

Photo
Simpson Street Elevated Train Station of the IRT; just at the end of my block

“Bronx Stardust”

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6,167 words and 20 original photos by the author (Many deleted for transmaission)

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After a lifetime living in so many other American cities and in foreign countries, including 20 years in Saudi Arabia, I now am able to write about the place I was born and lived for twenty one years. It is my Bronx Stardust!

"Bronx Stardust is a portrait of the culture, context, and times of the Bronx in the mid-twentieth century.

Bronx Stardust

The Bronx of the mid-twentieth century was a place and a people who enjoyed a dreamlike, romantic, and uncritical sense of well-being. We were unrealistically optimistic about everything, including our possibilities and place in the greater scheme of things".

Bronx Stardust defines the music of the period, while describing the metaphor of fantasy and dreams indicative of the period and myself. It is a song of great classes which is played in the make-believe ballroom of radio and my mind. It was the art of

sound that layered over much of the time and was the best of who we could be.

Stardust:

"Stardust" was composed and first recorded for Gennett Records by Hoagy Carmichael's band in 1927. Some critics have called "Stardust" the finest love ballad ever written, Parish's evocative lyrics, redolent of loss and nostalgia, integrated perfectly with the phrasing of Carmichael's melody. It is one of the most recorded songs of the 20th century, with over 1,800 recordings.

It's the song every righteous icon of song wanted to sing, and when it was it heard demanded a kind of reverence for its beauty. It is the Bronx I know and remember.

Bronx Stardust

The stardust that was formed in mid twentieth-century Bronx is the clouds reifying the Bronx for us to enjoy today.

As my story and my life's work is so steeped in metaphors and metaphorical thinking it seemed apt to find a metaphoric title.

"Bronx Stardust"; I like it!

The Bronx is art but never Egypt or Babylon. More Sodom and Gomorrah, filled with violence, strife, and angst but covered in God's grace and the forgiveness given to

Nineveh of Jonah's time. There is now a Stardust Ballroom in the Bronx, which harkens back to the Stardust Dance Hall featured in the Paddy Chayefsky movie "Marty." Neither of these were my inspiration but naming things Stardust does occur to other of my fellow Bronxites.

Bronx Stardust

Bronx Stardust is a portrait of the culture, context, and times of the Bronx in the mid-twentieth century, as seen through the eyes of the author and his family.

The Bronx of the mid-twentieth century was a place and a people who enjoyed a dreamlike, romantic, and uncritical sense of well-being. We were unrealistically optimistic about everything, including our possibilities and place in the greater scheme of things.

Bronx Stardust takes place in the mid-twentieth century Bronx, and it depicts the indigenous effects of lives on the place, and the place on lives, which testifies to the reputation of the Bronx. As an architect I believe every site has its specific characteristic and a nature peculiar to it only, waiting to be awakened and discovered. It is through these tales about family, recreation, jobs, works, schooling career building, family ambulating, traveling, etc. that the twentieth-century Bronx is reified and exhumed.

Bronx Stardust

The diversity of neighborhood's unbridled and chaotic social structure is reflected in such neighborhoods as South Bronx, Hunts Point, Washington Heights, Riverdale, etc.

It finds expression in the "Gilded Age" (Mark Twain) between 1937 and 1958 when I entered Pratt and married Dorothy. It is well before I was called, and was just "me" alone without a shepherd, lost in the wilderness... but I did not want a quick fix. I was like all of us – a God-created person, heading for heaven, determined to go before the judgment seat of Christ and live eternally in the lake of fire. So was my life ruled and guided. I was in the stardust of the melody, mesmerized by my context and its challenges.

Bronx Stardust

Like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Bronx is synonymous with evil, death, and destruction; the Bronx is a place which is outside what many consider righteous and acceptable. A place with diverse and complex demographics: Black or African American – 36%; Puerto Rican – 24%; Dominican Republic – 10%; West Indian (excluding Hispanic groups) – 8%; other Hispanic or Latino – 8%; Italian – 6%; Jamaican – 5%; Irish – 4%; Sub-Saharan African – 3%; Mexican – 3%; African –

2%; Central American: – 2%; South American – 2%; German and many others – 1%.

It's a place where the median household income is two thirds the national average (\$27,611 Bronx vs \$41,994 United States of America), yet its population increases by about 2.3% annually.

