

Intergenerational Art Education: Building Community in Harlem

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I began the first of 43 visits to an after-school intergenerational art program in Lower East Harlem, New York, with the expectation of a straight-forward research project, one which would perhaps ratify my growing conviction that young people and older adults together would provide a natural learning environment for art. My first personal encounter with the Lower East Harlem community began when I crossed 96th Street, an informal boundary separating its decaying tenements and public housing projects from the newer, more prosperous neighborhood to the south. I soon realized that there was no need for a line on the map indicating the division between Manhattan and Harlem. And referring to a travel guide of New York City, I noticed that it listed no restaurants, hotels, or shopping highlights above 96th Street. Subway tracks emerged above ground and loomed over Central Harlem's neighborhoods. The only new building in the vicinity north of 96th Street was the impressive Muslim Mosque.

A mixture of fear and compassion swept through me as I entered the economically struggling neighborhood of primarily Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and African Americans. I viewed an area punctuated by deserted buildings with barred or bricked-in windows, and walls covered with gang graffiti or murals in tribute to youthful victims of crime. In front of one row of tenements, stuffed animals dangled from the limbs of a tree like pendulant fruit. One teenage informant

suggested, "A child probably died there." Kozol (1995) mentioned a similar mysterious tree in the South Bronx in his ethnography, "Amazing Grace."

I passed by sidewalks strewn with trash and windblown paper, vacant lots cluttered with abandoned cars and garbage, even a rat carcass in a sidewalk puddle. An occasional child's shriek broke through the din of traffic and the racket from a nearby playground. Across the busy street a loudspeaker crackled, blaring a message of religious redemption over the heads of school children carrying book bags and crowding the entrance of a tiny storefront shop. As I approached the senior center that was to be the base for my study, I noticed a rag doll, discarded on a rubble heap behind a chain link fence. It was somehow ominous at the moment.

The neighborhood, sometimes known as El Barrio, extends north of 96th Street and east of Fifth Avenue, bordering the northern edge of one of the wealthiest cities in the world. East Harlem, one of the poorest areas in the country, chronically shoulders many economic and social problems, among them poverty, drug abuse, and broken homes. AIDS is one of the fastest growing killers in the neighborhood. This area records the highest rate of child abuse and neglect in New York City and the greatest number of births to teenagers in the United States (Freidenberg, 1995; *Demographic Profiles*, 1992). Grandparents often become the principal caregivers of their grandchildren. The guardian for one of the teens in this program was his 40-year-old grandmother. Several were from single parent homes. Nearly all of the East Harlem residents involved resided in public housing projects which were deteriorating, sometimes vermin infested and overcrowded. According to the 1990 United States Census, the socioeconomic conditions found in this area have been devastating, with approximately 40 percent of the area's population living below the poverty level, with an annual income of less than \$10,000. Median household income in lower

Manhattan (below 96th Street) was \$32,262 in 1992, well over twice that of East Harlem, which was \$14,882.

Research Role

Within this inner-city community, I was an outsider, a small town intruder of Italian descent. Outwardly, I could almost have passed for a Latina resident, but I knew I was out of place. Since my background was so different from other study participants, I felt uneasy about taking on the role of participant-as-observer prescribed by my study. But I hoped that I would become less conspicuous through extensive interaction with participants.

I began collecting data in this role, as a member directly involved in the group experience. Weeks passed before I was able to establish a rapport with both age groups through close personal contact. My position, participant-as-observer, required less involvement than a full participant, thus allowing me more time for observation. As the program moved from training and relationship building to oral history collection and art making, I shifted towards a full participant role, more engaged in program activities.

The Participants

Participating seniors in this intergenerational program, aged 62 and older, were chosen from a list of 100 recipients for the city's Meals-on-Wheels program. The majority lived in public housing projects within El Barrio. The group of secondary school students varied in number from 10 to 12, as a few left and others enlisted. They ranged in age from 14 through 18 and were primarily from the same neighborhood. Nearly all of both age groups were from lower income households. They were Puerto Rican, Dominican, and African

American, representative of the multi-ethnic population. A few spoke and/or understood Spanish. All were fluent in English.

The students became involved with the intergenerational program through the encouragement of their teachers, school counselors, and friends. As participants, they were expected to maintain passing grades throughout the seven-month program. They received a \$200 stipend for each three months, six hours per week of regular participation. Some had considered volunteering before learning of the monetary incentive.

