pm a distribution of toys at 4pm and then there was the implication that Tree Lighting would happen in the remaining hours when the toys were all gone. I foolishly imagined that if I was around at 6pm, I would be there in plenty of time to see the lights come on.

Because of various complications in my life, I did not make it out to Brower Park until 4pm and found the toy distribution in full swing. Marva Brown was rushing around doing many things, making sure the tables with toys were all set, getting volunteers organized, having the children and their guardians get in line off to the north of Shirley Chisholm Plaza.



Marva Brown

Besides her efforts, there were other activities going on. Most prominently there was a steel drum band made up of young children. Their conductor and instructor went from player to player instructing them how to play each new song. They came off very well; I heard a version of “Havana” that was quite presentable.



Children's Steel Band

There were also various tables conveying information as well as giving away activity sets. One table had numerous pamphlets about composting and the young man behind it was urging people to sign a petition protesting Mayor Adams effort to cut back the program. He wants to close the fixed receptacles to which people can bring their compost. Adams argues these are not needed now that there has been a widespread distribution of composting bins. The man behind the table argued the central composting places fill a need. People who live in one and two family houses do not accumulate enough compost material to justify having a bin and putting Sanitation to the trouble of picking just a small amount of waste. Having a central location makes a lot of sense.



Compost Table

Another table had been set up by the Brooklyn Children's Museum. Jane and Dean had literature about the Museum but also were giving away kits to children to write cards. There was a folded piece of stiff paper and a handful of stickers. They also had a sample card for children who wanted to create their card on the spot. I did not have a child with me, but I do have a four-year-old grand-daughter in New Jersey who loves drawing, stickers and using the mails to receive and send letters. So I took a kit for her and mailed it off the next day. I am waiting anxiously, hoping for a letter to come back.



Jane and Dean Children's Museum

The Brower Park Library also had a table filled with books of interest for children. Behind the table was the head of the library Alicia Pritchard and Jez who runs the story reading program. The books on the table were being taken rapidly. Apparently the librarians had made a good selection as the kids were enthusiastically picking up volume after volume. And right next to the book table was another with toys, all kinds of board games, train sets, stacking sets and more.



Alicia Pritchard and Jez

The children, along with their adults, filed by and got lots of books and toys that seemed to makethem all very happy.

Having taken in all the points of interest I went home, planning to return for the lighting. I was only gone a hour, but when I returned, I noticed two things. One was that it had gotten very cold, and two was that no one was left. There were only bags of garbage to indicate that an event had taken place. Nevertheless the the tree by the entrance to the park was lit. It gave off a beautiful yellow light. The beauty of the tree compensated for having missed the lighting and whatever ceremony had been performed. Later Alicia Pritchard told me it was just too cold to stick around and that lots of people were leaving in any case. So I admired the tree, shivered a bit and headed for home.



The lit tree

CAROLYN EGAN: PLANTING BULBS IN RAIN GARDENS

—John DeWind

In a fit of over optimistic enthusiasm I had acquired a large bag of daffodil bulbs from the Friends of Brower Park. They had held an event planting daffodils in the park, but had far more bulbs than they could manage and so I thought I would get some and plant them in the area of the Brooklyn Avenue Block Association. I also got some tulips at Home Depot, on sale as the season was getting late. I offered both kinds of bulbs at a block association meeting and only handed out a few. The remainder ended up in my basement. I was very aware of their being there and made myself promises that I would get them planted, but again and again I failed to keep those promises.

Then something wonderful happened. Carolyn Egan wrote, saying that she had daffodil bulbs and she would be willing to help out in planting them. Carolyn is the Community Coordinator of the Rain Garden Program. Previously she had taught a group of us to be Rain Garden Stewards and had given various tools and equipment to do this work. Suddenly, I was no longer arguing with myself and losing the argument. I was now in the process of arranging a time to do planting. This we did for Friday, December 8th at 11am. Like a homeowner worried the cleaning woman would disapprove of the mess, I went out at 10:30 and cleaned out the two rain gardens on Brooklyn Avenue. Carolyn showed up exactly on time. It was just the two of us to start. I called up someone who works at home; he had said he could take off an hour to help out. However, when I called him, it turned out he had been sent out to Long Island for the day. So Carolyn and I finished cleaning out the two gardens I had started on, looked at two more gardens on Sterling between Brooklyn and Kingston and then moved down to Lincoln Place. There it

occurred to me that Kelly Burwell might be available. He had recently become an officer of the block association when we added Lincoln Place to our area of interest. Kelly was home; he came out and worked industriously to clean out the garden on Lincoln Place. We then planted bulbs, some tulips and some daffodils. As we were doing this, several passers-by came along and Kelly knew them all. Ebullient Kelly, a great believer in social media, said it was time to take a photo, and this I did.



Carolyn and Kelly

When we finished with Lincoln we went back to Brooklyn Avenue and planted in one of the gardens there. Time was then running short for Carolyn and me, so we went up to Sterling Place and planted one of the gardens there.

