



The Kindness of Strangers

ONE OF THE THINGS I MISS MOST ABOUT NEW York are the moments when New Yorkers set aside their own contentment and preferences to serve others.

I have received this gift of New York hospitality.

Late on a bitter January Sunday evening nine years ago on West 23rd Street, I threw into a cab a couple boxes and a dozen shopping bags and set out for an apartment building by the Queensboro Bridge on the Upper East Side. I had let the lease go on the West Chelsea apartment I loved and was moving into a friend's sublet while I looked for another job. While he drove us up 8th Avenue, the taxi driver told me about the jobs he was interviewing for where he could use his engineering degree, and how glad he was that I was his last trip at the end of what had been a long shift. He wagered I would easily find a taxi on the Upper East Side to go back downtown, as I had more things to move out of West Chelsea. As we crossed 57th on Madison, it started snowing. Cars disappeared from the streets, which got slick fast. Snow accumulated on sidewalks. How would I ever find the cabs needed to go back and forth across town in this weather? I asked myself silently. I stared ahead and slumped down in the backseat behind the taxi driver. As he carefully maneuvered the taxi between snowy parked cars down East 62nd Street, his eyes met mine in the rearview mirror. "I'll take you," he said. It took two more trips to get the last of my things.

Early on a cold and windy Monday morning after Christmas five years ago, I hailed a taxi on Wall Street to take my mom and I to my new Upper West Side

From pandemic-induced exile, Brunswick's **PATRICIA GRAUE** loves down-and-out New York.



The author, a Brunswick Director in the New York office, and her mother during less-frightening times in Manhattan.

home. The cab driver, a grey-haired man wearing a black cap, agreed to wait while I fetched a box. I ran off. My mom got in and started chatting with the driver. That morning, the last in the temporary Wall Street digs, the dishwasher had come apart and the coffee pot overflowed. "You want some coffee?" the driver asked. "Sure," she said. Before she could hand him cash, he got out and returned a few minutes later with one cup of coffee from a sidewalk cart. "I gave you cream and sugar," the driver said as he handed it to her, refusing her money.

A few years ago on a Saturday afternoon in March, I accidentally left my personal cell phone, which I had inherited from my Apple enthusiast father, in the backseat of a cab. What would become of this object I so treasured now, I wondered, as I dialed my phone number. "Hello?" the driver answered on the first ring. He offered to bring the phone to me at my Upper West Side building, but he would not arrive until midnight, after his shift ended. At around 11:30, he called to tell me he was on his way, from Queens. When the driver arrived, I thanked him profusely, telling him how special the phone was to me, as it was my father's who had passed away. "Why would you ever think I wouldn't bring you your phone?" he asked.

In her online commencement speech last May, Oprah Winfrey quoted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from a Birmingham Jail: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." ♦