

Brooklyn Flowers, Brooklyn Memories

by Phyllis Chesler



The colorful shrub Kerria is in bloom.

I grew up in Borough Park, in Brooklyn, in the 1940s. I was five when the War ended, and I can still remember the loud street parties that seemed to spontaneously erupt as soon as victory was declared. I remember hot and sultry summer nights long before there was air conditioning, the West End Avenue line to Surf Avenue, Coney Island, beach blankets, kosher picnics in coolers that my mother packed at home, how hot the sand felt, how cool it was “under the boardwalk,” and all the rides: The Roller Coaster, the Wonder Wheel, the Merry-Go-Round, and the Bumper Cars.

Once, in a storm, my father's car, which was parked at a Coney Island bathhouse, was washed out to sea. It was a tale told and retold in my family for years.

I remember my father's synagogue, my Hebrew School, my public school, the shops, and the covered market on Thirteenth Avenue; above all, I remember Ebbets Field, where my father took me to watch the Brooklyn Dodgers play baseball.

I also remember that my mother was constantly cooking, serving, shopping, cleaning, sewing, and forever hanging laundry on the outside clothesline and in our small living room, which doubled as a bedroom. I rarely saw her rest. She dressed "up" only to attend a wedding. Otherwise, she wore a flowered apron over her flowered housedress.

Our quarters were cramped—the apartment was maybe six hundred feet for the five of us. I think of this now, quarantined, with so much more space for only two people.

I miss the Brooklynites of my childhood. Loud, colorful, zesty, ethnic, filled with immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, all hoping to live the American Dream.

Yesterday, my friend Bob Brannon, who lives in Brooklyn, sent me photos of flowers blooming on the Brooklyn streets. Here are two more.



When one looks down, there are many colorful little bulbs emerging.



Soulangea "Lennei", first hybridized in Italy, has large, wine colored cup-like blooms.