The youths identified various reasons for joining the program. Some wanted work experience and hoped to improve their communication skills. Others joined the program exclusively for the money, and possibly, for a place to socialize with other teens. A few received high school credit. One of the teens said, "I just like the idea of actually helping somebody, the idea of talking to that person and seeing where they came from, and how they dealt with things we're doing right now." One of the teens had never known her grandparents but felt confident that she would find a surrogate in the program. "You can pick them." Many expressed stereotypical attitudes that the older adults were merely helpless members of their community, while they themselves were doing a good deed.

The Art Program

The art program was a joint project funded by a grant through an intergenerational arts organization and a New York City social service agency for seniors. I planned to investigate the development of intergenerational relationships that were encouraged through the program's three components, social service, oral history and art making. The first of these, social service, helped establish friendships and included pre-program training, phone reassurance, friendly visits, and shopping assistance. Pre-program training involved educating the young participants about the physical problems they might encounter

with older adults. Phone reassurance included conversations with seniors via the telephone. During friendly visits, teenagers visited the residences of homebound seniors. The young participants helped them with shopping or purchased items at the store for them.

The second program component, oral history, involved family tree training and creating a family tree, an oral history workshop, and collecting oral histories from seniors. Methods of oral history interviews involved formal and informal questions and an extension of inquiry through the discussion of artworks relevant to the Harlem residents' history. The third element, art making, consisted of studio art experiences for participants at the senior center led by a professional artist. Participants collaborated on developing a theme idea web (a schematic plan) for a collage, and then on making a collage based on a central theme from the senior's life story.

Making family trees with the seniors helped establish relationships between age groups. The oral history interviews expanded upon these relationships and potential collage themes began to emerge. Over a period of five months, the professional artist devoted weekly art training sessions to studio art. Teens learned various techniques for making a collage using a variety of media.

The arts organization had developed many programs over the previous decade, the goals of which were to increase interaction and understanding between widely disparate age groups, and to diminish social and psychological problems experienced within inner-city communities (i.e., depression, dementia, suicide, and the development of age-related stereotypes). Funded by a combination of grants and corporate support, the backbone of the organization's activities has been the development and sharing of the oral histories of individual participants, who then transformed them into a variety of artistic representations such as plays, illustrated books, photography and video exhibits, artworks or collage. At a prestigious central New York City

museum, I viewed a video produced by a recent program that was compiled from footage taken by teenagers roaming Harlem, interviewing the oldest residents. The particular program I studied focused on oral history and collage.

The intergenerational art program brought together several homebound older residents of East Harlem housing projects with teenagers living nearby. The goal of bringing the two generations together was to develop positive relationships between the teenagers and seniors, diminishing common stereotypes and ameliorating mental and physical problems associated with the social isolation of the elders. The collection of oral histories and the creation of visual art were means to encourage partnerships and sharing, and build relationships and understanding.

My research interest complimented the program's purpose, seeking to identify potential educational benefits of intergenerational art education, to understand how old and young people interact within this particular context, including the study site, the curriculum, intergenerational relationships, and the participants' ages, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Although data was triangulated, it was site specific, and consequently some findings may only be relevant to similar situations and participants.

Interpretations of the Intergenerational Interactions

My interpretation of this seven-month study of intergenerational interactions emerged from data collection and triangulation. I described, analyzed, and interpreted interactions between seniors and teenagers throughout the three program components: social service, oral history and art making. All these activities contributed to the formation of relationships between teenagers and seniors. Collecting oral histories and making art intensified the exchange of personal history and culture,

reduced age-related stereotypes, and empowered young and older participants. All of these promoted a sense of community among the participants. As a result of intergenerational relationships, art making became less intimidating and more meaningful for the teens. Oral histories created an open dialogue for learning art context. Data from participants, my observations, and supporting literature provided a clearer understanding of intergenerational interactions within this east Harlem community-based art program.

Intergenerational Relationships

Initially, when teens contacted older adults from the community to participate in the intergenerational art program, many hesitated. One senior was afraid to get involved and was apprehensive about the teens coming to his apartment. Another's original fears were magnified by these words from her sister, "You gotta be careful. You hear so many things," and she added, "If I let somebody take me out they may never bring me back." One older woman couldn't understand why teens would want to know about her history. "There's nothin' too much," she said.

