



## FROM BROOKLYN TO BASKING RIDGE

by Betty Frair

It's been said that every seven-hundredth person you ever meet will be from Brooklyn! It may be an old factoid too tantalizing to ignore or too fuzzy to confirm but Brooklyn remains one of the best known place names in the United States.

Through the grapevine and bulletin board announcements I collected the stories of twenty Brooklynites from Fellowship Village for my "Growing Up In Brooklyn" project. The stories were displayed for three weeks on posters in the reception center at Fellowship Village.

The project came about because I met a new resident who happened to remark that he grew up in Brooklyn. We reminisced about being Brooklyn Dodgers fans and laughed about the street games we played - like stick ball for the boys and ringolario for the girls. We remembered the famous Brooklyn seltzer beverage, egg cream, that could be purchased for a nickel, that had neither egg nor cream in it.

The photo below shows Brooklynites celebrating the project with a dinner in the formal dining room that featured the fondly remembered egg cream.



Brooklynites at Fellowship Village

### Growing up in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

**Paul and Lily Lang.** We were both born and raised in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, met and married in Bay Ridge, raised our family in Bay Ridge, and never lived anywhere else until we moved to Fellowship Village. Bay Ridge is a neighborhood in the southwest corner of the borough of Brooklyn with the Verrazano Bridge in full view. It was way back in 1652 that the Dutch West India Company acquired the land from the Nyack Indians. Through the years, many diverse ethnic enclaves developed as immigrants landed in America.

It was in the early 1900s that Paul's family members arrived from Germany and Ireland and Lily's parents from Damascus, Syria, and settled in Bay Ridge. In the 1930sm when they were kids, Bay Ridge was very country-like. For Paul, there was plenty of sleigh-riding in the winter as well as roller skating, stickball and all the street games city kids enjoyed in the summer. One of the highlights for Paul and his young buddies after Christmas was to gather dried-out Christmas trees neighbors put out for garbage collection and then set them on fire. Sometimes they could round up about 25 trees. The sport was to see how big a fire they could make, with the goal of seeing if the fire could hit the telephone wires!

Lily's fun times, a little more conservative than Paul's, included jump rope, hopscotch, and playing jacks on the stoops. We both attended Fort Hamilton High School, after which we went to work at Aetna Insurance Company, where we met. We still go back to Bay Ridge to visit friends, see the doctor, get a haircut - and enjoy the warmth and closeness of the neighborhood we lived in and loved our entire lives.

## Growing up in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

**Joan Cosenza.** My parents emigrated from Sicily around 1913 and settled in Park Slope, Brooklyn, in a rented four-room flat with one coal stove for heating and a water-closet in the hallway between two neighbors! Park Slope is a neighborhood in northwest Brooklyn near the famed Prospect Park. It is presently the home of the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

The family grew to 6 children and somehow survived in those close quarters. My Poppa died just a few months before I was born but eventually, with the older children going to work, we were able to move to a house in Bay Ridge on 68<sup>th</sup> Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Bay Ridge had its ethnic enclaves – mainly Irish, Norwegian, and the Italian neighborhood where we lived. And that's where I lived until I moved to Fellowship Village.

Growing up I had lots of fun playing hopscotch on the sidewalks, and roller skating everywhere. I remember the ice man who delivered ice for the icebox in the summer time, the vegetable man who sold fresh vegetables from his horse and wagon, and the chicken market that sold live chickens which were killed right in front of you. Many the chicken I defeathered before my mother threw it into the pot to make soup! My mother made her own macaroni and pizza from flour that came in sacks which, when emptied, she sewed together to make sheets for the beds. Of all the children, I was the only one to go to high school and graduated from Girls' Commercial High School in 1942. I still wear my graduation ring. Equipped with secretarial skills, I went to work at the Chemical Bank, where I worked until I retired. I loved, and still miss, Bay Ridge!

## Bay Ridge

**Julie Stagias.** I was born in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, but lived there only the first five years of my life, so my memories of that time are almost nil. What I learned from my family history is that my father settled in Bay Ridge when he came to the United States from Greece to join his brother, already a resident there. Bay Ridge, in the southwest corner of the borough of Brooklyn and right on the

coastline of Upper New York Bay, welcomed a huge influx of Greeks around 1922 as a result of the political situation that arose after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. To this day, Bay Ridge maintains a sizable Greek population.

When my father was about 23 years old, he went back to Greece to find a wife and brought her back to Bay Ridge and lived in 3542 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue - the house they shared with his brother and his wife – also a girl from Greece.

