

At today's (Jan 19<sup>th</sup>) meeting the assignment was to "tell a brief story about a place significant to your life, how that place impacted your life, and whether that place still has significance in your life".

Here is my response.

The most significant place I can think of is 1775 East 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn, NY where I spent the first 20 years of my life. I lived there with my father, mother, and sister. The apartment was located over a grocery store and my father would often say that it was "close to the food". What he didn't mention was that the apartment also came with cockroaches. As a teenager when I came home in the evening my job was to throw on the kitchen lights, run in and kill as many cockroaches as I could. They run very fast.

Once we had an attempted break-in, so my father rigged up two metal clamps on either ends of the door. Every night my job was to insert a steel rod between the two clamps so that the door couldn't be breached. My father slept with a Nazi sword by his bed, one he had brought home during his service in WWII.

My bedroom was at the end of the apartment with two walls to the outside and a non-working radiator. In the winter I could lie in bed and see my breath. In the morning I would wake up, grab my clothes and run into the kitchen. There I could hold my clothes over the gas stove so they would warm up before I put them on.

Since my mother couldn't walk, she had MS, my father rigged up a chair and some ropes so if there was a fire we could presumably lower her down to the street two floors below. There were no fire escapes so I am not sure what the plan was for us getting out. For years I had a recurring dream of hanging out my bedroom window and dropping to the ground.

The apartment below us was occupied by a family of alcoholics, so one could never be sure of safely getting to our apartment without an encounter. The two flights of stairs were dark and creepy, and of course I was too embarrassed to bring friends home.

On a lighter side, my father's job was to repair TVs, so at any given time we might two or three stacked up in our living room. At least one would be working.

All of this is many years ago. My father tried his best to take care of my mother and raise two children, all of which he did. I am grateful to have gotten through it.

Ellis Jan 2021