Despite rough beginnings brought on by age-related stereotypes each group had about the other, relationships developed during all three components of the program: social service, oral history and art making. Newman and Brummel(1989), among other researchers, note relative positive impacts that intergenerational programs have on diminishing age-related stereotypes and developing positive relationships for educational exchange (Metcalf, 1990; Rogers, 1995). Caring relationships also became evident as the Harlem program progressed. One teen said,

It's nice to know that you care about somebody else even though you might not have known them that long, and they also like to see you. They look forward to it. They want you to come see them, not because you're here and have to see somebody. Both of you look forward to seeing each other and talking. That's a good experience.

A senior commented on the collage making activity,

You ought to see them. When they do it [work on the collage], I notice, they just don't do it because they're doing it. They take an interest. If they didn't take an interest, they wouldn't know what to ask me, what I like and what I didn't like. The way how [sic] they do it, you see they take an interest. . . . they get up with such feelings to do it. Some people, they do it and just don't care. . . . When they do it, they do it with such a grace, a feeling, uplifting.

Many relationships were almost familial. According to another senior,

She treats me like her daughter, and I'm very attached. . . . she could recognize my voice. . . . We had a little trouble in the beginning 'cause I didn't know her, and we didn't know each other, but after . . . four months, she is great. . . . She'll talk to me and say, "Hi Rose, do you want to go shopping today or do you want to do this today?"

I observed some visual evidence of relationships that had also grown. For example, when Teresa and Bonita interviewed Carmina, their physical position and body language suggested their intense interest in what the Puerto Rican senior had to say. Teresa sat beside Bonita, both facing Carmina in her kitchenette. Teresa's mother sat just outside of our circle and jumped into the conversation as a translator

at times. I knew immediately that there was some special tie between the girls and Carmina. On earlier visits the girls had done their best to distance themselves physically and personally from the elder. They sat at opposite ends of the room and had little eye contact. Now, after several visits, Carmina had opened up her life to us, a story that we had tried to elicit many times before, but which she had assiduously avoided. Meanwhile, the teens' eyes were locked on her while Teresa's hand rested in Carmina's lap.

Some relationships established in the program were lasting ones. Visits and phone calls occurred frequently outside of the program. One team of teens who left the program continued to visit their senior partner. These relationships provided a comfortable learning environment. Adults became more open. Students became more involved and sympathetic as they took a personal interest in the seniors' lives.

The Exchange of Oral History

As intended, discussions were not limited to formal prepared questions from theme interview worksheets. Students developed their own topics of historical inquiry ranging from how much everyday purchases had once cost to discussion of weekly earnings, gender roles, comic books, sporting events and even to what took place at the Savoy Ballroom. Most teens enjoyed the oral history gathering process, even competing to ask the next question. Comparing prices then with now was a common preoccupation among the teens.

Many interesting conversations took place during oral history interviews, particularly when students interjected their own questions. One episode stood out in my mind. During an interview with Mr. Smith, a retired African-American social worker, Dante, a teen of Puerto Rican descent, leaned back on the couch and closed his eyes, claiming to have an excruciating headache. But Juanita's question, "Do you remember

the death of Malcolm X," brought him out of it, and he took over the interview.

Dante: Do you remember when Martin Luther King died?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dante: How was that?

Mr. Smith: Everybody was saddened, and I was saddened, because I looked at Martin Luther King as being a hero and a leader.

Dante: Me too.

Mr. Smith: And he brought . . . a lot of changes in this country.

Dante: And he didn't even use any violence.

Mr. Smith: No.

Dante: That's it.

During oral history questioning, historically and culturally relevant artwork was sometimes introduced as seniors shared their personal history and culture with teenagers. Making their lives the center of interest gave them a unique opportunity to display the understandings they had achieved through experience in a situation that valorized this knowledge. The young participants often responded with contemporary comparisons and contributed original questions of interest such as, "What was it like to go to the Savoy Ballroom?" and "How much did it cost back then?" Most noted that they gained a better understanding of their community's heritage through the unique voices

of older adults. Erickson (1983) asserts that historical inquiry can be enhanced by interviewing older acquaintances about a period of time or place, a young Harlem program participant voiced evidence of this notion:

I learned about their background and some things from history from a person who was around during that time. It gave me a clearer picture. . . . I used to like it when he [Mr. Smith] talked about how Harlem used to be. I can imagine. A picture of the current Harlem is nothin' you want to decorate your living room with. He told me how nice it was. I only seen [sic] it in the movies, but when somebody says it out of their mouth that they were actually there, it's different. You get more details. It's like bringing history to life.

