

## NORA MURPHY NOVELLAS.

By James Collins.

In 1956, Nora Murphy was 78 years old. Originally born in Ireland, she had married and buried two husbands and was now married to her third. She was friendly, feisty, stocky, impeccably dressed and had her hair done on a weekly basis. Her relatives lived on the ground floor of a five-story Bronx apartment house. My family lived on the top floor overlooking the courtyard that led to the entrance of the same building.

On a hot August day, my father was trying to cool the kitchen using the only mechanism available at that time. There were no air conditioners in those days or if there were, we could not afford them. Our solution was simple and reasonable. It consisted of two perforated steel sheet-metal plates about six inches wide and 15 inches across. On the ends were heavy wooden handles and the sheets were interlocked. You lifted the window about 10 inches placed the sliding mechanism vertical in the window frame, extended the blocks as far as they would go to the sides of the Windows and then brought the window frame down on top of the mechanism. The six-inch high sheet-metal plates had horizontal angled slots, which allow the air to come in, and theoretically kept the bugs out. This device weighed about four pounds.

Two separate, unrelated events were simultaneously coming together. As my father tried to place the mechanism in the window frame, it slipped out of his hand and fell four stories to the courtyard. Simultaneously, the Murphys were exiting the entrance and walking down the three granite steps directly below our kitchen window. The frame hit the ground between Mr. and Mrs. Murphy and shattered with a loud crash. The two sheets of metal flew like shrapnel and the heavy wood handles bounced off the brick walls. Miraculously none of the flying debris hit either of them. Without a pause, Nora Murphy turned to her third husband and said, "Ah Murphy "today wasn't your day to go."

After burying two husbands, Nora never expected the close call applied to her. In her mind, this narrow escape belonged to her third husband, not her.

A few years later, after the third Mr. Murphy passed on, Nora bought herself a large Buick. The first day she visited, she left the car double-parked immediately behind a parking space on the street in front of the apartment house. She went to her relatives and asked them if they could park the car for she could not parallel park. Her nephew, John, my brother's best friend came up to our apartment and asked me if I could park "Aunt Nora's" car. I agreed. He handed me the keys and we walked down to the parked Buick. I opened the door and prepared to get in but to my astonishment, I saw there were no pedals on the floor of the car at all.

"John, how does she drive this car? There are no pedals!"

"Jim, let me go in and ask Aunt Nora what's going on and I'll be right back."

About three minutes later, John ran out of the apartment house courtyard and came over to the car.

"Jim, Aunt Nora says she keeps slipping off the pedals when she's driving so she pulled the carpeting covering all of the pedals in the front. She said just get into the car; start it up and just put your feet down anywhere close to where you think the pedal should be and the car will go."

I complied and managed to park the car. Luckily, the Buick was an automatic so there was only a brake and accelerator. There was no need for a clutch. For four more years, Nora Murphy drove her Buick with the carpet covering the controls throughout the Bronx and Manhattan and she never drove slowly.

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