

Spring 2019

Worth Writing! Worth Reading Edition V (Spring 2019)

New York Law School

Worth Writing! Worth Reading!

EDITION V (SPRING 2019)

An alternative Spring Break...with the NYLS Asylum Clinic!

By: Claire R. Thomas
Adjunct Professor

The Asylum Clinic is a year-long, direct-services clinic representing adults and children fleeing persecution and seeking safety in the United States.

I direct our Asylum Clinic at the Law School and teach introductory immigration law classes. Our clients come from countries including Russia, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Senegal, Cuba, Honduras, Indonesia, Tibet, and Guyana. Most are applying for asylum, which is a form of humanitarian immigration protection for persons who are unable to return to their home countries because they have been persecuted or fear persecution. Many of our clients are part of the LGBTQ community and have been harmed on account of their sexual orientation. Others have been maltreated due to political affiliation or being part of a disfavored religious group. All simply want a chance at living a life with dignity and basic safety.

This academic year, the Asylum Clinic has seven students who are committed to advocating for their clients. Students are 2Ls, 3Ls, as well as evening students in their 3L and 4L year who have flexible work schedules. Three are immigrants themselves; three are first generation Americans. They speak Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, and Italian.

In addition to representing our clinic clients in their asylum cases, we travel on a monthly basis uptown to John Jay College of Criminal Justice to provide legal immigration screenings for John Jay students and their families.



This map hangs on a wall in my office. The pins depict the countries our clients come from.

During the fall semester, we traveled to Albany to volunteer at the Albany County Correctional Facility to prepare asylum-seekers, detained and flown by U.S. immigration authorities from the southern border to Albany, for their "credible fear interviews," the first step in the immigration process towards applying for asylum.

For Spring Break, we decided as a group to volunteer helping asylum seekers.

The students chose Tijuana, Mexico, as the preferred destination and I reached out to non-profit organizations in Tijuana and Southern California to see where we could be of assistance. From March 10th to 15th, five students and I volunteered with *Al Otro Lado*, a bi-national direct services organization serving indigent deportees, migrants, and asylum-seekers. We accomplished what we wanted to- to bear witness to this horrific human rights and due process tragedy occurring at the U.S./Mexico border and to assist as many individuals as we possibly could.

While everyone has the right to seek asylum under both U.S. domestic and international law, people simply cannot access this right along the southern border.

In the mornings, we walked about 10 minutes to Garita El Chaparral, the border crossing between Mexico and the United States. There, we walked around the plaza speaking to individuals from all continents who were waiting for their chance to seek safety in the United States and asked them if they would like to come to *Al Otro Lado's* clinic to meet with lawyers and doctors.

We quickly found that people who do not speak Spanish are even more vulnerable.

I spent a lot of time talking with French-speakers (some Haitian, Congolese, West African) and trying to earn their trust.

Nearly 100% of the non-Spanish speakers have been robbed/assaulted numerous times on their journeys through Mexico/Central America and are very much afraid of violence in Tijuana.



When we returned to Al Otro Lado's office every afternoon, student Amín Fernández (3L) and another volunteer led "Know Your Rights" workshops in Spanish. I lead the French workshops. After the workshops, the students met with asylum-seekers for individual consultations. They talked to individuals about their situation, assessed for any particular vulnerabilities, and then prepared the individuals to be their own advocates in telling their stories to U.S. immigration authorities. The other immigration attorneys and I served as supervisors, coming around to double check, to answer questions, and to make sure that everyone was prepared.

In addition to legal screenings, Crystal Giron (2L) took the lead in preparing peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, so that the 40 to 60 men, women, and children who came to Al Otro Lado's offices each afternoon had something to eat. Trisha Sobha (3L) quickly became the lead volunteer for "documentation" which was a process of digitizing asylum-seekers' documents. Every asylum-seeker would then get an individual pin number and access code to access their documents, which was extremely important as items get lost, stolen, or destroyed during the waiting time in Tijuana.

After meeting a woman and her three children who had nothing but the clothes on their backs and no place to sleep for the evening, Barbie Melendez (4LE) took the time to find the family a shelter for the night, as well as secured a car for them to get to the shelter safely.

One morning, we were invited to travel to a local LGBTQ shelter to provide a Know Your Rights workshop and legal consultations.

Amín and Crystal led the workshop, and afterwards the students started meeting one-on-one with the shelter's residents.

We quickly discovered that many of the residents had actually been kidnapped and tortured in Tijuana or other parts of Mexico, and were simply afraid to go outside of the shelter.

Olivia Kaplan (3LE) exhibited an enormous amount of empathy in interacting with the shelter's residents and earning their trust. Around 5 or 6 PM, we finished for the evening. It was then time for dinner and our group debrief in the hotel. We were all in bed, exhausted, by 9 PM. The students are still processing our time in Tijuana volunteering with Al Otro Lado, as am I.

On April 11th we hosted a Border Rights Project presentation/discussion of our thoughts for the NYLS community in the early evening to accommodate the evening students.



Left to Right: Olivia Kaplan, Crystal Giron, Trisha Sobha, me, Barbie Melendez, Amín Fernández

I am immensely proud of Amín Fernandez, Barbie Melendez, Crystal Giron, Olivia Kaplan, and Trisha Sobha for jumping in, taking on leadership roles, and for treating each and every asylum-seeker they encountered with an enormous amount of empathy and compassion.

A Musical Oasis with the Young New Yorkers' Chorus Women's Ensemble!

By: Caitlin McGuire
Administrative Director of Clinic Programs

Every Wednesday night (minus summers) for the past three and a half years, I've hopped on the subway after 6pm and headed uptown for practices with the Women's Ensemble of the Young New Yorkers' Chorus. The Young New Yorkers' Chorus is a post-collegiate community choir for New Yorkers in their 20s and 30s. At first I headed up to a professional practice space near Penn Station, then a church on the Upper East Side, and now another church in Chelsea. But at every one of these locations, I've been able to walk in, sit down, and think of nothing else but singing for the next two hours. The group has been a welcome respite from the day-to-day hustle and bustle of New York City, but has also been an opportunity to perform challenging music.