All this work turned out to be great fun. Carolyn is a delightful person, focused on her work, but also filled with interesting information, and she has a great sense of humor. Kelly is enthusiasm itself, grandly sociable and filled with amazing and interesting stories. He knew all about the building on Sterling and Brooklyn that had gone up in flames recently and had been the site of a cult.

So with these two companions the work flew by, and I was reluctant to give up their company. And now, instead of worrying about when to get the work done, I wait in anticipation of the spring and seeing where the daffodil and tulips sprout up. A worrisome present has been replaced by a happy future.

PAUL HANLEY'S DOGS

Hanley is an accomplished photographer. He is the owner of 3island photography, and one can see his work by punching in Paul Hanley Photography. He does excellent art work, all kinds of events, portraits and more. In this case he was at the Doggie Parade in Brower Park to celebrate Halloween on the weekend before the actual event. The parade was also a contest to choose the best costume and also an occasion at which Crown Heights North Association received a grant from the state arranged by Brian Cunningham. He was accompanied by Chi Osse who was acting as a judge for the event. Paul was working rapidly and sometimes did several photos of the same thing and ended up with well over 250 photos. I have just picked pictures of dogs and their owners with the idea of discovering something about the relationship between them. Dogs were once wolves that preyed on livestock. Early man found they could be domesticated and even become guards if they were fed. Instead of eating sheep, they became their protectors and in exchange were fed and housed. That relationship has evolved in thousands of ways and the relationships have become endlessly complicated. What follows are twelve photographs of owners dressing up their dogs to be shown to the general public and to judges. What do the humans make of this? What do the dogs experience?



Dogs can be children, and they don't move away.



Dogs can be fun, but human fun is not the same as dog fun. Being dressed up seems to be a matter of complete indifference, while the master finds it hilarious.



Dogs can become junior partners in our fantasies. Batman had Robin. A dog owner can have a dog subordinate. Two is more fun than one.



It is very cool to have a dog. A dog can enhance an image. Get a tattoo, buy some shades, purchase an exotic coffee, have a dog.



We can find doubles in dogs. A gentleman can have a very graceful dog and together they can move through the world with poise and grace.



Like children, dogs can be worrisome, and having two can multiply the difficulties.



stylish woman, a well-dressed dog, a beautiful fall day.



Two skeletons with a dog in an orange sweater. Sometimes the dog just comes along for the ride.



People get dogs for companionship, but that companionship can make us friends with other people who have dogs. How many friendships have begun by encountering a fellow dog walker in the park?



Dogs can be what we are not. If our lives make us sedentary and lax, we can still take pleasure in a sleek, well muscled animal that can do much that we cannot.



We can live simple, efficient lives; our dogs can carry the burden of complexity. Complementarity is a large theme between humans and dogs.

THREE ARTISTS EXHIBIT AT FIVE MYLES — John DeWind

The Three Artists show at Five Myles presents three women artists who are very different in some ways; Susan Newmark uses woven cloth on simple looms and paper. Deborah Everett uses very bright colors, painting on canvases sometimes of an enclosed space and sometimes depicting wide open ones like the desert. Her work has a serious subject but usually has a humorous aspect to it. Nina Melendandri set herself a large scale project, to do an art work every day in June. She goes to the beach and collects items there for collages. Thus the materials of the different artists are completely different, and their results are strikingly different. When one looks at the gallery, standing by Hanne's office, one divides it into three distinct areas and immediately the question occurs: Why in the world would Hanne put these three artists together. As one circles the gallery, the answer slowly emerges.



The three artist and everett, silent march

Susan Newmark's woven work falls into two parts; she calls one Erasure and the other Leaving Pompeii. They are both thus a consideration of what is lost, but then also they are concerned with memory. In depicting what is lost, one is also attempting to preserve it by giving it one's attention. The first work that appears in going around the gallery clockwise is called Bucha, referring to a massacre committed by Russian forces in the fighting in Ukraine. They killed about 1,400 civilians during their occupation of the town and then withdrew. The collage does not show the massacre

but rather the result. A street and a pathway which are white divide the ground into four unequal areas. A few people walk in the white areas. Thus what is portrayed is the aftermath; the four areas are mostly filled with rubble. So the massacre is implied as something over, and the materials make it even more distant because they make the scene fragmented. One has to look hard to see what is being shown, and one has the feeling that the image is in the process of coming apart. The shaky lines of cloth suggest the destruction is continuing, that the scene will eventually become unrecognizable. So the process begins with the massacre but then continues as memory fades. The attempt to remember seems destined to fail. This idea is repeated in other collages in the Erasure series.



Bucha by Susan Newmark

“The Drought Garden,” divided in half, has plentiful roses on top and dead leaves on the bottom. Moving from the destruction that humans cause, one segues way into the destruction caused by nature. The passage of the seasons and natural processes, like rain waxing and waning, cause a parallel destruction and leads to the thought that the one is not so different from the other. Perhaps it is the nature of humans to destroy just as nature itself destroys. The overall effect of making the Erasure series have seven works in it gives the feeling of a theme and variation. Between human destruction and natural deterioration rests Huichol Memories referring to works by Indians in Mexico. In this, one is looking at a jungle-like setting and gradually picking out animals seemingly hiding in the forest, trying to blend into their surroundings, which increases their chances of survival.