Bronx Stardust

The focus of this story is the South Bronx area, which comprises five community districts in the southwestern portion of the borough (also the county) of the Bronx in New York City. In 2000 its population was 522,412, about 40% of the population of the Bronx.

Bronx Stardust

The number of people with incomes below the 1989 poverty datum level in Bronx County is almost 20% higher than the number in New York City, and about three times that in New York State and the United States.

The Black and Hispanic populations both nucleated to the South Bronx in the forties and continue to dominate the area. This has churned disputes for “turf,” and been the cause a good percent of the violence and “gang wars” (Fort Apache and West Side Story) in the area.

This is the Bronx, my family, friends, and our context before drugs, including marijuana, recreational sex and a general moral collapse infiltrated the Bronx and the rest of the United States of America.

Bronx Stardust

It was before the popularity and acceptance of single-parent children, OPEC, electronics, high-tech and jet planes. It was before the era of supermarkets, corporate control, Japanese hi-fi and cars, commercial globalization, and before illegal immigration became an acceptable practice. It was the Bronx before the Vietnam War, computers, color TV and the international media explosion. Before digital electronics, suburburbia, rock-and-roll, go-go girls, miniskirts, night-lit cities, fax machines, cell phones, walkman, boom-boxes, microwave ovens, the space program, TV dinners, OPEC, and AIDS. It was during the cold war, the Mafia, and the development of an endless supply of energy and a national network of highways. It was a very different Bronx to the one we see today. It was before speed and rapid change; before morals collapsed and the population increased exponentially. Cities

and villages were still indigenous, and communal places and small business and entrepreneurship flourished.

Bronx Stardust

I was 4 years old when we moved here and 9 when we left to live on Simpson St.

“Bronx Stardust”

The median income for a household in the borough is \$27,611, and the median income for a family is \$30,682. Males have a median income of \$31,178, versus \$29,429 for females. The per-capita income for the borough is \$13,959; 30.7% of the population and 28.0% of families live below the poverty datum line. Of the total population, 41.5% under the age of 18, and 21.3% of those 65 and older live below the poverty datum line.

Milty and Barie in front of 980 Simpson St. was Milty's building.

Despite the stereotype that the Bronx is a typical, poor urban area of New York City, it is not necessarily true of the entire borough, or even the majority of it.

Bronx Stardust

The Bronx has much affordable housing (compared to most of the rest of the New York metropolitan area, as well as upscale neighborhoods like Riverdale, Throgs Neck and Country Club).

The Bronx underwent rapid growth after World War I. Many immigrants, notably the Irish, settled here. Author Willa Cather, Pierre Lorillard who made a fortune on tobacco sales, and inventor Jordan Mott were famous for settling the land. After the war, thousands of immigrants flooded the Bronx. French, German, and Polish immigrants crowded into the city and changed it forever. However, from 1950 to the present, the Bronx has lost a small percentage of its population.

In the prohibition days, bootleggers and gangs ran rampant in the Bronx. Mostly Polish and Italian immigrants smuggled in the illegal whiskey. By 1926, the Bronx was notorious for its high crime rate and its many speakeasies.

Mayor Jimmy Walker stated: ``The Manhattan Polak is very different from the Bronx Polak. The Manhattan Polak would smuggle in the illegal whiskey secretly so as the cops aren't on 'em or don't see 'em a mile away. In the Bronx, the Polaks don't give a

lick if they are spotted with it. They'd pull out their guns as quick as lightning and the cops would be dead men in less than a second. After the 1930s, the Polish immigrant population in the Bronx decreased as a result of better living conditions in other states. The German population followed suit in the 1940s, as did many Italians in the 1950s, leaving a thriving Hispanic and African-American population, which would continue to live and dominate in the Bronx to this day.

Bronx Stardust

The South Bronx growth rate between 1990 and 2000 of 11.8% is slightly higher than that of Bronx County (10.7%) and the City (9.4%), and double that of New York State (5.5%).

Population sectors within the South Bronx changed in size in different ways between 1990 and 2000: the Black population declined by 3.5%, while the Hispanic population increased by 18.8%.