I've been singing for over twenty years at this point in some fashion. It began in elementary school when I marched up to our music teacher and demanded a solo in the upcoming Christmas concert (I was a pushy kid). Throughout my school career, I was in every vocal music endeavor my schools could offer. I was in chorus classes, after-school choirs, church choir, all-county choirs, and even studied with private voice teachers. As a high school student, I even had the great opportunity to sing Mozart's

Requiem at Carnegie Hall (to which I credit my ability to navigate the backstage during NYLS commencement last year!) In college, my focus on vocal music took a back seat to my studies, nevertheless, I participated in a group called "Boston University (BU) Off Broadway", a volunteer group that sang at homeless shelters and nursing homes.



The Young New Yorkers Chorus Women's Ensemble

My first years out of college, I had no participation in vocal music, and I very much missed it. Upon moving to New York, I was discouraged by how "professional" so many of the opportunities to perform were. It seemed even karaoke singers went to music school!



NYNC with The New Amsterdam Singers, West Point Glee Club, and the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony at Carnegie Hall

One night, I did a quick Google search for "New York City Amateur Chorus" and it led me to the Young New Yorker's Chorus! The name seemed vaguely familiar, and after reading their website, I realized that I had heard of them listening to an episode of the radio program RadioLab, where the choir's voices were used to illustrate the colors of the visual spectrum. I was interested, and thankfully, their website showed that they had auditions coming up.

I was nervous to audition. It had been several years since I had read music and sang (and if I'm being honest, I've never really mastered it successfully). But when I arrived, everyone I encountered was so kind and friendly so I decided that I would audition for the Women's Ensemble. Being new to New York, I was looking to make friends of a similar age. A couple of days later, I got an email: I was in!

Since then, I've been able to have some incredible experiences with the choir. I've gotten to sing Beethoven at Carnegie Hall, record backup vocals on an album, perform live on WQXR (New York Public Radio's classical music station), and premier

countless new compositions. I even got to sing to in a follow up to the RadioLab episode where I first heard of the group!

But beyond just the interesting opportunities the group has given me, it's

also a terrific community of women who are caring friends.



Costume Contest during a rehearsal on Halloween

We have social events to get to know each other, and it's a close community who looks out for one another. But it's also a community that cares about the world around us: at the past two concerts, we've had toiletry and clothing drives to benefit homeless shelters.

Being able to sing every week is an incredibly meaningful experience and I'm grateful that I get the opportunity to participate. The benefits go beyond just the ability to create beautiful music (although that's great too!) I think that the practice of reading music each week helps me to keep my brain active, especially when it's usually so easy to go home and zone out in front of the TV!

Singing requires stamina and focus. You have to activate your



Rehearsal at Pearl Studios

whole body to sing and also pay attention to oh, a million different things in the music. Choral singing requires you to read your own notes, the dynamics (how loud or soft you're supposed to sing), count how long each note is supposed to be, and listen to the other voice parts as well! It definitely requires an ability to multitask.



Backstage at the Jerome L. Greene Space

But the feeling when it finally locks in, when you're in perfect unity with the voices around you, and the sound is completely full and soars to the ceiling truly cannot be beat. It's hard to compare the feeling of being so completely in concert with the people around you. And

the routine of heading uptown every Wednesday, and being able to focus entirely on music, is unparalleled. For two hours, I don't have to think about anything but making music, and that is an experience that I'm profoundly grateful for. Goethe once wrote that "A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine

picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul." Thankfully, I live in a city where I have the opportunity to experience a sense of the beautiful every day. And thankfully, I have a community in YNYC that allows me to shake off my "worldly cares" and create something beautiful every week.

ABOUT OUR NEWSLETTER

Worth Writing! Worth Reading! Is written by the staff for the staff. It is about you, about us, who we are as a community and what makes us special and unique as individuals.

We encourage each and every one of you to submit your ideas, thoughts, opinions, accomplishments and stories that you would like to share with your colleagues and we promise to review them.

We are solely contribution driven, in other words, if you write, we can keep publishing. This is a safe, non-judgmental space that we hope will encourage you to write honestly, create freely and give voice to those from whom we have yet to hear. So please send your submissions, however long or short, we place no limit on freedom of expression~!
Email: worthreading@nyls.edu

Either write something worth reading
or do something worth writing.

- Benjamin Franklin

A Look at the Life behind a Familiar Face

He is one of the humblest, kindest people I have ever met...and his name is Mario David.

Interviewed & Written by:
Sarah A. Mowry
*Office of Facilities
Management*

I have known Mario since the first day I started working here. We began roughly around the same time, so between us we have racked up over 50 years at this institution and are the longest serving members in this department. When I asked if he would consent to an interview I thought he might decline because as long as I have known him he has always been shy, quiet and unassuming but like many people who masquerade great strength, character and will behind a calm exterior Mario is a remarkable individual with a remarkable story.



Mario in the Events Center

African slaves on the island of St. Vincent. Over time they migrated to Central America and settled along the crystal waters of the Caribbean coastline where they survived by fishing, building canoes and growing cassava, but like many indigenous communities who are displaced and dispersed they retained their cultural identity by holding onto the beliefs and customs of their ancestors and honoring the ceremonies passed down from generation to generation. Ask Mario and he will tell you, the Garifuna are strong, self-sufficient and loyal to one another and deeply committed to preserving their own language, music, dances and celebrations.

Mario was born in a traditional mud hut built by hand using wild cane, palm leaves and successive layers of baked mud. He remembers fondly each time a new hut was built, the telltale beat of

the drums to summon the villagers to work as the women began singing and dancing while they prepared meals for the men laboring in the hot sun. He recalls with a smile the simple diet of fresh fish, cassava roots, dried in the sun then sifted into flatbread, green banana mashed with coconut milk, but like so many people who are born into a community that combines a simple, idyllic paradise with the stark reality of poverty he left behind everything he knew at age 14 and moved to the closet town, La Ceiba, in search of work.