However, this raises the issue of why they need to do this. They have adapted to survive the predators, and so have the Indians.

The second part of Newmark’s display is called “Leaving Pompeii.” These pictures are also woven, but there is no longer a loom, and the material is paper. They were made before the “Erasure” pictures and are even more fragile. Lacking the loom structure makes them feel wilder and less formed. Single strands of paper trail off away from the artwork. An orderly person might want to snip off the stray ends. The pictures like the objects are in danger of destruction and the sense of evanescence is heightened by the use of paper. Pompeii was after all destroyed by hot lava that not only buried the city but also set it on fire. If one set a match to these works, they would turn to ashes in minutes. The subject matter here is houses (two of them belong to “tragic poets”), there is a library, two windows, and a garden. There is again the repeated obsession of attempting to recover something from terrible destruction, done with the realization that the attempt is partial and imperfect. Newmark began this work during Covid and it seems dominated by the fear and loneliness associated for many with the epidemic.

As we circle the gallery, the next artist is Deborah Everett. She has seven canvases all brightly colored with a painting technique that makes everything seem fluid. The effect is to create a world where there is lots of energy present and there is movement within a realm where sometimes that movement is contained in a larger structure and sometimes not. There are no humans only some flora, and there are fauna not to be found in any textbook on zoology. Here too the subject is often loss, but with a much different treatment. There is structure and there is energy, and the two interact in surprising ways.

The first painting one encounters is “Homage to Schumann.” There is a brightly colored room, each wall is vibrantly colored. In it five little houses, each having one window and little black tails, bow to the left. If this is homage, it is looking at a past accomplishment. Perhaps the ladder leads to setting the dial which has the number nine on it. Could this be Robert Schumann’s opus nine, which is Carnival, or his symphony no. 9? In any case, we are looking to the past, which is gone but nevertheless celebrating something in it. That past is contained in a room but within that structure something has been found that is good and worth remembering. This theme is picked up in the next painting, which is of a house on fire. The painting seems to be a comment on the phrase that someone is going “like a house on

fire.” The saying indicates that the person referred to has boundless energy. Fire is of course energy, but it is also destructive. In this case, a strangely calm setting, the house is being burned down. Energy can destroy structure, and there is again loss. The forces that can make for the most vibrant life can also destroy that life and leave a smoldering ruin. There is another contrast of energy and structure in “Silent March.” The march here is a parade of tombstones. They have no legs to march with, but they are set in a gray material that seems to be flowing, as though they were moving in a river. This river of the dead is contained in an elaborate colorful structure of sky, stone like structures, and landscape including vegetation. Life ends in death and passes into oblivion, but it is all framed by a structure that gives it form.

The last two paintings are different treatments of a cactus in the desert. Here the containing structure is minimal. The setting is the desert, dry and having very little life that can survive in the difficult conditions. In the first picture the cactus is a hand, and it is waving good-bye to what seem to be a set of tepees that are bowing to it, somewhat like the houses in “Homage to Schumann.” The subject is again loss but also respect for the cactus, perhaps for its ability to survive. It is indeed a beautiful but dangerous form of life, with its spines bristling with energy. In the next picture, the question of survival is raised again. Here the cactus is standing aloof on the left, and a rock like creature is off to the right. It is bowing to the cactus, but has a huge moth that looks like it could consume the cactus. In a very different different way, the painting raises a question about the natural world. Is the life force in it based on the destruction of life? Are the defenses that make for survival based on continual attacks by predators. In this case the question is raised in a bright, cheerful setting. The tone is utterly different from the one that Newmark creates.

The next artist, Nina Meledandri, is much closer to Newmark in outlook. If Everett sees a close relationship between form and subject, Meledandri creates a form that makes for obsessive practice comparable to what Newmark does, using the same form over and over to recreate what is lost and fading away. Meledandri goes to the beach every day throughout the month of June in 2022, picks up items there and brings them to her studio to make a piece of work on handmade paper about 11X11 inches. What she picks up are flowers, pieces of paper from books and newspapers, leaves, matted fur from her dog, different kinds of thread, bird feathers, images of dead birds she holds in her head, and much more. All these things are items detached from their life, from their usual

place in nature, or from their manufactured use, part of a cycle of death, removal from context, or things becoming trash after being used, in other words, another version of life coming to an end with things spared by the intervention of memory. Again the natural cycle of life and death is attached to the human cycle of manufactured goods becoming trash.

As with Newmark, the repeated return to making a work of art in the same way becomes part of a larger work of art. The particular becomes one example in the overall work. Theme and variation leads to contemplation of a whole that is larger than one work.



Meledandri dead bird

Art might be said to be a combination of hard work and inspiration. In the case of Everett, who works with bright colors, a reduced, simple design, and the use of the contrast between confinement and energy, inspiration emerges from this configuration in different and surprising ways. For Newmark and Meledandri the important thing is relentless work done with obsessive repetition so that particular encounters become an overall scheme. It seems like a lonely process. Newmark did a lot of her work when she was isolated by Covid, and Meledandri goes to the beach and returns to do her artwork no matter what. For just two days she stops, but still records those days on a white sheet with the words “travel day” and the date.