I don't remember anything about the neighborhood. My only memory of those very early years is that I always had cousins to play with. When I was five years old, my mother took me and my sister back to Greece to visit her family but soon returned to America because of the impending clouds of World War II. When we returned, we moved to Jamaica, which is in the borough of Queens. I'm glad we moved there, for that's where I met my husband Nike, another Greek who lived in a Greek neighborhood in Jamaica. I've had a wonderful life and it all started in Brooklyn!

## Bay Ridge

**Etta Kuhn.** My roots in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, go back to my grandparents, who migrated to America from Germany and settled in Bay Ridge, a three-mile-square community in the southwest corner of the borough of Brooklyn at the foot of the sprawling Verrazano Bridge. My mother died at my birth, so my father and I moved in with his sister and her husband, their two children, and my grandmother. I was an only child but living with my cousins gave me plenty of company. We lived in a typical Brooklyn brownstone house with a stoop and played the usual street games city kids enjoy. As I got a little older, I had a bike that I loved riding – especially on Shore Road along the Lower New York Bay. I almost rode to Coney Island one day. I remember, as a kid, a very special day called “Anniversary Day,” when we got a holiday from school and all the Protestant churches in Brooklyn put on a parade in their neighborhoods to celebrate the Sunday Schools of New York City for thousands of people to enjoy. We attended the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, so I joined all the kids in my Sunday School and marched through Bay

Ridge for what seemed hours of walking. We dressed in our very best, had bows in our hair, wore a church banner across our chest, and carried flags. When I got older, I rode my bike in the parade – decorated to the hilt with colored crepe paper. After I graduated from Fort Hamilton High School I went to work for Esso in lower Manhattan. I shopped in Woolworths, bought groceries in Bohack, shoes in A. S. Beck, and candy in Loft's! I loved Bay Ridge and lived there until I got married.

## Bayridge and Bensonhurst

**Jack and Doris Brooks.** Jack and Doris were both born in Brooklyn but in different neighborhoods. Jack's parents immigrated to the USA from Ukraine in the early 1900s and settled in Brooklyn – first in Borough Park and then in Bensonhurst. Both of these neighborhoods are in the southwestern part of Brooklyn. Jack attended P. S. 177 and graduated from Lafayette High School where he was a classmate of Sandy Koufax (pitching star with the Brooklyn Dodgers for 12 seasons), and then graduated from Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute – the second oldest private engineering school in the United States. Of course he was a Brooklyn Dodgers fan and remembers taking the D train to downtown Brooklyn, where he made connections to get to Ebbets Field for a game with a seat in the bleachers for 60 cents and a hot dog for a nickel! His fondest memories of growing up in Brooklyn are going to the school yards and parks as a kid and playing stickball, handball, football and basketball.

Doris's parents immigrated to the USA from Norway and settled in the large Norwegian section of Bay Ridge. Doris was born in the Norwegian General Hospital on 46<sup>th</sup> Street in Bay Ridge. She has no memories of Brooklyn because the family moved to New Jersey when she was just three years old. But that's enough to make her a Brooklynite!

## Bay Ridge and Flatbush

**Peter and Doris Stratakis.** Peter and Doris both grew up in Brooklyn but in different neighborhoods. Peter's father emigrated from Greece and settled in Flatbush. Doris's family emigrated from Norway and settled in Fort Hamilton, a neigh-

borhood just to the south of Bay Ridge with a large population of Scandinavians – with Norwegians heading the list. It is known for its historic fort, which was built in Revolutionary times but because of its strategic location on the southern tip of the borough is now used as a military base. Doris was born in the Norwegian General Hospital on 46<sup>th</sup> Street in Bay Ridge and attended Fort Hamilton High School.

Peter lived on Bedford Avenue and Empire Boulevard, which is just about across from Ebbets Field, the famed baseball park. He remembers living in a 4<sup>th</sup> floor walkup apartment in the days of the icebox when the iceman would holler up and down the dumb waiter shaft for the order of ice – which sold at the amazing price of 10 cents a piece. For fun, he and his buddies would go sleigh riding in Prospect Park in the winter and play baseball in the park in the summer. He attended Brooklyn Tech High School.

Doris and her family were very busy with their church activities, going to endless church suppers and enjoying typical Norwegian food such as fish balls with white gravy and plenty of fish stew. Peter and Doris were introduced to each other by a friend and after they married they left Brooklyn.

