

CAMEOS A2

By James Collins.

BOTH SIDES OF THE FENCE

In 1962 I was working in a defense plant on Long Island. As the Tiger team leader, I had a number of people working for me who were extremely competent and equally well educated. One of these, Herb Z, had one or two more years of experience than I had, but I showed up first and was designated Tiger team leader. A few weeks later, while I was interviewing to fill my support positions, I found Herb, and selected him. If Herb had shown up a couple of weeks earlier, I would have been working for Herb.

For five years we worked together and the team exceeded schedules against all of the competing teams on the program. We were recognized as the most competent and dependable tiger team. As the program wound down the challenges eased off and we all discussed what we would do next. Herb had a great working relationship with the customer and thought that the government was by far the better environment to be associated with to develop a long-term career. Herb often stated that he felt the grass was greener on the other side of the fence. He eventually accepted a job with the Navy in Washington, D.C. At about the same time, I changed companies to get a broader experience and more challenging opportunities.

Twenty-five years later, I was Director of Programs for Kollsman dealing with the Navy. Herb Z was director of a major Navy research operation with more than 400 people reporting to him. On one of my trips to Washington DC, we were able to meet for lunch. We reminisced and discussed all of our former colleagues and their successes in the industry. Herb and I were both aware of each other's position and scope of responsibility.

I asked, "Well, Herb, you've certainly been very successful. Do you feel that the government offered all the opportunities that you had expected before you made that fateful decision to move down here?"

"Jim, I'll only tell this to you, remember my basic complaint that the opportunities were limited to certain people and the politics were nasty? Well, after all these years, I have come to the conclusion that the grass is equally brown on both sides of the fence."

BATHGATE.

In 1968 the South Bronx was in turmoil. New non-English speaking immigrants were moving in and the older generations of immigrants who populated the neighborhoods felt threatened and isolated. They were trying to move out. Drugs and crime, hand-in-hand, expanded and everyone had

personal experience in their families with this blight. The elderly had raised their children, educated them, and the children married and moved out to the suburbs, leaving their parents behind. Now the children were frantically trying to find safer environments for their parents.

Sadie Goldberg and Julia Doonan were sitting in front of their four-story Bathgate Avenue tenement, watching the world go by. Warmed by the sun on a spring afternoon, they sat on their folding lawn chairs. A large unmarked moving van had pulled up in front of the building and four movers with slings, blankets, and wheeled carts, entered the building.

"Julia, someone else is moving out. Who could it be?"

"Sadie it seems every week, we are losing somebody. It could be the Kaplans, the Ryans, or old Mrs. Baldacci. All of them are talking about moving, since Mr. Smith was mugged on the corner."

Twenty minutes later a parade of furnishings and furniture flowed from the building into the truck carried by the four movers. It was almost continuous like ants carrying leaves into an anthill.

"Such careful movers, every piece is totally wrapped with the blankets and tied with the slings. You can recognize the outline of a couch, the outline of the chair and even the carpeting. But everything is wrapped so tightly and so well they can never be damaged."

"Somebody's kids have money so they are very good movers. There is no name on a truck, so I cannot tell where they are from. We'll just sit here and watch them do the moving and when they done we can go in for the night"

For little over an hour, the parade continued. After the last item was loaded into the truck, the four men got into the front and the truck left. Sadie picked up her chair, folded it, picked up her cane and slowly started to mount the steps of the stoop. Julia followed but she was feeling tired and moved a little more slowly. As Julia reached the second floor, she paused to get her breath. Then she heard the screams. Sadie was on the third floor and was obviously hysterical. Julia rushed, as fast as she could go with her arthritis and reached the third floor to see Sadie sobbing as she sat on the steps.

"Julia, I've been robbed. They took everything, even the curtains. There is not a stick of furniture left in the apartment. Those movers were robbers and they took everything out of my apartment while we sat by and watched them load everything into the truck. I didn't even recognize my own chairs and couch because they had them wrapped so well with those gaudy blankets."

The police precinct that serviced Bathgate Avenue experienced so many of these mover style burglaries that they instituted a counter theft policy. From then on, a uniformed police officer had to attend any time a moving van was in the neighborhood. This stopped this particular burglary scheme, but the old people still moved out of the neighborhood.