There are two different approaches shown here, both equally valid. One is like data collection, which allows for understanding of a larger insight. The other uses a set of tools and dives in. Both approaches are dealing with the strange ways that life and death are combined using the complicated processes of memory.

What an interesting exhibit that pulls one into looking carefully at individual works, but in doing so one finds all sorts of connections that lead to larger ideas.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF THE WRONGFULLY CONVICTED: GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION FIGHTS FOR JUSTICE

— Jenn Peck



Wrongly Convicted

In a nation that prides itself on justice and the rule of law, the reality of wrongful convictions continues to cast a long shadow on the legal system. The United States, with its commitment to the principle that the prosecution must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, still grapples with a disturbingly high rate of wrongful convictions. Studies suggest that between 4% and 6% of convictions each year are wrongful, resulting in an average loss of at least 10 years of life for the wrongly convicted.

The profound impact of wrongful convictions is exacerbated by a direct link to race, exposing a deeply rooted problem within America's legal infrastructure. Family and Friends of the Wrongly Convicted, Inc. (FFWC) emerged in 2013 as a grassroots organization founded by Derrick Hamilton and Sundhe Moses, two Brooklynites who fell victim to a flawed system.

Both Hamilton and Moses spent decades behind bars for crimes they did not commit, victims of systemic issues including racial profiling, corrupt law enforcement practices, unreliable eyewitness accounts, and inadequate legal defenses. Their cases were among eight believed to have been falsely framed by a NYC detective named Louis Scarcella, leading to immeasurable trauma and loss for the innocent individuals and their families.

Upon their exoneration and receipt of settlements from the state, Hamilton and Moses resolved to turn their painful experiences into a force for change. FFWC is dedicated to raising awareness about the injustices embedded in the legal system and ad-

vocating for policies and procedures that prevent future wrongful convictions. In a short period, FFWC has made significant strides, contributing to the overturning of over 10 cases. The organization has actively collaborated with community advocates, resulting in impactful legislative reforms in the criminal justice system. Notably, FFWC, alongside community activist and celebrity LaLa Anthony, celebrated a recent victory with the passing of the "Clean Slate Act," offering those formerly incarcerated a chance at a fresh start.

However, FFWC's mission extends beyond legal advocacy. The organization provides crucial services to those formerly incarcerated, addressing issues that impact successful re-entry into society. Additionally, FFWC offers support to families and friends, helping them navigate the trauma associated with wrongful convictions and providing resources for assisting their loved ones.

Family and Friends of the Wrongly Convicted, Inc. stands as a beacon of hope and change, transforming pain into purpose. As they continue their tireless efforts, FFWC exemplifies the resilience of those who have faced injustice and emerged with a commitment to heal society as a whole.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH INJUSTICE: THE TRIUMPH OF THOMAS MCGOWN

Jenn Peck



Thomas McGowan and family

As I embarked on writing an article about the Families and Friends of the Wrongfully Convicted, Inc., emotions stirred within me, bringing to the forefront a personal connection to the fight for justice. Reflecting on the profound impact of wrongful convictions, my thoughts turned to my second cousin, Thomas McGowan, who, for 23 years, faced the harsh reality of life behind bars for crimes he did not commit.

The journey began in the 1980s when, as a middle-schooler, I sat at our yellow kitchen table in Queens, NY, discussing the absurdity of the case against Thomas. Our family, confident in his innocence, couldn't fathom a conviction. One striking piece of evidence presented during the trial was a belt supposedly worn by the assailant, visibly meant for someone of substantial size. Thomas, however, was rail-thin, rendering the claim implausible.

Despite this and other inconsistencies, Thomas faced two separate trials, resulting in consecutive life sentences for burglary and sexual assault. The key piece of evidence against him was the identification made by the victim, a woman who had suffered a brutal assault.

The harsh reality of faulty eyewitness accounts came to light as we discovered that 75% of DNA exoneration cases involved such inaccuracies. The victim later admitted in court that she was pressured by law enforcement to identify Thomas, stating, "He said if I was going to say it was somebody, if I was going to say it was that picture, I had to be sure. I had to make a positive ID. I had to say yes or no."

This single identification led to 23 years of incarceration for my blood relative, during which he missed his entire youth. Tragically, both his father and my beloved grandmother, staunch advocates for his innocence, passed away during his time in prison. In 2008, a glimmer of hope emerged as former Dallas District Attorney Craig Watkins, legal scholar Barry Scheck, and The Innocence Project worked tirelessly to secure Thomas's release. DNA evidence unequivocally proved his innocence, leading to the overturning of his case and a settlement from the state of Texas.

While the exoneration brought a new sense of peace to our family, the scars of injustice run deep. Thomas, once robbed of his youth, now faces a world tainted by the fear instilled during his wrongful incarceration. Despite his laughter and travels, a residual fear lingers, restricting the joy he allows himself to experience.