## Growing up in Flatbush, Brooklyn

**Bill Williams.** I lived in Flatbush, Brooklyn for just the first three years of my life but that's enough to make me a Brooklynite! Flatbush, located in the central part of Brooklyn, played a key role in the American Revolution with significant skirmishes and battles taking place. Years later, before the Spanish American War, my uncle emigrated from Wales to America and settled in Flatbush. He became quite wealthy and eventually arranged for his stepbrother Howell to join him. Howell's sweetheart, Nesta, also from Wales, followed him to America and soon they married and settled in Flatbush with my uncle. Howell and Nesta were my father and mother.

Eventually, I came along, and was born in the former Carson Peck Memorial Hospital in nearby Crown Heights, another Brooklyn neighborhood to the north of Flatbush. For the next three years, we lived on New Kirk Avenue in



Flatbush and my father worked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard until the family moved to Summit, New Jersey. Since I was only three years old when we left Brooklyn, all I can remember is the little playmate I had – Billy Mullen. But there's nothing like getting a good start in life – and where else but in Brooklyn?

## Growing up in Flatbush, Brooklyn

**Joe and Pat Merten.** Joe and Pat were both born and spent the first 20+ years of their lives in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Joe lived at 1829 Albany Avenue and Pat lived at 687 E. 38<sup>th</sup> Street. Pat grew up in a well-built row house with a brick stoop – a house built by Trump, who built a whole section of homes in Flatbush.

Joe lived in a private home. Although they never met in those days, both Joe and Pat attended St. Vincent Ferrer School on Glennwood Road run by Kentucky Dominican nuns brought in to educate the children of Irish and German immigrant children. Pat and Joe enjoyed the fun of their childhood years doing the usual. Joe played stickball on the street – with the manhole cover designating one of the bases. Pat had fun with her girlfriends digging tunnels in the open lots between the houses, playing marbles, and jumping rope.

As they got older, they had interesting jobs. One summer, Joe sold hot dogs at Coney Island. Another summer he worked at a food counter of a pleasure cruise line that carried passengers from Battery Park to the Statue of Liberty. All day long he rolled franks over and over on the grill. Whatever he didn't sell one day, he packed up, heated up again, and sold the next day. He still says that's why he never had one all summer!

When Pat was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, she had a one-Saturday-a-month job at the financial house of Merrill Lynch in lower Manhattan stuffing envelopes with monthly statements, and earned \$3 for the day's work. Pat and Joe met casually at a church dance, then again at a beach day at Riis Park. The romance took off and soon after that they married and left the fair borough of Brooklyn.

## Flatbush

**Elaine Magliulo.** Does living for just three weeks in Brooklyn make me a Brooklynite? That's where I was born – in the Methodist Hospital in Park Slope between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue on Sixth Street. My grandparents lived in Flatbush at 337 Flatbush Avenue their entire lives. And it was in Brooklyn that my mother and father met, married, and then moved to Roselle, New Jersey. But when I was soon going to make my appearance in this world, my mother decided she wanted to go back to her parents' home in Brooklyn for the birth of the baby. In those days, the mother and the baby would stay in the hospital for about two weeks – and when we came home from the hospital all the relatives took the trolley ride to “337” to celebrate the blessed event. We stayed for another week and then returned to Roselle, NJ.

I have very happy memories of visiting my grandparents in Brooklyn over the years. I remember the house very well – my grandparents, who were butchers, lived on the second floor over the butcher shop which was their business – an old-fashioned butcher shop complete with custom cuts of meat and all the way down to sawdust on the floor. We always went back to “337” on the holidays and had wonderful family times with all my aunts and uncles. I was in Flatbush, Brooklyn for just three weeks – but that's where it all started for me!

## Flatbush

**Ellen Baumann.** I was born and grew up in Flatbush – a neighborhood just about in the center of Brooklyn – and sometimes geographically referred to as “the heart of Brooklyn.” Flatbush was founded by Dutch colonists in 1651 and so named from the woods that grew on the flat country. Today the “woods” are gone, the population is dense, and it is thought to be the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in Brooklyn. When my grandfather and grandmother married they settled in Brooklyn, as did my parents.