Miguel agreed: "Here [in schools], you teach in books. The other way, I see in person with my two eyes." The intergenerational dialogue gave voice to seniors through the sharing of their personal memories and cultural histories, which became a "medium of expression, an empathetic way of seeing through another's eyes," as Gablik (1995, p. 82) has asserted. Providing recognition and validation for their life experiences were empowering to those who had long been disenfranchised, ignored, and forgotten. Their direct connection to the past valorized their lives and offered a living testament to long ago events.

Oral history questions prompted discussions about famous people and places, entertainment, everyday life before modern technological conveniences, traditions, immigration, and more. There was a strong interest in the Great Depression, and the desperate circumstances described by elders astonished the young people. A few of the seniors responded to questions regarding Father Divine, a religious leader in the 1930s who helped feed and organize the poor in Harlem. The teens

had been unaware of his work, but they listened intently to some of the comments made by Mrs. Miller:

He was a religious man. . . . He used to charge 30 or 25 cents a meal. He used to help the people, the hungry people. That's back in the Depression.

They also learned about segregation during the 1940s from an older man who experienced it. Mr. Smith spoke of his early years at a school in the South.

The elementary school ran from one through seven. Eighth grade was junior high. We only had one school. We had segregation. So, the blacks went to their school and the whites went to their school. That happened in the county that I'm from We had another race of people called the Indians, and they had their school The books that we got were from the white school, if you will. Many of the pages were missing, and we had to use those books. I didn't like that part about it, but we had to do with what we had.

Many in our country look back on "the good ol' days," but these personal experiences of segregation and racial prejudice had left many oppressive memories among older volunteers which brought a poignant silence among the youth. Teachers or textbooks could not offer more eloquent testimony.

Life was a struggle for many people who immigrated to the United States during the early part of the twentieth century. Anna spoke of her family's experience while several of the youngsters listened attentively.

It was tough here. When I was a very young child, I remember soup lines, bread lines. That's when my mother died. Then, my grandmother came. She took me back to the Virgin Islands. My

father's mother took my brother. It wasn't as bad down there. She had a garden. My uncle came up here from the Virgin Islands because of the war. That's the United States. You know, when a person comes from somewhere, the family follows. That's how different ones followed him here, but he came here and got a job in the Navy yard. He stayed there and the family migrated to Philadelphia [to be with him].

Despite the harsh life many people endured in Harlem early in the twentieth century, we also heard warm personal reflections on those times. Many seniors mentioned listening to the radio at home for entertainment, or making excursions to the theatre to watch cartoons on Saturdays. One student asked jokingly, "Didn't you have video games?" Mr. Smith explained,

On Saturday, there were five cartoons. "Flash Gordon" was one. Every week there'd be a new installment. They had a cowboy picture. You take your lunch. Some kids would stay in there all day until they put 'em out, but it was a four-hour show. There wouldn't be grownups there unless they brought their child, because there was too much noise.

During the teen interviews with seniors, I began to recognize a shortcoming of traditional education, the exclusion of the historical and cultural voices of minorities. But when the lived experiences of the Hispanic and African American older adults in Harlem were shared with interested teenagers, they became significant to the teenagers, and this recognition was empowering to the elders.

I asked Rose, an older African American woman who had lived in Harlem all of her life, to respond to Palmer Hayden's painting, "Midsummer Night in Harlem." She said,

This here is nice! [excitedly] This looks like jazz town. This looks like real Harlem! Jazz town. This reminds me of 125th Street. With all our cousins sittin' out there. Look at that [laughing]! Smokey Joe and all of them out there.

Then I asked her, "what would you say if you were one of the women in the painting?"

"Good morning. Hello-How are you?" Then gossip, you know [Rose laughed]. If a lady has a son that she wants to get off, she introduces you. . . . Years ago they used to pick matches, but sometimes it didn't work. If she have a daughter, she's gonna pick a fella that she figures is nice for the daughter. Now, it's up to the daughter whether she likes him or not.