Encouragingly, Thomas channels his pain into advocacy, educating others about faulty eyewitness accounts and the flaws in the justice system. Remarkably, he shares platforms with the woman whose false testimony put him behind bars, recognizing her as a victim of the same flawed structural system.

Our family, now rejoicing in having Thomas back home, stands in solidarity with The Innocence Project and other organizations fighting for equity and fairness. Thomas's story underscores the imperative to question, seek facts, and demand justice. As we forge new narratives, we remain steadfast in the belief that all individuals deserve a true due process of the law, free from doubt and prejudice.

KANE JACOB AND STAY DRIVEN

I work at the Department of Health in East New York. One of the things we do is look into health-care providers to see if their programs might be useful. Thus it came about that I attended a session of a program provided by Kane Jacob who had set up a corporation, Stay Driven LC LLC. About twelve of us assembled in a room and, in a supportive atmosphere, went through a series of steps that involved answering questions by doing things, such as looking in the mirror and reviewing incidents in our past that might have an effect on how we behave in the present. The premise is that we all have things we want to do or accomplish. What the program attempts to do is locate what stands in the way of our achieving what we want to achieve. Once the obstacle is made clear, the next step is to figure out what to do about it. Of course, delving into the past can be walking into a minefield; one has to be very careful; reliving trauma can be difficult. When I did the program with people I know and work with I found that it worked well in the sense that I felt more open by the end. I felt I could say things and listen to others in a relaxed and positive way. This was a help in getting our office to do its work, we knew each other better and this helped us to get things done. Going through this experience got me interested in knowing more about Kane Jacob and his organization, so I arranged a time to talk, and here is some of what was said.

First I asked him to introduce himself and say what his passion is.

He replied as follows:

My name is Kane Jacob, and I am 29 years old. I was born and raised in this wonderful community of Prospect Heights/ Crown Heights in Brooklyn.

My passion is that I am big on community education and helping people. I believe that my purpose is helping people in to achieve what they want to achieve. I want to continue to grow our community, especially our African-American youth.

Moya: What have you been doing to achieve that.

Kane: I am one of the co-founders of our organization named Stay Driven LC LLC, and We All We Got BK, which is our non-profit we use to raise funds. We help mentor young adults to improve their mental health and emotional intelligence. We do mindfulness train-



Kane Jacob

ing that helps them be more aware of who they are and how to accomplish what they want to accomplish.

We have realized that young people have often been through traumas or just difficult emotional experiences. These can create barriers that prevent them from finding peace and happiness and also from taking on challenges. So our program helps people understand what has happened to them and what the effects have been. The hope is this allows them to move forward in a productive way.

Moya: What sparked your interest in taking this journey?

Kane: I guess community health and mental health are issues my family have always been interested in. My mother was an educator and deeply concerned with the health of her students and how that affected their work. So I would say my work began with learning and working with her. I went to Benjamin Banneker Academy for high school and got very involved in their community service programs, doing clean up work and other things in Clinton Hill where the school is located.

Moya: What college did you go to?

Kane: I went to Morehouse College in Atlanta. My major was Political Science, and I double minored in Chinese and International Relations. I got a broader perspective through my studies, but when I graduated my focus turned back to Brooklyn, and particularly helping our young people. One of my first jobs was teaching in Brownsville and I saw how being concerned with the whole student could have an impact. I found that a teacher can really do more than just teach a subject, but can help the student to grow. I realized that that effect could be achieved on a larger scale and that is what led me to create the Life Courses of Stay Driven and also We All We Got BK.

I later found out that the company was formed in 2019 by three men – EPIC, Shareef Abdul and Kane

Jacob. These three are the ones who conduct the Stay Driven courses in a variety of ways putting together small groups of five to ten people and continuing the course for different amounts of time, sometimes just once, maybe for a week or a month. They might do this in schools or in some setting outside of schools. Everyone has a story, the purpose of this organization is to have young people write their own stories, to be the authors of their own lives and not to be a minor character in someone else's tale.

There is a Stay Driven website where one can see a video and also purchase merchandise – t-shirts, hoodies, caps and more.

I was glad to have had this talk with Kane, and I thanked him for doing the work he does.

— Moya Dewar

PROFILE OF PETER ANEKWE

Peter Anekwe is someone who has spent most of his adult life in prison. He served twenty-five years incarcerated for robbery. Part of the reason for the lengthy sentence was no doubt that he had had other run-ins with the law and must have given the appearance of a career criminal. Yet, now Peter seems like anything but a hardened offender; he is trying to find ways to give back to society, and assimilate himself back into civilian life. He is well-spoken and writes clearly, judging from his emails. He is active in his Block Association (which is how we met), as well as in community events. He has taken a deep interest in areas of law: specifically in criminal justice and the penal system as well as civil law. He got out of prison this past February; he was jailed in 1998.