We lived a happy, comfortable life in a lovely private home – 776 E. 18<sup>th</sup> Street - with a lot of

land around us where my sister and I and our little neighborhood friends could run and play in the open fields that surrounded our home. We even had our own apple tree growing in our backyard garden with plenty of its delicious fruit to eat and enjoy. In my elementary school years I walked to P.S. 152 and then traveled by subway to Erasmus High School – credited with being the oldest high school in Brooklyn. We were all Brooklyn Dodgers fans so of course we made occasional trips to Ebbetts Field to enjoy a baseball game. For shopping excursions, we boarded the trolley for a ride to Loesher's and A&S – (we didn't call it Abraham and Straus in those days) – and could always drop in at Woolworth's 5&10 for low cost household goods. And for a dinner out, it was a trip to Bickford's restaurant. I met my husband Bill, also a Brooklynite, at dancing school. After we married, we left Brooklyn. But I will always remember the small-town feeling of Flatbush with its old houses, lots of trees and bushes, and big backyards.

## Growing up in Garritsen Beach

**Betty Brown.** I was born and raised in Garritsen Beach – a small neighborhood in the borough of Brooklyn on a peninsula off the southeastern shoreline of Brooklyn facing the Atlantic Ocean. It is just miles away from the famed neighborhood of Coney Island. It was named for a Dutch settler in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and remained an under-developed area until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. To date, the 2010 census reports a population of about 8000 residents.

I remember the “shorey” atmosphere, the semi-attached homes with back and front yards, and open fields. My father ran a “thrill ride” concession as well as the movie house at Coney Island – just miles away. I was an only child but had plenty of neighborhood friends to play with. We jumped rope, rode the swings as high as we dared to go, played with our dolls and ran and played in the open fields all around us. For grade school I attended P. S. 194 and later attended James Madison High School. We had buses to transport us around the town, but for the most part we walked everywhere except when we were going to Manhattan, which meant we had to ride the bus

to take us to the subway. I lived in Garritsen Beach until I was 14, when we moved to Jersey City, NJ.

## Growing up in Greenpoint, Brooklyn

**Betty Frair.** I grew up in Greenpoint – for many years known as “The Garden Spot of the world.” Greenpoint is the northernmost neighborhood in the borough of Brooklyn, bordered on the west by the East River. Our house on Lorimer Street, situated between Noble and Calyer Streets, was a brownstone – which was so typical of the homes in Greenpoint. And of course we had a “stoop,” which we enjoyed in the fair weather days. In the summer, I sat on the stoop with my girlfriends and played “pick up jacks.” In the evening, to get a breath of fresh air, everyone sat out on their stoops and chatted with next-door neighbors. Information and gossip could be passed all the way down the street! The boys played street games – being careful to watch out for traffic rounding the bend. If you walked down the bordering street, Noble Street, you would arrive at the East River waterfront and view the skyline of midtown New York. We walked to school, to church, to the A&P, to the Five and Ten, to the drug store, to the post office, to McCarren's Park – to everywhere in the community and to the subway – which would transport us to midtown Manhattan in about 20 minutes for a nickel a ride. We were all Brooklyn Dodgers fans and took the trolley to Ebbets Field to enjoy a game. One of my fondest memories is the night we celebrated with the Dodgers when they won the World Series in 1955. Our street was closed off to traffic at each end. There was a band. People danced in the street. There were flags, banners, pennants, and all sorts of Dodgers memorabilia everywhere. Everyone on the block put out a table on the sidewalk laden down with food of every kind. It was a crazy, happy time!

## Growing up in Williamsburg, Brooklyn

**Arthur Mills.** I grew up in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which had its beginnings in 1664, making it one of the oldest neighborhoods in the borough of Brooklyn. Williamsburg is in the northern part of Brooklyn, just south of Greenpoint and bordered on the west by the East River. My grandfather, who emigrated from Ireland when he was just 13,

settled in Williamsburg and later on walked over the Brooklyn Bridge each day to go to work. I was born in a house on Hews Street – just a short distance from the famous baseball park, Ebbets Field. I attended Transfiguration Parochial School and remember the fun we had playing handball and stickball and punchball with the young priests who were our teachers – and the manhole cover on the street that was home plate. Then I attended Boys' High School, which I traveled to by subway – when the fare was just 5 cents a ride. For a big treat the family went to Coney Island for a swim on a hot day and a ride on the Cyclone at Steeplechase. And who can forget having a hot dog

at the original Nathan's! We played baseball in Prospect Park and hitched a ride on the back of the trolley to get there – against the law, but we did a pretty good job escaping the wrath of the trolley conductor or the police! We roller-skated on the streets with just one skate – nobody had enough money for a pair. We bought cake at Dugan's, fished pickles out of the pickle barrel in the corner deli, and wore Thom McAn shoes. The first date I had with Edith, my future wife, was to walk to Greenpoint for an evening in McCarren's Park. Williamsburg was a wonderful place to grow up and my memories of that neighborhood are very fond.



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