The Bronx is a metaphor for the underdog of our times and represents a place full of potential it has yet to achieve, yet which has all the ingredients to succeed. Indeed, it is a place where a renaissance can take place. The renaissance is in its population, who, like myself, let God intervene, lift, and set on a high place.

Bronx Stardust

As Jesus did to Legion, God rebuked evil, sat him down, dressed him, and gave him a voice. This is my prayer for the Bronx and its population. Look what the Lord has done in my life: he has healed and delivered me. This is my praise.

He touched my body, he touched my soul; he changed my mind. This can happen to someone in the Bronx, and the Bronx can rise and find its cultural power.

I am everything I am because God has faith in me; He stood by me when I had no love and no chance. This is the story of Barry in the Bronx. This is the story of pain and God's deliverance in a place and time where faith and life was dark and bleak. It is a story about Bronx Stardust.

Fort Apache Precinct Station #14: Simpson Street

Bronx Stardust

Aside from the instinct to exhume the metaphors of a valuable, worthwhile place and time, I was saddened and angered at the ways our twenty-first century habitations and ways of life are being churned out. I know there was another time and place where people, places, music, entertainment, education, and neighbors had value and importance. It was long before I was called and a saved soul but the context and environment were alive with potential and authenticity. It was a time of Bronx Stardust.

It had hope and heart.

My present anomie includes recalling the past where I can write this work; an experience, which revealed a chain of anomie I had held in the past. A past which held delight, passion, and images.

So, I bring the past to the present through the eyes of a current anomie, where I interrupt the present to enter the past; where I break the standards and values now in place for those of another time.

With each and all anomes of the past, I mourn and can bridge the present by reifying the moments of the past.

It seems a delight and, at times, relieves a stress, which I uncover in the past. I can also add information and offer a mature perspective on the past through past emotion, feelings and perceptions, with the advantage of setting each in the context of a lifetime of anomie, experiences, and adventures. It is the ultimate metaphoric experience, where I talk about the past in terms of the present, and then compare what was familiar in the past with what is happening in the present.

Bronx Stardust

There were so many traumas and unexpected interruptions, like the time the boys hammered my foot with a stick and broke it.

In such moments there are contexts, people, relationships, experiences, accomplishments, arts, yearnings, and a family I know, because I remember and write about them. They come alive now through mature eyes as I recall them in this anomie, and not the anomie in which the dissolution of standards and values has occurred. Most of the anomes are not stressful; they are joyful, and ones in which I even had a role in ending. Yet I do regret their passing, and see the world in their images: the farewell to school friends as they moved to other neighborhoods; leaving New Haven

for Puerto Rico; leaving Arlene for an education; leaving Junior High for High School; leaving Faile for Simpson; and leaving Simpson for Holland Avenue.

Bronx Stardust

For me these anomies occurred in contexts, in recreation, music, and radio programs, movies, places, times, and fashions.

It is with an anomic sense of alienation and passion that I reconnect to this time and place, bringing the past into the present and relating to it as the present.

It is my way of aggressively dealing with the stress and disorientation of the past anomi.

James Osterbeck said the sense are the doorway into an event of the past and often it is not the five senses but the pain or joys that recall the event.

This work provides me with a medium to relive, vent and relieve the stress of anomie.

Success brought me a miraculous anomie in Saudi Arabia.

So, I asked myself, what enabled me to succeed on a mission, which no one else was able to?

Many had tried and failed.

Bronx Stardust

God made the way, but who was this instrument God chose to use for this particular work? And did I walk on God's path, as Ezekiel did?

It seems that answering this question might be of interest; and worth revealing for observation and analysis.

To do this well I'd have to surrender and reveal many things, which may have been obscured by time and circumstance.

Realizing that God uses sinners and ordinary people, I just had to reveal who it is God chose to encourage others.

Who is Barie? And where did he come from? Like the Jewish Dutch boys with whom I visited Arles to find the secrets of what made Van Gogh's work so important, the answer was Van Gogh and not Arles.

Bronx Stardust

But it was Arles where all of what he did played out. Just as Israel, Galilee and Jerusalem are where Christ lived. Knowing the context helps us understand the person and his accomplishments.

My "big" question has always been: Why are things the way they are? How do buildings, streets, and interiors get to be the way they are? What makes the world? How is it decided? How is it formed? Once I knew, I asked what it meant to me.