Peter was born in early 1964 in Brooklyn. His father Simon Anekwe had come on his own to the U.S. from Nigeria to be a journalist. An older sister was born in Nigeria in 1959, and right after that his mother came with her to Brooklyn. The family lived in various places in Crown Heights and finally bought a house on Hampton Place in 1969. However, the family returned to Nigeria where Peter spent his early childhood. The only language he knew was Ibo. He was the only boy among three sisters. One of them, Cecilia Anekwe, became a lawyer and eventually a judge. Being the only son played a large role in Peter's life.

His father was a sought after journalist, offered positions at the Washington Post and Time Magazine, but he decided to write for the Amsterdam News. The house on Hampton Place became the center of family life, and that is where Peter lived.



Peter and DeVorce

He had to learn English when he came to the U.S.; he did this by watching TV and paying attention in school. He attended schools in the neighborhood. When he was fifteen and going to LaSalle Academy High School, an event occurred that changed his life. His father was attacked and robbed in the Ralph Avenue train station. He was badly injured and taken to the hospital. The result for Peter was an explosion of anger and cynicism. These feelings led him into criminal behavior. Soon he was arrested for a robbery

committed with someone older than him, in which the victim exonerated him of anything to do with the crime. The district attorney, in order to get an admission of guilt, offered him a deal in which he would confess but would be charged as a youthful offender. This would mean he would be put on probation and the felony would never be used against him in any manner. Peter's father encouraged him to accept the deal, under the understanding that the conviction would not have any effect on his son in his later years; Peter agreed. However, when the case came up for sentencing, Peter was not treated as a youthful offender, the trio of lawyers (the judge, assistant district attorney and his lawyer) conspired not to give him the youthful offender adjudication as promised because his father did not come to court. Thus he was put on probation, but more importantly a felony that would affect him, had been put on his record.

Peter continued to commit crimes. For a time, he and two other individuals lived in an apartment where they paid rent out of the money they got from their activities. Peter had broken off with his family. He served a sentence of one and a half years in a prison in Queens for a conviction. After that, he was convicted again, and sentenced to a long sentence. He did not get out until 1995. During this period of incarceration, as the seeds of interest in law started to take root, he became acquainted with the case of John Williams. John Williams, while on parole, had committed an armed robbery with his little brother. Wishing to protect his brother from as much punishment as he could, he took full responsibility for the gun and had his brother's case severed from his, so that his criminal past would not tarnish his brother's chance of leniency. John went to trial and won, on the gun charge -- which he severed from the robbery -- and subsequently on the robbery charge. On the day of his not guilty verdict on the robbery, the ADA informed the Court that he had another indictment of John Williams. The prosecutor subsequently took this case to trial; it looked eerily like the case he had just lost. This time though, Williams was found guilty and sentenced. When he was five years into his sentence a sergeant in the prison told him he was about to be released. He thought this was some kind of cruel joke and berated the sergeant. The sergeant found this to be rather odd behavior for someone who should be elated to be going home and started doing some digging. What the sergeant found out was shocking to not only him but also to John. The docket number of the case he had been tried and convicted for was his brother's. Docket numbers of a case are a means of tracing a case to its origin. Consequently, he was not released, and what followed was tragic. Williams got married while he was in prison and was allowed conjugal visits. At the time he got married no one in NY State DOCS (now DOCCS) could get married if they had HIV. He subsequently and mysteriously contracted HIV and eventually died of AIDS. However, his wife did not get ill or carry the virus. The question of how Williams got HIV has never been answered.



Peter Anekwe

Peter got out of prison in 1995 and eventually got implicated in a crime that netted him a long sentence in 1998. Being highly literate and intelligent, Peter immediately started to go to the law library in his prison. Most of the time he was incarcerated in Green Haven Correctional Facility in Dutchess County. He also spent time at Downstate Correctional Facility during his processing into State custody, but in addition, prior to being sent to Green Haven he also spent time in Attica and Upstate Correctional Facilities, near the Canadian border. Immersing himself in the law library he had a great revelation. He found out about all the rights people have according to the legal system of the United States. Gradually, a kind of seminar began to emerge in the library. A group of prisoners joined Peter, studied the law, and came up with ideas for filing various motions to get themselves or other prisoners out of prison. In studying law and the details of cases that had led others to prison, Peter made many discoveries.

He found out about a man named Lamont DeVorce; a man twice sentenced for the same crime and therefore given twice the amount of time. In this case Peter intervened, obtaining a modification of the sentence imposed to half the term, but the damage was already done. Mr. DeVorce who should have only had to serve 12 1/2 years as his minimum before seeing the parole board had served 23 years. Thus, upon receiving the modification of the maximum portion of his sentence from 50 years to 25, he had only approximately 18 months remaining to serve on parole and complete the entirety of the sentence. The two are very close; Peter regards him as a brother and he has visited Peter from where he lives down south.

Peter has filed post-conviction motions on his own case to no avail. Currently he has several pending lawsuits at different stages against the Department of Corrections.

At the moment Peter is working on the case of Lionel Sampson, a man convicted of committing murder in the course of a robbery. It is Peter's contention that the man should have been given one sentence for what he did. The judge gave him 25 years for murder and another 15 for the robbery coming to a total of 40 years – this was a mistake. Peter hopes that Sampson's sentence will be modified now as he has already served 27 years; which more than covers the murder charge. His hope is for an immediate release. He is now searching for a lawyer to look into the matter.