This illustrates Garber's (1995) observation that understanding of culturally based art involves a "longitudinal process" that may encompass "life experiences of persons in the culture studies" (p. 212).

Young participants took in this firsthand understanding of Harlem's rich history through question/answer dialogue with seniors. They discussed reproductions of historically and culturally relevant artwork, which provided visual representations of material culture. I encouraged teenagers to analyze the work as a researcher would study material culture, from various perspectives, i.e., psychological, archeological, anthropological and historical; to consider the original context in time, its change over time, cultural environment, and one's relationship to what is represented in the artwork. The elders were primary sources for oral histories and they could often personally identify with what was represented in the artwork. Their reflections on the circumstances surrounding an image or an artifact and its place in time and culture offered the students an opportunity for a greater understanding of the artwork. Kauppinen (1988) supported this

concept, that older adults can serve as resources for understanding art through their familiarity with events from history. The interpretation of artwork through the reminiscence of elders, and their lived experiences as revealed through the oral history project were sources of understanding of both the artwork and the art making process. Oral history discussion and making art empowered older adults, giving them a forum to share their recollection of the past and compare it with the present.

Art Studio

While the young participants worked with elders toward the design and completion of a senior's collage, all were empowered by the shared experience. Seniors directed teens in developing a theme and creating a web of ideas to symbolically represent their life history in a collage, often portraying circumstances from early in their lives, which positioned them as historical/cultural experts. Teens used their art skills acquired in training sessions with various media (i.e., watercolor and tempera paint, clay and plaster), and the arrangement of found objects to portray the theme while seniors complimented their efforts. Art making, which had been previously perceived by teens as little more than the manipulation of media, began to include individually meaningful content through dialogue about their collage themes (i.e., the culture of Puerto Rico, religion, and childhood).

One intergenerational team (all of Caribbean ancestry) chose Puerto Rico as a theme, creating a web of various ethnic symbols. This group followed my suggestion to explore the meaning of the Puerto Rican subject matter as it was added to the collage, an acrylic painting of a lush island with palm trees, Styrofoam clouds and various objects often found in Puerto Rico constructed from scrap materials. Rita, an older Puerto Rican woman, handed the teens her Christmas card cutouts of Puerto Rican musical instruments to attach to the painting

and explained that she remembered a parranda (party) of singers and noise makers.

At Christmas, they come around the house starting the 24th of December through the 6th of January. People would come playing instruments and singing and drink coquito [a coconut drink for the holidays]. . . . Sometimes, the people played tricks. The Three Kings is the 6th of January. We used to go to the country We go from house to house. We also eat pork.

Rita also decided to add the written names of famous Puerto Rican women to the tropical island. She had been reading a book about the lives of famous women from Puerto Rico, and noted,

Those were women from the past century. They suffered a lot. . . . In those times, it was not so easy as now. You see, now in Puerto Rico most everybody has a house with a balcony and this and that, but before there were three or four people sleeping in the same room. That was different.

The women portrayed in the collage had achieved professions almost universally denied to women during that time. She included the names of a poet, a writer, a movie star, a mayor and other famous women. As Bonita inscribed their names on the collage, Rita briefly told their life stories: Julia de Burgos, Antonia Bonilla, Felisa Rincon, Rita Moreno, Doris Matos de Pasarella, and others.

The presence of seniors influenced the art studio environment. Individually in training sessions, teenagers expressed some fear of incompetence in making art. They'd say, "I can't do that," but in the presence of seniors, "they felt like they were doing something good" according to the art instructor. He also observed that there were less discipline problems when the seniors were around. The teens were

more focused and less likely to be distracted by their peers. The collages done in the presence of seniors included more meaningful content than the materialistic fantasy collages the teens had produced during earlier training sessions including vacation spots, expensive cars and fashion statements. While their previous work was dominated by commercial imagery, the collaborative work showed a thematic focus reflecting the shared construction of knowledge built around personal relationships and dialogue as in the collage of Puerto Rico.

Diminishing Stereotypes

Another result of intergenerational exchange became evident in the maturation of the young participants' view of older adults. One teen said,

She [Maria] changed my view a lot. She is very nice. I thought that some seniors was [sic] selfish, angry, you know, always out for themselves. Like on the buses, they would look at you and you'd have to move all the way to the back.