What have I been able to do with this knowledge?

The knowledge led to ability.

Like Daniel and Joseph I have contributed to shaping things; not just knowing. God brought me to serve the corporate giants, the decision-makers, and the leaders of kingdoms and great fortunes.

Bronx Stardust

In the Bronx, the answer I sought as a child came while I was researching housing for a book I wrote about Leipzig. As I read the research, many of the observations and hardships I had suffered on Simpson Street became clear. The tenement has become a symbol of my youth and the context of my urban identity.

The tenement prototype was actually developed in France, Germany, and England, and was later exported to the USA.

The “Hof” was the name of its prototype in Leipzig, Berlin, and Dresden. Its application to the USA had some very serious and significant differences. The ones in Europe were through-units from the street front to the rear Hof.

Bronx Stardust

The Hof, the backyard, was, and is today, common and accessible to all and is not used as a throughway for outsiders.

It is private and well guarded by residents who use and view it. The buildings were doomed to become slums when they were made subject to both rent control and absent owners. These owners finally traded the buildings beyond their value and potential return so that eventually the tax burden outpaced the income revenue by far, and ultimately the sales price. I know this because Dorothy’s father and Jose Fernandez shared these facts with me about buildings they owned.

Indeed, my visits to so many cities have answered the curiosity of little Barry. My design studies and works have added to this knowledge, and together helped me understand how the grid and its utilities were laid, and then buildings formed to house “the people” in a country/urban setting. That is today; to have all the amenities of the country, while living in the city. Wow, was that a failure!

Bronx Stardust

The Loews Paradise Theatre on the Grand Course

Converting “they” to “me” the person

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. – Matt. v. 6.

Who are they? Trades, professionals, ranks, citizens of countries, nationalities, etc.

We group people together and identify them as “they.” Husbands, wives, spouses, children, and animals all become “they,” and are soon cast into our file of nameless beings as a unit in a vast group of units too numerous for us to identify or recollect. In the face of our age’s acceleration of population, and the speed with which the individual is depersonalized into bodies, groups, armies, nations, bands, tribes and “theys,” it is necessary to convert oneself from that anonymous, insignificant and trivial status to the personal being seen and known by God.

Bronx Stardust

The person who beats and throbs within each mind and spirit. It is in confrontation to, and contrast with, that this work strives to exhume from the many “theys.”

Barie became the individual which, in fact, he really is. Not a they but a persona with a unique and peculiar combination of experiences and accomplishments. This

combination and its manifestations are what set each of us apart from the “they” society wishes to mould us into, and the “no-they” of the God-created persons we really are.

Yet, it is this very “they” which is so convenient, and needed in one context, which becomes a detriment to our very soul; it blurs the detail and specificity of relationships, contexts and memories of our senses, feeling and motivations, which are consumed in the urge to shelve collections into categories and blurred perceptions.

Bronx Stardust

If I could walk back down the streets from which I came, and give each person I met a copy of my book, perhaps this might encourage them about what lies ahead about the potential and possibilities. I would give out the books in candy stores, groceries, libraries, public, and high schools. I’m afraid I’d make some people angry, but there might be some who would find a beautiful hope for tomorrow in what was given to them from the past; people who walked the same streets, and then some. I can only remember how encouraging it was when Jan Murray spoke at our Junior Hugh graduation.

We saw him frequently on TV and were thrilled when he appeared at our graduation as a former student, and told us about his experiences in our neighborhood. As I grew up, I met so many people who told me they had changed their names. It was common practice amongst immigrants and their children.

Later, after knowing so many such people from Shore Haven and the stage shows, as Maitre'd in the Catskills I got to personally spend time with entertainers who came to our hotel. It was one of my duties to feed them and help them logistically. They were so funny and friendly; we had great times.

It begins in my parents' domain, and changes in 1958 when, at 21, I left and began a marriage and my freshman year at Pratt. It is a precious period in America's and the world's history. It's worth comparing my life to this history. It is a grand conclusion to a hurried struggle that compares with Samson at Lehi, when he recovered strength enough to topple the temple. Yet it was not celebrated by anyone in my family nor by my friends.