Peter was married for awhile, but it did not last; however, he says he and his former wife are friendly. They did not have children. He is a man who mostly eats a healthy diet, and tries to stay fit with a regular regimen of exercise. He looks in excellent shape for a man who had titanium rods put in his back due to a terrible car accident prior to his incarceration. He is now looking for work. An ideal position would be one as a legal aide of some kind or a position with a social justice organization. Peter has studied law for many years and learned a lot. He currently has an Associate Degree in Business Administration and is striving to finish his Bachelors, for which he only needs 9 credits. He plans get them during the spring semester. When individuals such as Peter, who have been away for so long, come back into our communities looking to help make a change and have a positive impact, we need to welcome them home.

GOOGLE COMES TO SOULBK

I have been interested in the activities of Kevin Walters for some time. First, I think he was a leader in the idea of uniting the merchants of Nostrand Avenue to help themselves and also make the community a better place. Second, I am impressed by his resilience. He had the misfortune to found Nostrand Social at just the wrong time. He started the restaurant and ran smack into Covid and with all the difficulty of starting a new business he was faced with dealing with an epidemic that was sickening his staff and his clientele, and his business went under. However, he very quickly came back with a group of partners and a more ambitious plan. SoulBK was to be a successful restaurant and also a model for a franchise. A Brooklyn soul restaurant was to be reproducible all across the US and even abroad. Kevin had fallen off a horse. The usual advice is to right away get back on. Kevin did that one better; he got back on with a team of four horses and a wagon. I am filled with admiration, and I have become a spectator, and not an objective one; I can't help cheering him on.

So it was when I found out about a big event he was having, I very much wanted to come. The event was an evening for Black employees of Google. Google has had a large and growing presence in New York. Over twenty years they have grown to about 12,000 employees spread around six different buildings, five besides the main one on 8th Avenue between 15th and 16th Streets. Of these employees approximately 1,200 are Black. During Covid, Google mostly moved to doing remote work. Of course it had its advantages, but it did not help joining workers together in a team. Now they have returned to three days a week in the office and two remote. However, with workers only coming in part-time and being distributed over a number of locations, it is still hard to bring them together with a unified sense of mission. One way of dealing with this is to encourage net-working within the company. Thus it happened that a

man named Roy, who is in sales, was put in charge of helping Google employees to get to know each other so they would work together better.

Roy has set up all kinds of events, but in this case he wanted to bring together the Black people who work for Google in a setting that would be enjoyable with food, drink, music and dancing involved. He chose Brooklyn because many people from Brooklyn work for Google and most of Google's events have taken place in Manhattan. He liked Kevin's place because it is Black owned, has a great record with events, it is an interesting space with two floors, and Kevin has established a growing presence in the music world, bringing in all kinds of talent to his restaurant.

The event was scheduled for 7-11pm and with the idea that there would be a limit of 200 guests. I arrived a bit after 7 and things were getting started. I checked my jacket and noticed there was a band present though they had not begun to perform. Roy Bennett is the leader and he humbly has named the group Just Another Band. He plays bass guitar, Debbie Kagyan was on guitar, Evan Ballard on keyboard, and Jay Francis on drums. They supported the singer Lea Soul and later on she was joined unexpectedly by Tay.



Lea Soul

As I was looking around I came upon the event photographer, a slim, attractive man named Q. As the event went on he became not just a recorder of the event, but a participant and someone who made things happen. Not only did he take pictures, he danced, he drew people out, he interacted with lots of different people who were there.



Q photographer

The main room of the restaurant had been completely cleared of tables, so the only places to sit were benches on one wall and the bar on the other. Right from the start the bar was packed; having an open bar had its effect. Some people stood while others settled on the benches as soon as they had drinks. Almost immediately waiters began passing around the food. There were six items and I only managed to try two of them – the Deviled Egg with Grilled Chicken Toast and the Chicken with Peppers and Onions skewers. Both were really tasty. I also noticed that the trays that went around were emptied very rapidly. I several times missed out on something. A waitress said she would get more for me, but when she returned the tray was emptied again just before she reached me. She smiled helplessly, and I got the message – “What can I do?”

With persistence I secured a drink; the bartender told me most people were drinking a spiked punch, vodka and rum were the usual additions. With my drink I settled on a bench and met Raven, she works in Manhattan as an account manager and lives in Bed-Stuy. She knew about the event from an e-mail and was hoping some of her friends would show up, but she had made no arrangement to meet them. She was not worried about staying up late as she would be working from home the next day. She seemed the kind of person the event was made for, and soon she did see someone she knew and joined the social whirl.



