

August 07, 2011

Our move to New York City has been exciting yet uneventful. I did have to take apart and then reassemble the futon frame to get it up the stairs and through the doorway of our second floor apartment. Other than that, everything went according to plan, which is quite a gift when you are doing something as stressful as moving from a bucolic small village like Potsdam to a large, intimidating and unforgiving city like New York.

We are living on the second floor of a two-story, pre-war townhouse on a quiet side street in Sunnyside, Queens. The townhouse is part of an almost-block-long complex of Tudor-style townhouses with small garden spaces in front. This side of the street reminded me of some of the small villages in England that Michele and I passed through on our walk along the South Downs Way last summer (<http://mysite.verizon.net/gsimonel/SDW1.html>), I think that's why it initially appealed to me. Although it's an older complex, the apartment has been recently remodeled and is bright and cheerful with beautiful oak floors throughout. Directly across the street from us is a fairly large, six-story apartment complex. Except for this one building, the rest of block is comprised of individual houses and rowhouses, most also pre-war. With numerous large trees all along both sides, the street has more of a Main-Street-Small-Town-USA feel than is typical this close (around 2 miles away--less than 15 minutes by subway or about 45 minutes by car during "rush" hour) to downtown Manhattan.

Once you leave our little block, however, the metropolitan location becomes more evident. From our street corner we can see both the Empire State and Chrysler buildings in the distance. Sunnyside is a true melting pot. Besides the Irish and Romanians who have made up the majority of the local population in the past, there are immigrants from all over the world living here, the majority from South and Central America, the Near, Middle and Far East and Eastern Europe. This mix is reflected in all the ethnic restaurants and groceries lining Queens Boulevard and Greenpoint Avenue. One can hear many different languages spoken on the street, and it's fun trying to guess what language people are overheard speaking when their specific ethnicity isn't readily apparent. Turkish? Nepalese? Farsi?

After 5 days here, Michele and I are more-or-less unpacked and settled in. One thing I've realized since moving is that space is much more precious here than any place I ever lived before. Space is something I've never thought about before. I've always taken for granted; in New York City, however, it's practically a commodity, and every cubic inch is valued. There's no such thing as an empty hallway or bare wall. Such an thing would

be wasteful and ostentatious. I miss my piano and my antique oak roll-top desk, but I'm so glad that we got rid of so much stuff before we moved.

It's already clear that living here will be quite an adjustment. After 4 years in Potsdam, I'm used to looking strangers on the street in the eye, nodding my head and offering, "Good morning." When I do this in Sunnyside, about 1 in 4 people break into broad grins and return the greeting; the other 3 ignore me or deliberately look away. In many Eastern cultures it's rude to look a stranger in the eye; my intentions may be friendly, but to some of the people living here this habit is insulting, and I need to remember this. Apparently, greeting people on the street is something you do only when you're in a foul mood.

I'm also not used to seeing so much litter, or seeing homeless people sleeping on park benches. And it's strange just living amongst so many people; I may pass someone on the street and never see that person again, or fail to recognize them if I do. That doesn't happen very often in Potsdam. Even if you don't know someone personally, you still see him or her repeatedly around town. So it will take a while to get used to city living, and I'm not sure I'll ever be totally comfortable here. But we'll see. For now, it's an adventure, and we're doing our best to acclimate. There are flower boxes in front of the house, and Michele has planted some chrysanthemums and started an herb garden in them. Saturday we went to the local farmer's market. And we're trying to take advantage of all the local events. This weekend the town celebrated the 80th anniversary of the death of Bix Beiderbecke, an early and influential jazz trumpeter who lived in Sunnyside shortly before his death. There were jazz concerts all afternoon on 46th Street, which had been closed off to traffic, and the night before in a park across the street from the library they showed cartoons from the 1930s and 40s that featured a lot of good jazz music. The park was filled with families; most of the kids ran off and played in the playground area after about 15 minutes or so while the parents stayed on and watched the cartoons.

Michele and I haven't made it into Manhattan much yet--we've spent most of our time getting settled in Sunnyside--but I've still got a few weeks before I begin working, so hopefully we'll start doing some exploring soon. The adventure begins . . .

Best regards,
Glenn