A traditional Garifuna hut made of sugar cane sticks and mud, with no running water or electricity.

La Ceiba, the third largest city in Honduras and a major port marks the beginnings of Mario's journey away from his ancestral home. For the next couple of years, he tended to the gardens and pools of affluent families who provided him with a small, modest room and a salary of \$2/month, but the lure of earning more money prompted him to travel to San Pedro Sula, a city now reputed to be the "murder capital of the world" due to its poverty stricken, gang controlled culture. There he received a letter that changed his life, an opportunity to work on a cruise ship and seek a better life on foreign shores. Life at that point opened up for Mario who at age 20 now had the opportunity to indulge his passion for travel, interact with people from other countries and showcase his skills aboard the ship in the kitchen.



Mario's birthplace, Corozal, Honduras

To understand Mario one must understand his journey that began in Corozal, a tiny coastal village in his native Honduras and home to the Garifuna community whose colorful history has its roots during the colonial period when the Carib population mingled with escaped

By age 21 he had travelled all over the Caribbean, to Bermuda, Miami and finally to New York, the city that gave him the life he has but almost claimed it too.



Mario working for the cruise line

The move to New York happened partly by accident when he failed to report back to the ship one night, a decision which immediately jeopardized his job with the cruise line and all but guaranteed a one-way ticket back to Honduras. He chose instead to part ways with his employer and start a new life in New York. New to the city and craving direction he sought the company and support of fellow immigrants in a place called Happy Land, a mecca and stronghold for the Garifuna community living in New York City.



Mario shortly before he left his job with the cruise line

He soon found work in a factory packing boxes before moving onto maintenance work at Kennedy Airport followed by a stint working for a small cleaning company which prompted him to

apply for a job with Harvard Maintenance and that is how his path intersected with the Law School when he landed the position of night supervisor in 1990. Impressed by his diligence and commitment to his work, he was offered the chance to switch to the day shift where he remains to this day.

Today Mario is the proud father of four children and ten grandchildren who are the living reminder of how much he has accomplished, how far he has come and the dedication, resolve and faith that made it happen but rather than give himself the credit he is quick to point out that the inspiration for everything he does comes from his strong relationship with his church. One of the most striking things, if not the most laudable is his unshakeable faith in the future and ability to accept life as it happens without misgivings or doubt. He readily admits he was not always this sure of himself or the world around him but that all changed the day he accompanied a cousin to a church service. He liked what he heard and kept going back.

Mario's journey is one of enviable success and poignant example; for not only has he built a home for his mother back home complete with indoor plumbing and modern conveniences but he continues to care for and contribute to the welfare of the larger Garifuna community still living in Honduras. Every time he travels home he brings school supplies, clothes and other basic amenities from the US to the villages around La Ceiba. It is a fact he is excited and anxious to share about himself because it is one of the ways he has chosen to honor the Garifuna tradition of

passing along the baton of hope and inspiration by helping to provide a better life for one's nuclear and extended family. It is this he tells me that he is most proud of; his humble beginnings and the difficult journey that he chose to make to provide a better life for the generation before him and the two successive generations that have followed him.



Mario with his grandson, Omari

Interesting facts about the Garifuna...

The Garifuna have their own language (Garinagu).

There are approximately 200,000 Garifuna living in New York City,

The Garifuna culture is kept alive through music and dance. The most famous of these, the "punta" is an African courtship dance.

The Garifuna Coalition USA, through its headquarters in the South Bronx advocates for and protects the rights of Garifuna immigrants.

Prof. Santangelo was always a troublemaker!

By: Prof. Anne Marie Santangelo
Adjunct Faculty

Don't just learn about the law ...change it! We can all be an instrument of change for the better. We just have to start somewhere...



Graduation- Brooklyn College- 1969

I am not sure just exactly when I realized that but probably a long time ago. I grew up in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn and attended the public schools there. In junior high school I opined that girls should be permitted to wear pants to school, especially on very cold winter days. In fact, I did that to my peril...one frigid winter day consequences, of course, letter home to parents and stripped of my Arista (Honor Society) pin, but I certainly felt warmer and proud of myself. Why not? I thought. That spunk, if you want to call it that, followed me and again every time it popped up and encouraged me to take action I was proud. We should all be.

After graduation from Bushwick High School I attended Brooklyn College, graduating in 1969. Although I was a full time student I always worked part time. My parents were factory workers,

financially solvent but not much extra money at home. College was a dream for me. I needed to be self-sufficient and to help out at home if I could. Toward the end of my college career I worked on Wall Street before technology or automation as it was called then. My older brother was the cashier, back office day to day money manager, for a major Wall Street brokerage firm. He taught me all of the back office operations and I would travel to Manhattan every day after my college classes to help balance the trades in the back office, paper flying around the room, runners yelling about their last or next delivery, adding machines roaring away and at the end of each day all of the "houses" had to be balanced to the penny or we did not go home. It was awesome and terrifying at the same time. I loved it.

When I received my bachelor's degree I thought for sure I would remain on Wall Street. But I didn't.



Teaching during the 1970's

I received an employment offer but it was substantially less than the financial offer for high school

graduate males who did not have my experience. I said "no." My dream was to teach and go to law school and leave money making for another time or maybe never.

Money was not the issue. It never has been for me.



Attending Law School- 1970's

I started teaching in the New York City public school system, junior high school level. I taught in a low income area of Brooklyn and every day felt like a crusade. The students were poor, needy and challenging but always fun to be around. I felt drawn to them and appreciated every day, but law school kept gnawing at me. I decided to apply to evening division law school and was thrilled when St. John's accepted me. It was four years of teaching by day and law school by night.