Raven

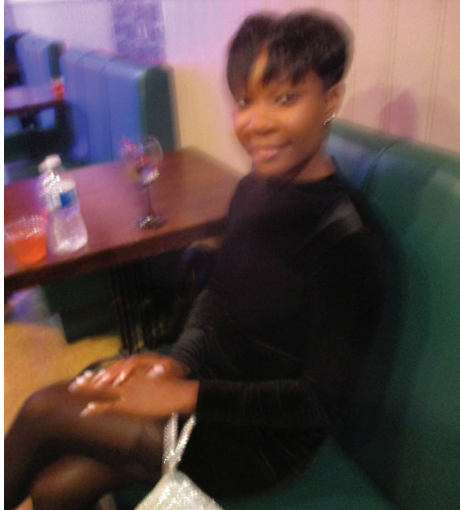
Another Googler I met was Omar, a family man with two children who lives in Westchester. He said he had just heard from his wife that the children were asleep and he said he would not be able to stay until 11pm as he had to catch a train back home. He allowed with a smile that he had a curfew. He said that he knew a lot of people, and soon one came up to him and pulled him into a series of fist bumps and hugs.



Omar

Meanwhile the band had gotten going first with Lea, but suddenly Tay came on wearing a baseball cap that read “No Holds.” At first Lea seemed upset about this, but soon the two of them were singing together and they got a line dance going with maybe eight women doing the Electric Shuffle. Leading all the dancing was a woman dressed in red and black, the red including very high heeled boots. She danced by herself, danced with Tay, danced with the line of people, danced with Q, singing along with whatever song was being performed.

At this point I met Boris, who lives in Harlem and told me he knows a lot of people and there was ample proof of this as the evening went on. He was everywhere with his distinctive black and white striped sweater. Going from one group to another, one person to another, dancing, drinking and talking. Tay really got the dancing and singing going with the song, "Tell me what you want, tell me what you need." Suddenly, there was Boris, dancing with the woman in red and black.



Anna

I then decided to see how things were going downstairs where the DJ, R.H. Tate was providing the music. The music was very loud and the room was packed. It took five minutes to get a place at the bar, and I had to shout several times to put in an order. The bartender was producing drinks at an amazing rate, and remembered my order even though there were six others to do before it. My profuse thanks were lost in the noise, but she gave me a lovely smile. Not being able to talk to anyone I soon returned upstairs and there met Anna, a programmer and editor who lives in West New York across the Hudson. We shouted at each other; however, I could understand little of what she said. Soon she was off to socialize, drink and dance.

Feeling at this point, that verbal communication was no longer possible and also that my old man's bed time of 10pm was past, I got my coat from the coat check, not easy as people were still arriving and the coat check was packed with garments even though there was another coat check downstairs. As I left I passed more people arriving. It occurred to me that there was no way this event would be over by 11pm. It was a fabulous party, and my guess is that lots of people met each other, felt convivial from the drinks, and if they exchanged contact information, might well meet at another time. As far as I could tell, no one was drunk, the animated shouted conversations gave no evidence of that. What one saw was a very large number of people (I would say more than 200 with the coming and going) having a great time, getting to know each other with smiles, nodding and gestures of greeting and affection. Kevin, their host, had delivered everything Roy could have hoped for and more.

(I apologize for the poor quality of the pictures in this article. My poor old camera could not deal with the lighting.)

— John DeWind

UPDATE ON HELPING SOUTH BROOKLYN SDA CHURCH GET SUPPORT FOR ITS PROGRAM TO HELP FORMER PRISONERS STAYING IN THE BEDFORD ARMORY

In the last issue of Crown Heights Community News, I wrote about a meeting that I hoped would take place that would include Pastor Williamson of South Brooklyn SDA Church and three people who are officers of Community Board 8. They are Mark Thurton, who is chair of Public Safety, Tamika Gibbs, who is chair of Health and Human Services as well Michelle George who is District Manager. I wanted them to get together to talk about supporting the program the church runs for newly released prisoners at Bedford Armory. They are there to have their needs assessed over a period of thirty days before they are sent on to other places. I gave Michelle contact information for Pastor Williamson at the recent Community Board meeting. I also gave Tamika and another committee member copies of the last issue of the newsletter in which there is an article about this situation on page 14. Unfortunately Mark Thurton was not at that meeting. I will make every

effort to see to it that he gets the same information. Next issue I am hoping I will have a happy sequel to this story.

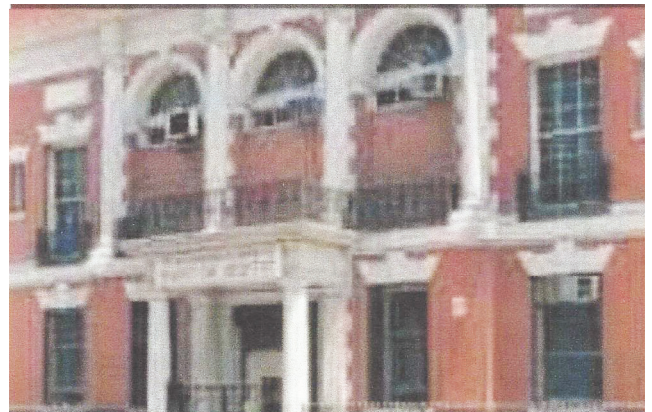


Photo of the Church

— John DeWind