

## A Budding Artist *by Florence Manglani*

One Sunday morning in late June, the Morning Walking Group, Aggie, Madi, Merrie and I, met at our usual spot on the southwest corner of Glenwood and Rugby. That day, we were celebrating two events: Aggie's recent knee surgery and my retirement from Brooklyn College (after almost 30 years). Madi and Merrie went to Newkirk Plaza for coffee and donuts from Dunkin Donuts, and Aggie and I continued our slow walk round the Glenwood Mall—slow walk because Aggie had had knee surgery about 3 weeks before.

We sat on Aggie's front porch, observing social distancing and wearing our masks, except when we were enjoying the treats. Aggie said, "I have something to show you. I think you all will like it." We were quite intrigued and could not wait to see Aggie's surprise. Aggie went inside and brought out a picture of her house. It was not a photograph, it was a pen and ink plus watercolor sketch of her house. It was beautifully done and captured many of the architectural details of her house.

"The other day, a young girl, maybe in her early twenties, knocked on my door and offered to sell me the picture," Aggie said. "She said she was going around our neighborhood sketching houses that caught her eye, and offering to sell the sketch to the owners. I loved the way she had captured the details and so, after some back and forth, I bought it. I don't know who she is. But if you are interested, I will tell her if I see her." Of course, we were very interested and wanted sketches done of our respective houses.

The next morning, I heard my door bell ring. I was not expecting anyone. I opened the door and lo and behold, there was this young girl, showing me a sketch of my house and asking me if I would be interested in purchasing it. I was somewhat surprised as well as pleased to see the sketch of my house. It was really done quite well and of course I bought it.



"OMG, you are the person who did the sketch of my friend Aggie's house, aren't you?" I asked. She was very surprised and said, "Yes. How did you know?" "And were you sitting across my house yesterday afternoon making this sketch?" "Yes, that was me.

But how do you know all this?" she asked. I introduced myself and asked her for her name. I told her about the walking group and that we were all discussing getting our houses sketched, and told her that if she was willing to do some more work, my walking friends were very interested. I mentioned writing an article about her. She exclaimed, "You would do that for me? Really!?" I replied, "Yes. My friends and I want to help you and encourage you."

Her name is Esther Maxwell, and she grew up in Brooklyn. Here are some of the drawings she has done in West Midwood. If you are interested in contacting her, you can email her at [esthermaxwelo@gmail.com](mailto:esthermaxwelo@gmail.com). You can see more of her work on her Instagram page: [Esthers\\_portfolio](#)



## ***Here is Esther's story, in her own words:***

I've spent my whole life drawing. My school notes were decorated with princesses and castles, English essays were accompanied by illustrations, and when I finished a test early I would while away the extra time by drawing on the back of the test. When I was in second grade, my teacher called me over to discuss a provoking picture I had drawn on the back of a test. "Where did you come across this?" I was asked, as my test with the teenagers smoking on the back was presented to me. I don't know if I had drawn the image to purposely tick off my very orthodox school, but that image got me in a lot of trouble. Smoking teenagers were not supposed to be in the subconscious mind of the good Jewish school girl.



I also kept a separate notebook on my desk to sketch in. Most teachers understood that the drawing notebook helped me concentrate on the lesson, but a lot got very touchy about it. They felt it was disrespectful when I distracted myself. I argued that the drawing kept me focused and my mind attentive. If I wasn't able to keep my hands busy, my mind would soon wander. This battle ended only with the school year.

After high school, I continued learning more about art. I took a course on the principles of design last summer and had a job as an art assistant. During this time, I came across a book called *Daily Painting*, which described the concept of consistently improving your painting skills by completing a small painting every day. I took on this challenge and since then I have tried my best to keep to it. This went on for a year. I got an office job with graphic design opportunities and life started to settle down. Then Coronavirus hit. My job no longer had hours for me and I was faced with a lot of down time. I painted twice as much as I used to, but I still had a lot of free time. I started taking walks.

I really liked walking through West Midwood. You could easily tell that the people living here had a lot of pride in their homes. The gardens were detailed and beautiful, the architecture was carefully maintained, and each home was full of charm. Little gables jutted from the rooftops, shutters manned the windows, and hanging flower pots graced the porches. I knew I would have to come back and draw these houses. Their charm had to be captured.

And so it was. I came by with a sketchbook and drew my first house. When I was done, I knocked on the owner's door to show her the sketch. I had a faint idea that she might like to keep the sketch, but my confidence in my art was fairly low and my expectations even lower. However, when the owner came out and saw what I had done she was so encouraging. She loved seeing her dear home on paper. Her praise gave me the confidence to offer the drawing to her and so began weeks of similar drawings. I drew another house and another house, and was pleasantly surprised to find drawing after drawing gratefully accepted by their owners. I really feel like I'm living in a dream! My love for drawing made the time sketching a pleasure, and the fact that I got to pass on these drawings to people who appreciated them made it all ten times as special. I had a mission now. A commitment to capturing as much of the inherent personality of the houses as I can. I would not exchange this mission for anything. Thank you West Midwood for your encouragement and support. I loved getting to know this neighborhood better, and look forward to getting to know it better still.

### ***WMN: Tell us a little more about your background:***

I grew up my whole life in Brooklyn. I was raised Orthodox and went to an Orthodox Jewish school. My father is from England and I have visited there often. The architecture there is similarly charming to the houses in West Midwood. Perhaps this is why I've devoted so much time drawing the houses here. They remind me of my time in England. I firmly believe that every drawing I make is only because of G-d's help. All my drawings have my signature on the bottom, and G-d's "signature" on the top. I put the acronym bs"d on the top of my drawings. This stands for 'besiyata dishmaya', or, 'with the help of G-d'. That is how I make all my drawings. I am from a family of eight siblings. I love my family and they are my biggest supporters. Every time I come home from drawing the West Midwood houses they ask me "Did anybody like your drawings? Did you sell any?" They believe in me and that belief has formed my confidence in myself. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. It's been a pleasure.