Bronx Stardust

Yogi Gupta advised about conditions outside of my own behavior and beyond my control that affected my life. A single person may be able to navigate, overcome, survive, negotiate, find opportunities, and maximize the use of resources made available but he or she cannot change the circumstances and earn more or do more than contained in the context. "You can't get water out of stone." Yet there are some that do by changing the circumstances. However, the conditions of my context and my activities reflect my character and personality, as well as my capabilities and capacity.

Bronx Stardust

For starters, before I was born the stock market crashed in 1929, and with it most of the Western world's economies. Many who thought they could change circumstances were reminded that they too were human and subject to the whims of evil. They risked and lost. I was born eight years later, in the last quarter of the Thirties, while the market was still down. Since the people of that era lived from hand to mouth from the wages they earned doing odd jobs, the Depression was simply part of their way of life. They suffered the loss of the joys of childhood and affluence that we have come to expect today. My parents grew up in this environment, and were conditioned by these circumstances. Considering our own lives, we can imagine the circumstances of others to compare their success with our own. The lessons we wish to apply to ourselves is found in the "life," as a guide to matching similarities with our own major characteristics, circumstances, and contexts. Once matched, we can then look for the details and examples of the variations of the life that may shed light on our own.

Home Street

Bronx Stardust

The elusive Horoscopes, and their deceptive predictions, is such an example where one can find life based on a birth time, and then see the details of behaviors related to the profiles constructed for that life. I have little faith in such devices but have followed the lives of some of my seniors for what I might learn to light my way. Perhaps I should have rather sought wealth. This, at least, was the conclusion Gerald Popiel made of his own life.

Similarly, for race, religion, nationality, vocation, profession and the matrix of combinations, including gender, age, period, time, similar economic, social and

political times. All of these make us jump to conclusions and seek comparisons, analogies, and models. I certainly did.

The Thirties were the decade that bore the brunt of the Great Depression, and which greatly shaped the context and attitudes of my parents toward their own lives. The Empire State Building was built between 1930 and 1931, and the Chrysler Building was built in 1930. Both these buildings seemed ancient and eternal by the time I knew they existed. They and my parents grew before I was born and were there for me to know and understand. It humbled me. They were so huge, and I was little and weak. My father was working as a cook in a luncheonette; at least that is what is written on my birth certificate; and my mother had a variety of jobs as a seamstress.

Bronx Stardust

It was also the decade of the dust bowl, southern plains, mobsters, gangsters, and boxing. The radio was gaining in popularity and putting vaudeville out of business. It was the day of the tough guy, and boxers and gangsters were heroes. We'd listen to the boxing matches and radio plays about gangsters and detectives on the radio. My father was raised in Harlem, and it was transitioning into a tough and poor man's ghetto.

The cars were rectangular and box-shaped, with outside running boards and exterior rumble seats. They were styled to fly and reflected the aerodynamic curves of speed

and raciness, which later became known under the insignia of “Art Deco.” Speed and nature were prominent in this style. The best examples can be seen in the Paris Metro and Miami’s South Beach.

The oil business and the roads on which cars could drive were muddy and scarce. Only urban centers had paved roads, garbage pick-up, and full-service utilities. I took these things for granted as my God-given right.

In 1937, the year I was born, there were many union fights; the Hindenburg crashed in New York’s Lake Horst; and John D. Rockefeller died. America lived in cities or on the farm. There were no suburbs. Only a few scattered experiments. Doctors made house calls and telephones were long sticks with a cone-shaped flower bell mouthpiece, and a cylindrical speaker to listen. My parents honeymooned at Lake Placid in the Catskills.

Bronx Stardust

And then, in October of 1937 (my birth year), FDR made his famous “Quarantine” speech, saying in part:

“It seems to be unfortunately true that the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. And mark this well: When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves, and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease. It is my (Roosevelt’s) determination to pursue a policy of peace and to adopt every practicable measure to avoid involvement in war.”

I remember my mother telling me how President Roosevelt promised to keep the peace and us out of war. We were all shocked when that same voice announced the attack on Pearl Harbor and the following declarations of war to defend the same peace. In hindsight, had the president been a conservative hawk and taken pre-emptive action, World War II may have been prevented.

