

Making memories

graying new york

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"Sycamores, Riverside Park," center, by Ruth Kozodoy, a Bloomingdale Aging in Place member, was among the works at a clothesline art show at the HI New York City Hostel last weekend. Photo: Caitlin Hawke

On a Saturday earlier this month, John and I went to the West 104th Street Block Association Street Fair between Riverside Drive and West End Avenue. BAiP (Bloomingdale Aging in Place), our neighborhood all-volunteer senior community organization — what some might call our NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community) — had a table there, as they do every year.

It's fun to meet and greet other BAiP members as they come and go, scanning the stalls, buying books and other items, and just having a pleasant

Saturday outing on the Upper West Side. From there, we went to the HI New York City Hostel at Amsterdam Avenue and 104th Street, where local BAiP artists were showing some of their work in a clothesline show. BAiP has, among many other activities, a group for new and experienced artists.

Their work was impressive, and once again we ran into BAiP friends and neighbors and had a chance to mingle and munch on crackers and cheese. That same day the hostel was having one of its open houses and some BAiP members joined in to learn about the historic building. The sign engraved outside calls it a Home for Respectable Aged Indigent Females. Today it is part of Hostelling International and well known for its pleasant environment, large garden and front terrace. The Victorian Gothic structure, designed by one of the 19th century's preeminent architects, Richard Morris Hunt, was built from 1881 through 1883 and operated as a residence for, as it says, aged and respectable aged indigent females. It was shut down in 1974 for many building violations, but in its interior was revamped in 1990 and it became a youth hostel. The building was designated a New York City landmark in 1983 and is the largest hostel in North America. Try to get the next tour date; the history of this amazing building is fascinating.

To round out the weekend, we took a drive with some friends to my hometown, Croton-on-Hudson, hoping to visit the Van Cortlandt Manor, which unfortunately was closed for a private event. From there we drove to "my" house on Morningside Drive. It was my house from 1947 until I went to college, and remained my parents' house until I was in my 30s. But someone had the gall to paint it yellow. I'm just kidding, I guess. I am an old lady with my memories of a gray house with white trim. And why did it look smaller? And why did tears come to my eyes?

Of course I had to go and look at the high school, which has a new addition and some very young people hanging around outside. Then on to lunch at the Croton Diner and a peek at the upper village, which was all we had in the way of shopping way back then. Nostalgia is fine, but I was glad to get back to the UWS, where I live my real life. And in my mind, that house will be gray with white trim for as long as I live. So there!