It was a blur, but I can remember being so happy to be there, I would pinch myself. I made it to law school and I was thrilled. My evening class was comprised of 100 men and 10 women. It felt as though we had been carefully chosen to fit in and for four years I guess we did. It was important for us to do that.

Graduation from law school found me in another male dominated area of the law – criminal justice – my passion at the time, but totally male dominated. I worked for the New York State Parole Board and visited many correctional facilities in New York State and throughout the country. I was almost always asked if I was a secretary or a clerk and called “little lady” an infuriating number of times. Yes, I am short but not the point!

Upon leaving the Parole Board I was asked to join the staff of a New York State Senator who chaired the Crime and Corrections Committee in the Senate. Another dream job for me. It is said “two things you never want to see being made are sausage and legislation” and I can tell you from first-hand experience that is definitely true! When my boss got promoted to the Banking Committee I started to look for issues that were more me. There was a Senate Minority Task Force on missing children that needed help moving program bills through the state legislature. Again a challenge but a cause worth fighting for. I helped craft an amendment to the New York State Education Law to make it safer for children to be picked up from school. Many missing children cases are really custodial interference matters I learned and if a law could help clarify those matters and keep children safer then I had to be a part of the fight for it – politics aside!

In 1987 I left crime for grime, if you will. New York City Sanitation was looking for an attorney with legislative experience and I was looking for a job that kept me off the New York State Thruway.

I interviewed with the then Deputy Commissioner for Legal Affairs who offered –

“you teach us about legislation and we will teach you about garbage.”



Working at the Sanitation Department

It was a great offer and a great match. Being at Sanitation also gave me the opportunity to meet Ernest Hart, now a Supreme Court Justice in Queens County. He was the agency Employment Counsel for Sanitation and an adjunct professor at New York Law School (NYLS). In 1991 he asked me if I would be interested in talking to the Writing Program at NYLS about designing a course in Drafting Legislation. Wow! The rest as they say “is history.”

I have been an adjunct faculty member at NYLS since 1992 and have taught a number of courses in the Writing Program and now Upper Level Writing Program.

Don’t just study the law – change it. My students make me proud. Their success is my success. Their change for the better is my continuing change for the better. Just last week a student called to thank me for supervising her independent study project and tell me that she “landed her dream job with one of the nation’s top law firms” – my dream continues to come true.

Have You Ever Wondered How to Take the Perfect Picture...?

By: Rich Valdez
Office of Information Technology

You’re walking down the street, and notice a particularly interesting flower growing along the sidewalk. Taking your phone out, you snap a picture and continue on your way. Later on while reviewing the image you realize that what you captured is not the picture you envisioned. The flower is there, but it just doesn’t look special. This scenario has happened to just about everyone.

Not too many years ago, you needed expensive equipment - cameras, lenses, and lighting, to be able to capture a quality picture. These days we all have mobile devices with very capable cameras in our pockets. A \$5000 camera is capable of capturing a much higher quality image than a \$500 phone, however the difference between an ok picture and a good picture more often comes down to the image composition. While you can point and shoot at anything, by following some basic guidelines, anyone can improve their photography skills. These are some of the basics.

The Rule of Thirds

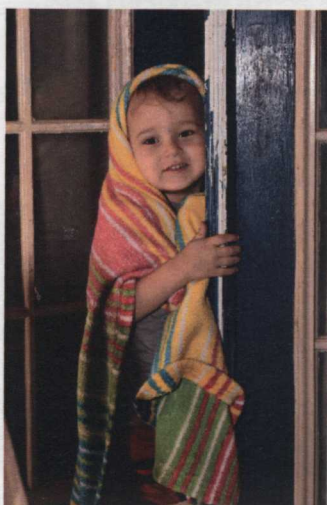


The Rule of Thirds concept is based upon the observed behavior of the human eye. When we look

at an image, our eyes tend to focus specific areas. If you divide a picture into thirds as though a tic-tac-toe grid is over it, you have 4 points where the lines intersect. These locations are where the eye will naturally fall. The lines themselves also are helpful as position locations of your subject. Think of the horizon in a beach scene, or a person in the foreground. Positioning either of these to adhere to the rule of thirds concept will create a more interesting and visually balanced image.

Lighting

In my personal experience, nothing is more critical than proper lighting. This doesn't mean that every shot has to have a brightly lit subject, but it does mean that you need to be aware of where your subject is in relation to your primary light source.



For example, let's say that it's a bright and sunny afternoon and you're out taking pictures of friends. If you position the sun directly behind you, your subjects may be brightly lit, but also probably squinting. Position the sun behind them and you end up with faces in shadow (unless using a fill flash, or alternate light reflecting source). Bright midday

sun also tends to wash out the colors, as well as creates minimal shadows, creating less depth.

For outdoor photography, the best time to go out is the Golden Hour. This is the hour after sunrise and the hour before sunset. The sun is lower in the sky creating a warmer richer tone, as well as casting much more interesting shadows.



For interior shots you'll need to use a flash at some point. The challenge there is controlling the amount of light projected onto your subject. Most external units incorporate hinges so that you can angle the flash upwards or reversed and bounce the light off the ceiling, creating a uniform lighting effect. You can also use a diffuser over the flash to disperse the light. Even a piece of white napkin taped over the emitter will make a difference.

Composition

When taking the time to compose a picture you want to examine everything in your field of view. Your focus in you primary subject, but what's behind them? Is there a tree limb that looks like it's sticking out of their head? Are

you zoomed in too close and cutting off the middle of an arm? Too far out and losing structure? Be mindful of everything in the field of view. When in doubt it's better to be too far away than to close. An image can always be cropped later on.

Know your equipment and read the manual

This may seem obvious, but it is probably the most important factor overall. Learn what the different controls do. Aperture priority, shutter priority, custom scenes, and the dreaded full manual mode. Experiment with the settings; learn their relationships to one another. Get out and just take pictures. Before digital became widespread it was an expensive and time consuming process just to get a roll of 36 exposures processed and printed. Now you can take hundreds and see them immediately, figure out what you'd like to capture, and adjust accordingly. There are numerous software packages available that provide the ability to tweak and transform the original images from simple pictures to works of art.