By 1939 the Depression had ended. The World Fair took place at Lake Success, New York, and I remember being there with my Mother. I got lost and she was very upset. Between 1933 and 1945, Fiorello Henry LaGuardia (Italian and Jewish ancestry) served a record three terms as Mayor of New York City. Whatever I remember of this period is extremely personal and intimate. It was all about my mother's furniture, clothes, sickness, and the context of our home.

Bronx Stardust

I was born at 3:00 am on December 28, 1937 in Brooklyn Hospital. It was the very same year and month the Hutchinson River Parkway was opened, and when, a year earlier, oil had already been found in Saudi Arabia in 1936; FDR had been President since 1933. It was during the recovery after the Great Depression, and bank deposits were non-existent, and the government stimulated savings by encouraging my mother to buy bonds, and there were always union fights.

Drake's Park in Hunt's Point

The same year as the Hindenburg disaster, on April 28, 1937, Saddam Hussein was born in Ouja near Tikrit, in Northern Iraq; Hikmat Suleiman retired; and Bakr Sidqi was assassinated. The Royal Commission (Peel Commission) of Great Britain recommended the partition of Palestine, and Palestinian Airways initiated flights. George M. Cohan opened two musicals: "Off the Record" and "Hurray for What?" with very patriotic themes and music.

Bronx Stardust

The age of swing and bebop was in full progress and the vocabulary of jazz and Harlem permeated my family's conversation. These were the early years, from the time I was born until 1958 when I was 21 during my student days at Pratt Institute.

Bronx Stardust

Faile Street apartment building next to PS 48.

The sociological character of the neighborhoods I lived in with my family was all urban. The only people I knew were cosmopolitan, urban people, except for those we visited in Ohio, Florida, and New Jersey. To me they were the nice but out of touch, inferior people of the world. They simply were not New Yorkers!

Bronx Stardust

It was a time when the Lowe's movie theaters were decorated like palaces, and the movies took place in castles and expensive palaces. The Bronx stardust was sprinkled on every part of our life and we reminded each other about the stardust in songs, clichés, and conversations.

These are the 21 years when Americans chose between corporate conformity or freedom. Either one was a well-defined group.

Jack Kerouac tried to balance his wild city life with his old-world family values. Though Kerouac dubbed the term "Beat generation" in 1948, followers of "Beat literature" did not emerge until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Kerouac's *On The Road*, which heralded the beginning of "Beat" popularity, was not published until 1957. By the time the "Beat generation" generated a following in mainstream society,

most of the Beat writers had descended into drug addiction and obscurity. Yet it was a foil against which the metaphor of the new business life model was played.

This was a time when families, communities, neighborhoods, business and politics were being defined by a synthetically created standard. A normative of corporate conformity and productive mass regularity, where leaders and followers were proclaiming metaphors of distinct conformity to regularity and productivity, with social standards supported by corporate behavior and manufactured products.

Americans were being amalgamated, and Barry had to choose to be “in” or “out.”

Julia Roberts played Katherine Watson, a wise, self-reliant teacher who comes to Wellesley in an effort to learn more about herself. In the process, she directs her narrow-minded female students to the path of independence.

Bronx Stardust

Julia Stiles and Kirsten Dunst played two of Watson's students who had different perspectives on Watson's teachings. Dunst played Betty Warren, a symbol of 1950s females who found satisfaction in their roles as wives and mothers. On the other hand, Joan Brandwyn, played by Stiles, represented the women of the 1950s who, like Joan who valued the motivation of Katherine, were independent and willing to change.

The interactions among these different women led to a broader understanding of the mixed emotions behind the female revolution of that period felt by the women actually experiencing the conversion from "housemom" to "businesswoman." While the movie may not be awe-inspiring, it is worth seeing. Women will obviously be more fascinated by the Mona Lisa Smile, because of the feminist plot, but men can

also relate to the movie's sense of growing independence and departure from older, more conservative American values.

Wellesley College personified the program and standards of the times. This was depicted in the movies *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Stepford Wives*, and other movies and books. One was either in one or the other camp. Barry was not corporate or being groomed for corporate camp.

Furthermore, because we are living in a uniquely humanist, secular age, with a secular generation, I had other choices. Other times were not like the one we are in now. Secularism is on the rise and permeates the church, religion, Government, education, etc. Most of what we do is of this age, and we tend to destroy the things that have led to this time. Distrust spawns alienation within cultures and globally leads to terrorism.

