

## MY STORY

Fox Street was like a lot of other streets in the Bronx. The apartment houses dated from just after the turn of the twentieth century. They were five and six story, red brick walk-ups, except for mine. I lived in the only elevator house in the neighborhood. And it was constructed of white brick. And it had a courtyard with grass and bushes. And it was built the same year that I was born, 1927.

I loved my apartment house and I loved my neighborhood. I lived there from 1933 to 1957. True, they were the only apartment house and neighborhood I knew as a kid, but I couldn't imagine that there could be any place nicer. I was born around the corner and a few blocks down, on Beck Street, but I don't remember our apartment. My mother told me it had four rooms, and lots of sun, and my mother and father moved there from Harlem where they also had a lovely apartment. Right after World War I, the Bronx was the place to be.

My mother and father married in 1916. They both were living on the lower east side of Manhattan at the time. After my mother died, I went through her papers, and learned that she had been living on Allen Street and my father lived on Eldridge Street. Those houses were built in the 1880s and 1890s. They weren't called apartment houses; they were called tenements.

I am sure that when they were built, they were just fine. They must have been a lot better than the places the people who had just come from Europe, had lived in. I think my mother told me that her house in Vaslui had a dirt floor. One advantage of a dirt floor is that you don't have to take your shoes off when you come in. And you don't have to wash the floor.

The tenements that my folks lived in, before they married, were called "cold water flats." A flat is another word for apartment, and they were called cold water flats because they did not have hot water. Also, they did not have a toilet in the apartment. There was one toilet to the floor, and it was in the hall. I still have not visited the tenement museum, but when I was a little boy, I went with my mother to see an old friend of hers who still lived in the old neighborhood, and saw for myself. It was dark, it smelled, it was small, it had a bathtub in the kitchen, which was covered, and the toilet was at the end of the floor.

I have been writing my story in an organized way since I retired in 1997. I was 70, and decided I was going to describe my life from as far back as I could remember, and tell whatever I could about my parents, and when I completed writing my story, I would have it published. A couple years after I retired, I discovered a class, which was part of the Brookline Adult Education program, called "Telling Your Story" and it has kept me writing. The instructor keeps telling us that each of us is unique, there is no one else like us, and therefore our story is unique.

I know that I am unique, that I am the only one with my story, but there must be millions of people with similar stories. If they did not live on Fox Street, then they lived on Beck

Street, or Kelly Street. If they did not live in the Bronx, then they lived in Brooklyn or Manhattan. If they weren't born in the 1920s, they were born in some decade before or after. If their parents didn't come from Eastern Europe, they could have come from Western or Southern Europe. If they weren't Jewish, then they were Catholic or Protestant. However, if they weren't born in the Bronx in the 20s, and didn't have parents from Eastern Europe, and weren't Jewish, their story would certainly be different from mine. And I realize that even if they were, their stories would also be different.

I mentioned that I have been writing in an organized way since 1997. The truth is that I have been writing my story sporadically since I was a kid. I would keep a diary, usually a cheap pad, and describe what I did. Rereading it years later, I was amazed at how boring and pedestrian my entries were. Still, I kept on keeping on. From cheap pads to steno books, to typing at my desk at work. I described what I did, what I thought, even what I ate. I had no idea what I would do with it. At some point I started calling it a journal rather than a diary.

Getting back to Fox Street: I remember thinking that there are more people on three Fox Street blocks than in many small towns across America. I would multiply the number of apartments on a floor with the number of floors in each apartment house and multiply that by the number of houses on a block, assuming an average of three people to an apartment, and that was low. Here we go: five apartments to a floor times six equals 30 apartments, times six apartment houses on each side of the street (12), times three people equals 1080. Three blocks: more than 3,000.