Both Feniak (1993) and Patten (1994) have also found that intergenerational programs improved young people's attitudes toward elders.

Examination of the intergenerational interactions during the final four to five months of this program illuminated some important social and educational implications. Although social service work had sometimes resulted in casual friendships between young and old, age-related stereotypes persisted throughout the first three months. Several teenagers continued to view seniors as people who simply needed help, but could contribute little to their community.

As the program progressed, these friendships, even though casual, set the stage for intergenerational dialogue that occurred later during interviews and discussions about historically and culturally relevant artwork and art-making. Students provided the artistic expertise in constructing the collage, while seniors' historical and cultural knowledge became the central focus of the collage. As a result, age-related stereotypes diminished, and the young learned more about the treasure of personal knowledge within their community. In this study, dialogue pertaining to the collage theme contributed to understanding and encouraged participants to incorporate their own cultural and historical meanings into art making. During intergenerational interactions, the youth moved from the materialistic iconography of pop culture common in earlier collages during art training sessions to meaningful representations of the ongoing dialogue based on the elders' life experiences. Art was about process (intergenerational dialogue), not product. Art-making represented their vision, their definition of their own relations with previous generations.

What is Art Education?

An expanded understanding of art and art education emerged in this study. A dialogic process having both educational and social implications contributed to the building of community relationships. The process of art education was an ongoing dialogue between two generations from which educational and social implications emerged. The program's goal was not to produce professional artists but to develop community relationships and open dialogue through art education. The art education portrayed was reminiscent of what Gablik (1991) has described as a "more participatory, socially interactive framework" (p. 7), in opposition to modernist practice which has "kept art as a specialized pursuit devoid of practical aims and goals" (p. 7).

Likewise, Hamblen's (1995) postmodern definition of art education, which valorizes the importance of the personal knowledge and the experience of non-experts, was eloquently illustrated during the Harlem program's oral history and art making interactions. All participants shared in the construction of knowledge through dialogue. Seniors, including one elderly woman who summed up her life early in the program as "nothin' much," felt empowered by the central role her life story played in the oral history gathering and art making phases of the program. The experience nurtured caring relationships and mutual respect between generations and cultures and helped establish an environment in which everyone was actively involved in learning.

Conclusion

This research noted several positive educational and social implications that resulted from interactions between teenagers and seniors in art related activities. The Harlem art project suggested that intergenerational discussions about artwork and artifacts pertaining to the history and culture of older participants can enhance the young participants' understanding of art because "they [the seniors] bring history [and culture] to life" through their personal experiences. Intergenerational discussions about culturally and historically relevant artwork led to collaboration with elders in art making. The objective of art making was to transform a theme from the senior's interview into a multimedia collage including paint, in, paper, and miscellaneous materials. In this studio setting, youngsters felt less intimidated and more focused, and they set aside frustrations resulting from their preoccupation with realism. Intergenerational interactions during the oral history and art making components of this study also contributed to the reduction of age-related stereotypes, empowered participants, and generated a community conducive to art education.

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When the Bough Breaks: Loss of Tradition in the Urban Landscape

Esther Parada

Considering the theme of this conference—wide-open spaces¹—has prompted me to think about my life history in terms of landscape/ environments: the first eighteen years of my life were spent in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is set in the gently rolling Grand River Valley of western Michigan; the next four years were at Swarthmore College, amidst the narrow winding roads and lush vegetation of suburban Philadelphia. In the mid-60s I spent two and one-half years at nine-thousand feet in the spectacular Bolivian Andes, as a Peace Corps volunteer art teacher (I'd never seen mountains before the summer we left for Bolivia, but I had a double dose that year, since our two-month training site was at the University of Washington, Seattle, in the shadow of Mt. Rainier). During the 70s and 80s, a good number of Christmas holidays were shared with parents-in-law in the big-sky country of rural Oklahoma, just outside the grand metropolis of Kremlin, not far from what was once the Chisholm Trail. But (aside from relatively brief travel in Europe, Latin America and India) a large part of my life over the last 30 years has been lived in or near Chicago. For the first ten of these years I was located on the top floor of various three-story walk-up apartment buildings. (I came to take this arrangement more or less for granted until the eight year-old daughter of a friend of mine from