Bronx Stardust

This period in the Bronx was another haven from the mainstream of these dilemmas. One had to reach out of the Bronx to find these values, otherwise the Bronx was a kind of Brigadoon, befuddled in its own metaphor.

The so-called "Gilded Age" (coined by Mark Twain) was prolific in the films and music of my childhood with airs of intense superficiality and vanity. It manifested itself in the remnants of fashion and interior decoration. Mostly western movies, and movies about the "good ole days." It was by then I began to have a sense of the difference in ages and periods. The World Fair dramatically afforded us glimpses into our own future and our potential in that future. The 1939-40 New York World Fair,

the 1939-40 San Francisco Exposition, the 1964-65 New York World Fair, and the 1967 Expo 67 in Montreal, were all dramatic occasions to contrast our tenements, urban mish-mosh and turmoil, and get psychosocial relief from real constructs of our societies' plans to steer us into a better tomorrow. It helped us believe in some help, coming from a source other than the government.

Bronx Stardust

Each fair elated and excited us by its location, occasion, and investment. The fairs not only defined our age but also gave our age and era a responsibility for tomorrow. We considered the results and consequences of our efforts, expenditures, political decisions, etc. As an architect-to-be of the second fair I believed that someday I would build some of these visions. For the first I just absorbed the metaphors and juxtaposed them with the movies and my dreams.

Men and women's street dress was formal; men wore hats and gloves, even some spats and knickers, and women wore long dresses, corsets, gloves, hats, and veils. Fur coats were fashionable for those who could pay the price. I was told that women went

to work during this period. My mother was home and cared for us, and so were her friends. We did not know any women at work. The few we did know were rare exceptions, and beyond our inner circle of admitted ignorance and caution.

Bronx Stardust

During this time we traveled by car to Cincinnati to my cousin's wedding, and to Miami to visit my aunts and uncles. William O'Dwyer was Mayor of New York City in 1946. New York's World Fair ran from 1939 to 1940, and the Whitestone Bridge opened in 1940.

The name "Bronx" is named in memory of the area's first European settler, the Swede, Jonas Bronck. You can see how names get changed from Bronck to Bronx, as Fis to Fiss to Feiss to Fez-Barrington.

The earliest settlement in the Bronx took place along the Harlem River in 1639, in what is now Mott Haven. The Bronx originally was part of Westchester County. In 1841, the New York and Harlem Railroad began a regular commuter service between the Bronx and Manhattan, and by 1895 the area had become a part of New York City. At the turn of the century, the quiet suburban streets and farms of the Bronx began to yield to rapidly expanding factories and urban neighborhoods.

In 1914, the borough's main thoroughfare, the Grand Concourse, was completed; it had been inspired by Paris' great boulevard, the Champs Elysées. I have walked on the Paris original and it was just not the same. I really never associated the two together.

The Bronx never became Paris and the density and brevity of the famous boulevard in Paris is more like Broadway, Fifth Avenue., 57th Street, 42nd Street, etc. So didn't they name it New Champs d'elyse? I do not know! The Grand Concourse was the concept of Alsace-Lorraine immigrant and civil engineer Louis Risse. Inspired by the celebrated boulevards of Paris, Risse designed the Grand Concourse as a four-mile long thoroughfare, divided into three roadways by tree-lined dividers. Its broad sidewalks allowed for a lively street scene.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Grand Concourse soon became the main parade route for the borough, the site of its government, and the axis of an important shopping and entertainment district. It begins on 138th Street and ends uptown at Moshulu Parkway.

The Bronx also began to attract wealthier people, with the construction of elegant apartment buildings on the Grand Concourse. Completed in 1908, the Grand Concourse, the main boulevard in the Bronx, was becoming the place to live for many middle class and upwardly mobile New Yorkers, much like Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue in Manhattan. The Grand Concourse further increased the population and desirability of the Bronx.

By the 1920s the Fordham Road-Grand Concourse intersection was a great commercial nexus and a center of tree-lined avenues, with luxurious homes and apartment buildings designed in the latest Art Deco and modernist styles.

Bronx Stardust

Barie in Faile Street's PS 48's muster room where he attended from 1941 to 1946. Nothing has changed. Amasing; Bronx Stardust!

Bronx Stardust