

I REMEMBER TRIBECA

(after Joe Brainard)

I remember silent streets embellished with tiny pockets of noise and light, moussaka on Fridays at the Square Diner, *Barnabas Rex* on Duane where the tough girls elbowed their way to the pool table. Later the tiny bar became a lawyers' office.

I remember a lawyer for whom I wrote the advertising tagline, *From Attica to Tribeca*, reflecting his Braveheart youth fighting for the underclass, before turning his focus to the ruling class.

I remember the row of wooden phone booths inside the Western Union lobby, no ID required to enter the building back then, before the FBI moved in on the top floor.

I remember doing demolition in many enormous interiors, like Nine Worth, where several teams of irate artists, working for minimal wages, stripped cork and concrete from ancient built-in freezers, sanded nail-studded floors with machines rented from the eccentric Mr. Zelf in Soho, whose paramour Chickadee handled the cash deposits.

I remember my artist friend Wayne Miller pulling up the leg of his dungarees to show me how the sandblaster had blown the hair off his calves along with the lead paint from the walls.

I remember during my bourbon period the Liquor Store was a liquor store, run by two diminutive brothers, who kept a big Alsatian dog behind the counter. It became a travel agency run by local hero Chuck Harris god rest his soul, who then converted it into an excellent neighborhood bar, the Liquor Store. After I quit drinking it became a haberdashery and is now once more a clothing store. Also called The Liquor Store.

I remember a slender Gerard Depardieu filming *Byebye Monkey*, directed by Marco Ferreri, not the auteur's best work, but the movie has wonderful scenes of the low slung town, circa 1977, Washington Market, filled with eggs and cheese of all nations, English cheddar four dollars a pound.

I remember passing by the Towers Cafeteria on West Broadway one afternoon in 1980, and there were the two McNally brothers, polishing mirrors and light fixtures, getting ready to open a restaurant. I suggested a deli would be more useful. Brian laughed, Keith rolled his eyes.

I remember the budding entrepreneurs who invented *Area*, a supercool nightclub in the former American Express building, Hudson and Hubert. *Area's* landlord kept a strange menagerie upstairs, including, allegedly, a Siberian wolf that freely roamed the rooftops.

I remember walking my daughter Nell to PS 234 every day, along North Moore and down Greenwich, hoping to catch a glimpse of Yaffa, her first fashion inspiration, teetering on platform heels in her café at 8.15 in the morning.

I remember my neighbor Ulla, a long-legged German girl who daily rode everywhere on her bicycle looking so Euro-sumptuous. By night she ran the *Blue Angel*, a rather louche dive on Walker Street, just around the corner from *The Baby Doll Lounge* on White.

I remember Betsy Sussler making *Bomb* Magazine on Franklin, and across the street Jill Hoffman promoting poetry with *Mudfish*. Both of them are still thriving, so maybe it's not true that there is "no money in poetry /and no poetry in money."

I remember Jamie Nares' wrecking ball swinging from the bridge in the alley between Jay and Harrison. He made a film of it in 1976, entitled *Pendulum*. The Met owns a copy now.

I remember the Mudd Club at 77 White Street, Jungle Red's legendary *Night School*, a Betsey Johnson fashion show, using as runway the top of the bar. I even persuaded William Burroughs to read there, on a double bill with John Giorno. A neat little plaque marks the spot, but fails to evoke the wonder of the place, filled to the brim with sexed-up, wildly creative lunatics. Burroughs lived at 77 Franklin Street in the early '70s. To this day I rub the doorknob when I pass, usually on my way to the Greek cobbler on the next block, who occasionally sews the bindings on my homemade books.

I remember Bubby's on Hudson before el jefe Ron Silver conquered Japan. The apple pie remains an exquisite expression of American ingenuity.

I remember Il Mattone's Italian comfort food on long winter nights, and Grandaisy's semolina bread for mopping up the red sauce.

I remember chicken bones littering the sidewalk at the corner of Duane, endangering the neighborhood dogs. Developers kicked out the chicken man and the dog shop, Dudley's Paw. The building may soon follow.

I remember the poet on Duane Street whose boyfriend was instructed to enter her loft by the fire escape, wearing a mask.

I remember Vornado Realty squeezing out Best Market, the only competition to Whole Foods.

I remember walking down Broadway by the dawn's early light, the Woolworth building's spire always a friendly beacon at the far end of the avenue. And my sense of outrage when some architect with a degree in grandiosity erected an adjacent building that blocked the Woolworth's sunset views of Jersey.

I remember looking out my rear window as a fiberglass swimming pool was lowered onto the roof of the building that had recently obliterated my southern vista, knowing in my heart I would never swim there.

I remember this and so much more...

- Max Blagg, Tribeca December 2019