

New York Stories: The Best of the City Section of The New York Times

Constance Rosenblum, Editor

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Lady Liberty, the piercing goddess and defender of this planet's most fabled city, stands alone, torch ablaze, illuminating the hopes of humanity while guiding millions who are following their quest towards her protected shores. In one turn of the head and one drop of the jaw, a mere mortal may view the entirety of this mythological city, and still not penetrate its veiling ramparts or darkened chasms. Determined to counter this overwhelming power of scale, this book serves as a kindly shepherd to the bedazzled pilgrim.

Readers are pulled beyond the storied ideal of the Herculean megalopolis and unceremoniously dropped from the heavens to bear witness to the struggles and joys of dozens of real people, who are living real lives in an otherwise unreal location. Here, forty stories find a home within four sections: "A Sense of Place," "Moods and Mores," "New Yorkers," and "City Lore."

The editor of this collection is the current editor of the City Section of *The New York Times*, which provides these entries, and a past editor for both *The Philadelphia Enquirer* and *New York Daily News*.

Explosively, readers are hurtled from "The House on West 11th Street," in an essay that describes the aftermath of an accidental detonation in 1970 by a domestic terrorist group, the Weathermen, who were bent on destroying the government. Mel Gussow, a culture writer for the *New York Times*, relates this shocking occurrence, which also affected then-neighbor Dustin Hoffman, whose apartment was damaged. "As time passed," the book relates, "the explosion faded into history, but for some of us, it remained a vivid memory." Resiliently finding whimsy amid grim circumstances, Gussow writes of neighbor Gino Sloan: "He lost all of his clothes except for a polyester suit he hated."

In "The Paper Chase," readers meet the Collyer brothers, courtesy of Franz Lidz, a senior writer with *Sports Illustrated*. From Columbia Phi Beta Kappa Homer to Carnegie Hall pianist brother Langley, readers arrive at the tale of the Collyer brothers who fretted away the years in a mounded warren created from nearly 200 tons of "midnight street pickings." These "ghostly men," as described by uncharitable neighborhood children, eventually fall prey to self-created and tragically undiscerning booby traps.

This collection of engaging stories will appeal to a broad range of adult readers interested in pushing back the concealing vapors of legend to discover the otherwise hidden gears and cogs that keep the enchanted ideal of New York City humming smoothly along.

SCOTT DOWNING (August 18, 2009)

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