Having said all of that, there is one more thing. Some rules are meant to be broken. Being creative with your project can result in striking results. Not every picture is going to be perfect, but with a little forethought and knowledge, you can take your abilities to the next level. Just get out and take pictures!



Meeting Keith Haring briefly in his studio!

December 1980

Still in December probably, I go into the subway (the F train at 6th Avenue and 41st Street) one day and see for the first time an empty black palate which has been put there to cover an old advertisement. I saw this empty black panel, and immediately I knew that I had to draw on top of this panel. It was a waiting perfect surface. The paper they use to cover it is a soft matt black paper. If they had used shiny paper none of this would ever have happened. But they had this soft matt surface that was dying to get drawn on. I immediately knew that I had to go above ground and buy chalk.

Haring, from interviews by John Green

By: George H. Hayes
Vice President for Institutional
Projects Management

Like many New Yorkers I first glanced the work of Keith Haring by chance on the black panels where normally there may have appeared advertisements for some personal hygiene product which we were told would make you feel so wonderfully fresh and clean or an alcoholic drink which would soothe your nervous disposition. It was the New York City of the 1980's: dirty, loud, and violently edgy. A place which you loved and hated at the same time.

One afternoon when riding the IRT 7th Avenue express train it came to a screeching halt outside a local

station. Looking through a door glass panel which was uncovered by graffiti, I spied a guy with chalk who was drawing on one of the black covered panels at the local platform.

He feverishly drew unusual figures. Hieroglyphics I first thought, until I stared at the drawing and noticed it actually contained a one-frame message or whimsical drawing. The drawing often contained a dog or a baby as a signature mark. At one point the train jerked wildly before moving on. So he is the guy doing those drawings I thought.

Another day I entered a subway station and I saw that same guy on his knees, again with chalk in his

hand as he moved it across the black canvas. He had covered about a third of the panel with figures and other shapes. Very unlike me, but very New York in attitude, I exclaimed, "Oh, you're the guy who is behind these drawings!" He self-consciously turned to stare at me and in a soft voice asked if I was a cop, to which I replied, "No." "Oh, ok," he said and then continued drawing.

He then asked if I liked his work? I replied, "Yes, I always hear people on the subways talking about your drawings." At that point he turned and looked at me straight in the eyes and with that action it seemed as though time had stopped. It was not the type of stare one would witness between two men who were about to engage in a verbal or physical altercation. Instead, his eyes gazed at me in a softer manner, unlike the sort of look a guy would give another. He then said, "I'm glad you like it." Just then, time resumed as I could feel the breeze, hear the roar, and see the train as it entered the station.

I bid him goodbye, and hopped on just as the doors were about to close. The yell of the conductor announcing the next stop and the noise of the train restored the typical soundtrack in place of what had been a quiet moment in an otherwise noisy metropolis. I turned to look back and saw him standing near his latest to be subway masterpiece, and looking toward me. We were still connected, eyes to eyes. But he was on the platform, and I on the train as it jerked and then slowly departed the station permanently severing that respite in time.

**Keith Haring at work
in the NYC subways, circa 1981**



It's ALL About Facilities!

What the hell is a PA~ and why should I care anyway?

By: Sarah A. Mowry
Office of Maintenance/ Operations

A PA, short for Place of Assembly is a certificate of operation required by the Department of Buildings (DOB) and Fire Department (FDNY) before a large group of people (75+ indoors and 200+ outdoors) can legally gather in a public space. So- this includes theatres, museums, sports arenas, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, places of worship and schools, which is why some of our spaces here, such as the Events Center, Auditorium, Student Cafeteria and larger classrooms (W300, W301, W400 and W401) all require a PA.

NYC Buildings



PLACE OF ASSEMBLY CERTIFICATE OF OPERATION

Certificate Number: 104636075 Borough: MANHATTAN
Premises Address: 185 WEST END AVE Block/Lot: 176 / 1B
Issued On: 05/07/2013 BIN: 1001967
Related NB/A1 Job No: 104324820

Name of Establishment: NYLS-BANQUET ROOM N-201/N-202

Floors: 002	Occupancy Classification and Description:	Number of Persons
A-3	LECTURE HALL / CLASSROOM Not a cabaret	326
A-3	BANQUET ROOM Not a cabaret	306
A-3	MEETING BALL Not a cabaret	129

This certificate authorizes occupancy of the premises as a place of assembly for one year after its issuance, and thereafter, only for periods of time during which there is in effect a New York City Fire Department place of assembly permit, unless suspended, revoked, or expiring. This certificate is subject to the strict observance of the laws, rules and regulations enacted for the protection of the public in such places of assembly. Approved seating plans must be kept on premises at all times.

Borough Commissioner: *[Signature]* Commissioner: *[Signature]*
MUST BE POSTED CONSPICUOUSLY AT ALL TIMES

Permit of Assembly for the Events
Center- 185/2nd floor

Long before 185 existed all the PA classrooms were in 57 Worth and a couple in the 55 building. Every year the FDNY would show up to inspect so I could renew the certificate, clear any violations and

decommission all once the new campus project began. When 185 was built and the classrooms outfitted with state of the art AV equipment, lighting, new furnishings and carpet, most people assumed they were ready for use. But all the renovations and money in the world won't help because without an approved PA you can't unlock the door and use the room. By law we could not occupy any of these spaces until the DOB inspected each and approved all to confirm we met and conformed during construction to the applicable fire and building codes that regulate fire alarm, sprinkler, egress and emergency lights.

During the initial inspection DOB must verify a maximum occupancy sign is clearly posted and the set-up of furniture on the DOB approved plans matches the physical configuration in the room. Assuming that all goes okay, DOB will issue the PA and the space is open for use, but that's just the beginning. FDNY re-inspects annually to confirm ongoing compliance with existing Fire Code and DOB regulations as well as any new ones. They want to determine if there has been a physical change to the existing space (think renovation) a change in the seating plan or furnishings (as happened when we increased the number of seats in the Auditorium from 296 to 302) or the name of the establishment has changed because one or all would require an amended PA. So, in a nutshell, that's a PA, but what's so special about this one piece of paper and why should I care you may wonder~
Remember Happy Land?

Happy Land was an unlicensed, after-hours social club in the Bronx. By all accounts it was a happening place where happy people congregated on weekends. And that Saturday night was no exception. Lydia Feliciano worked the ticket booth just inside the door checking coats for \$1.50 a night, just like she did every weekend. Naturally outgoing and sociable she loved her job and loved the dancefloor. The club always drew a large crowd, for it was a bright spot in a rundown neighborhood that shone in the dark beckoning its patrons with the promise of good times and happy memories. And this takes us back to Mario David's story on page 5. Mario had happy moments every time he went to Happy Land. It was worth going back frequently despite the long subway ride to get there. On March 25, 1990, he set out with his cousin and a friend to celebrate a birthday. Their destination- Happy Land.



Mario on his way to the US

For the Central and South American immigrants who showed up every weekend, it was a crossroads between the world they left and the one they longed to

join. Now in the USA, here in New York, they could talk in their own dialect, to people they knew from back home and celebrate their culture. They felt comfortable, connected to their roots and above all else, happy. Every weekend with the music pumping and the dance floor shaking, it was where young people went to meet old friends, make new ones and have fun. It was also the location of the second biggest fire in NYC history and at that time the scene of the worst mass murder on US soil.



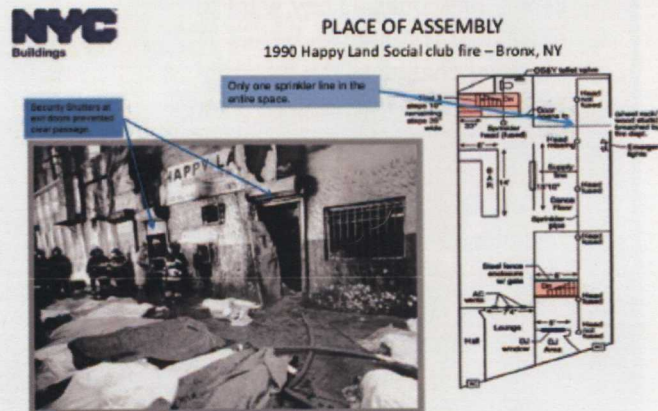
The Happy Land Social Club

The unprepossessing, dilapidated building at 1959 Southern Boulevard in the South Bronx was hardly noticeable although it had been noticed by both the DOB and FDNY during routine inspections and ordered to close for numerous fire hazards and building code violations. A fact which the owners made a deliberate and fatal choice to ignore. An inspection in November 1988 revealed there were no exit signs, no emergency lights, no interior fire alarm, no working sprinklers, no means of egress and no PA. A “peremptory order to vacate” was promptly issued and the building condemned but an unsuspecting crowd of young people, mostly Honduran immigrants, continued to show up on

weekends because rather than close its doors as ordered by the city, one remained open, the sole entrance and exit. And behind that door was the narrow, steep staircase leading up to the dancefloor.

Records indicate that the original structure had one story but by 1971 a second story had been built. The illegal add-on was a cheaply constructed space with an alarmingly low ceiling, no exit doors and one small window that couldn't be opened due to the presence of an air conditioner jammed in it. It broke every rule in the Social Club Task Force handbook which would have required a total of three exits, two of them upstairs, fire extinguishers on both floors, a liquor license and approved PA before it could legally exist as a social club.

The first floor was equally unsuitable and unsafe for gathering purposes and failed to meet the minimum standards required by law. A steel door at the back of the building had been welded shut and the only downstairs window blocked with concrete which meant there was no secondary exit and therefore no way out.



The fire exits had been blocked to prevent people from entering without paying the cover charge. In the photo that appeared a few people entered by breaking a metal gate over one door.

- This document from the DOB shows why it would have failed a PA inspection.

At the rear of the first floor was a small room with a makeshift bar, a couple of tables and broken down chairs but that was it apart from a dark and narrow hallway which led to an admission area and coat check.

It was here that Ms. Feliciano greeted the happy revelers who paid a meagre \$5 cover charge to enter the club and ascend to the second floor, smiles on their faces, purpose in their step. But with each fateful step that night, they lost the tenuous footing they had in life because moments earlier, with both floors crammed beyond capacity, a fire started at the foot of the forlorn staircase. In less than two minutes the stairs were engulfed in flames, and within seconds the fire had sucked all the oxygen out of the room on the floor above. The once vibrant dancefloor was now engulfed in thick, black smoke and became silent.

When the call came into Engine 45 in the early hours of Saturday March 25th nothing could have prepared even the most seasoned, hardened firefighters for what awaited them. This was an area blighted by crime and no stranger to arson, a count of the many vacant lots where homes once stood were a constant reminder of that. This was a community that was used to hardship and loss, but not on this scale and not to this level of depravity.

Two blocks away, a raging fire had ripped through a small, two story building full of people. Trucks and firefighters raced to the scene and extinguished the blaze within five minutes but they were too late. The heat and intensity of the flames had blasted the entrance door off its hinges and what lay behind

it was a scene of carnage so horrific and grotesque that even the strongest amongst the finest who had seen it all, or thought they had, began to cry.



The interior of Happy Land after the fire

The charred staircase was piled with the remains of 19 bodies burnt beyond recognition. Trapped then trampled they were fused together into one gigantic heap of torched humanity, their contorted limbs tangled, forever mangled in a smoldering ruin that reeked of burnt flesh and gasoline. In that moment two things became painfully clear; the extent of the slaughter and realization this was solely a recovery operation. If the scene on the staircase was unbearable, what lay upstairs was unconscionable.

The majority of victims that night were asphyxiated to death by smoke. A death so instantaneous it captured the moment their lives stopped and told the macabre tale of what they were doing as they choked to death. The club manager was at the top of the stairs, his hands around the only fire extinguisher in the premises, but before he could remove the pin he succumbed to smoke inhalation. Some patrons were seated at the bar, their

legs dangling from barstools, fingers wrapped around drinks while others held hands. Young men, pretty girls, once happy and dressed to party were slumped along the walls wearing a

collective expression of panic. The room was eerily silent and still, inhabited by 68 plastic looking, ghost like figures; their faces frozen with horror, fear and dread. It was a wax man's dream and a historian's nightmare.

There is time that belongs to everyone and no one. A universal hour when the uncertainty of night gives way to the confines of day and life continues as we know it; familiar, unremarkable but predictable. But not that night- an unknown street suddenly became remarkable and unforgettable due to the gruesome sight of shrouded bodies lined up under the steel crags of ominous grey cloud. One after the other, the corpses were placed on the frozen, cracked sidewalk. Before daybreak they had run out of body bags and it had begun to rain.



Victims placed on the sidewalk

The Red Cross scrambled in the dark and frigid temperatures to set up a makeshift body identification center across the street in Public School 57. A human train of shadowy figures quickly took shape and stretched around the block. Family members who waited anxiously and watched helplessly each time an inconsolable figure emerged from the building sobbing and screaming before collapsing into a grief stricken heap.

Most of the immigrants who frequented the club had recently arrived from Central America, excited and hopeful about a new life in the US because this was supposed to be better than what they left behind. It is the reason they made the journey in the first place. Let us not underestimate the power of the American dream, for in the eyes and heart of an immigrant it is the one constant that lives on through every generation and colors their vision of a better life. To them, the journey to get here is worth risking life and limb so deep is the belief that it will improve their lives and the lives of successive generations. But for the 87 victims, 60 widows and 106 orphans the American dream was annihilated forever when Happy Land became their eternal hell.

This was a heinous act perpetrated by an evil man with a diabolical result who himself was an immigrant having arrived in the US from Cuba during the Mariel boatlift. His name was Julio Gonzalez and his life had unraveled. Five weeks earlier, Ms. Feliciano had ended their eight-year relationship and with it the stable home life he had grown accustomed to. He treasured his role as a step

father to her children in the two-bedroom apartment they shared and decorated with saintly figurines and crucifixes. It was comfortable, but moreover it was predictable and he needed that emotional anchor, only now it was over. And she was over him. At her insistence he had moved out into a cramped, sparsely furnished room, full of misgivings and regret. One week before the tragedy he lost his job, was struggling to pay his rent and panhandling on the streets of the South Bronx, his mind churning over thoughts of her and how they might reconcile.

He showed up that night to talk and convince her to quit her job but she stood firm and staked her ground to stay put. An argument flared up and a bouncer intervened who asked him to leave. Angry and drunk he shouted at him, "I'll be back" and that he would "shut this place down", then he disappeared into the night. His life had come apart and he was down to his last dollar. All it cost was \$1 and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a gallon of gasoline. He hurled the fuel in front of the staircase, set it alight with a couple of matches and slammed shut the metal security gate to block the sole entrance and only exit. In one final act of unspeakable cruelty everyone inside was trapped, unable to escape and doomed to perish in a painful, catastrophic, senseless tragedy. No remorse, no regret, no regard for the innocent human lives trapped in a fatal web fueled by his own jealousy and rage.

The following morning Mario's phone began to ring, and everyone calling had the same question. Are you alive? Whether it was luck, or the result of a last minute decision, the three of them had decided not to go to Happy Land but remain in the club they visited earlier in the

evening. But as soon as he heard the gruesome details of what had happened a feeling of shock and horror crept through his being. These were people like him, they were his people, Garifuna celebrating Carnival. And he could have been there with them, just like one of his close friends was. A man who came from La Ceiba, just like he did. Only this man had just landed in New York that afternoon, and after depositing his suitcase in the apartment where he was staying, headed back out the door to celebrate his arrival in the US in a place he had heard about before he left Honduras. Happy Land.

Of the 87 killed, 59 were Hondurans.

That number could have been higher if Mario, his cousin and friend had stuck to their original plans.

So back to my original question, why should you care? Because a PA is about public safety, your public safety. A legally approved space is a safe space and the grant of a PA requires proper egress, the exit signs and emergency lights illuminate, the alarms sound and the sprinklers activate so that in an emergency you can get out and the fire department can get in. Fire needs three things- an accelerant, ignition and oxygen, once these combine, it becomes a fast moving, rapid race against death. Julio Gonzalez made sure of that on March 25, 1990.

29 Years later...

Within hours of starting the fire, Mr. Gonzalez was arrested in his 8x10 foot rented room. As he sat on his twin bed, a picture of Jesus Christ looming above it, he told detectives, "I killed all those people, I'm sorry". He was found guilty in Bronx County Criminal Court of 174 counts of murder in the second degree with depraved indifference to human life and carted off to the Clinton Correctional Facility near the Canadian border to serve 25 years to life. If he was indeed "sorry", he showed no remorse during his time incarcerated. He committed numerous infractions and was forced to attend anger management classes. He died of a heart attack, age 61 in September 2016.

For the Garifuna community, recovery was slow and painful. Cardinal O'Connor led a prayer vigil the following day and the bodies were moved into a hangar at Kennedy Airport. Some were in coffins but not all, some had to be piled on top of flatbed trucks. The New York National Guard organized a cargo plane to transport the corpses back to Honduras.



The hangar at Kennedy Airport where the coffins were placed before their final journey back to Honduras

With the tragedy came the realization that living in the shadows was no longer an option, they needed to be seen and heard. The Garifuna community quickly organized to advocate for their own safety. Over 20 groups sprang up to provide the families of survivors with aid and court assistance.



A memorial with the names of the 87 victims inscribed on it was built across the street from the former club.

The FDNY was deeply affected by this tragedy because it happened on the anniversary of the deadly Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire that occurred on March 25, 1911.

**HUNDRED AND FIFTY PERISH IN FACTORY FIRE;
WOMEN AND GIRLS, TRAPPED IN TEN STORY BUILDING,
LOST IN FLAMES OR HURL THEMSELVES TO DEATH**



The New York Herald covers the deadly fire- March 26, 1911

146 people, most of them women and immigrants were trapped behind locked exit doors and leapt to their deaths. It became apparent that the loss of life in this case was inevitable, and unless there were sweeping reforms, a rapid response was not going to save lives.

The city quickly reactivated the Social Club Task Force and set up MARCH (Multi Agency Response to Community Hotspots). Inspectors from the NYPD, FDNY, Dept of Buildings, Dept of Health and State Liquor Authority worked in tandem to inspect locations that posed a hazard to public safety. Bronx Community Board 6 designated March- Fire Safety and Fire Prevention month. They continue to work directly with the police and other agencies to crack down on illegal clubs.

Frank Lindsay, the Chief Inspector for Public Safety with the FDNY, who incidentally helped me for years with the PA renewals at the Law School explained at the time the challenges illegal clubs present. Basically, a restaurant during the day turns into a dancehall at night through a practice called "flipping". They "move tables, turn it into an illegal cabaret and charge at the door. These places get overcrowded and there's no sprinkler system or fire alarm like there would be in a regulated club. The exit facilities

are substandard and, without a doubt, a Happy Land situation could occur".

It is hard to forget a name like Happy Land. It is hard to erase the images of so many happy, young people who lost their lives. It is hard not to remember the smiling happy face grinning between the burnt out letters of Happy and Land on the charred sign above the door. The face I believe was symbolic. It offered hope and endurance for the survivors to rebuild their lives and community which to their credit they did.



The Happy face above the door

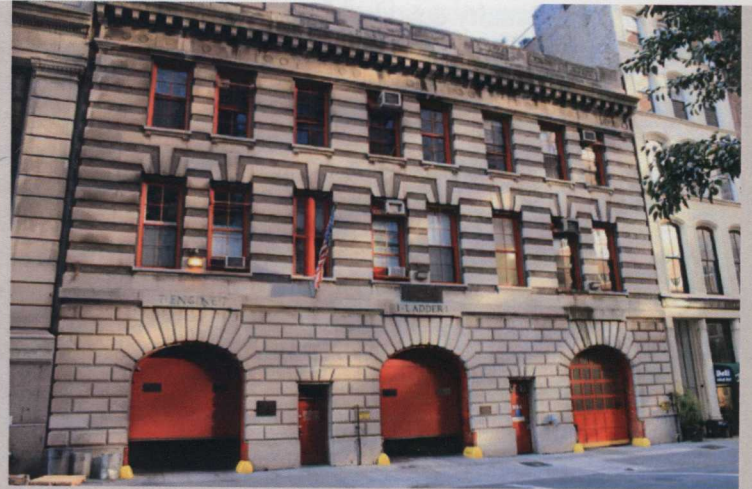
But there is perhaps another meaning that shines a subtle light on the complicated and uncertain position immigrants find themselves in once inside the US. The people who showed up at Happy Land felt welcome and they believed it was safe but was it? The happy smiling face became an unhappy reminder of the massive loss of life, the bonfire that burnt so many dreams and torched all hope of a better life as an immigrant in the United States. Behind it lay peril, and this incident apart from highlighting the bungling of a city bureaucracy illustrated a much darker problem. Most of the patrons of Happy Land were illegal, the camaraderie they felt and fears they shared are what drew them there. Happy Land had a reputation that extended far beyond US shores as being a "safe" place for them. The last thing on their minds was the illegality of the place, they were concerned with their own illegality which led them to live and socialize in the dark. What makes this so brutally sad is they believed they were safe and could not have known how much danger they were in.

A “Miracle” in Tribeca

Hook & Ladder 1

Hook and Ladder 1 was established during British rule on July 10, 1772 and staffed by volunteers. In the 1820's the foreman of the fire house, John W. Tout designed the fireman's helmet, famous for its high crown and wide brim which is still used today.

It was originally located at 22 Chambers Street, doors away from Engine Company 7. The two companies merged and moved into their current location- 100 Duane Street on New Year's Eve, 1905. The building acquired landmark status in 1993.



Hook and Ladder 1/Engine Company 7- 100 Duane St

Innovation & Change

Deputy Chief James Hefferman was a veteran fire fighter and engineer who invented a powerful, revolving nozzle capable of reaching areas that a hose or fireman couldn't access. He was in charge of Engine Company 7 and awarded the FDNY Administration Medal in 1927

With the construction of taller buildings at the turn of the century, the FDNY faced a new challenge; high rise fires. When the Lipton Tea building at Franklin & Hudson St caught fire in 1909, the FDNY tested the efficiency of designated hydrants with increased water pressure.

In 1942, the fire Commissioner declared Engine 7 the headquarters for the hose relay apparatus. This was a converted fire truck that allowed space for a larger, wider hose up to a half mile long.



One of the first motorized fire engines to replace horse drawn carriages introduced in 1917.

100+ Years Later...

The fire house that became a symbol for change and innovation is still making history. Joseph Pfeifer was Battalion Chief of Engine 7 in 2001 and the first FDNY chief to enter the World Trade Center on 9/11. Under his direction, the 55 fire fighters that rushed in that day from 100 Duane St escaped alive. Inside the FDNY community, Engine 7 is called “Miracle House”. Chief Pfeifer went on to create the FDNY Center for Terrorism and Violence. He advised first responders how to protect high rise buildings and tall structures.

Written by: Sarah A Mowry
Office of Maintenance & Operations



The helmet number identifies the station the fire fighter is based in. It also matches the number on the truck