



A Bronx Tale

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Mike A, pop artist from The Bronx.

A sleepy *small-town vibe* reigns in Belmont, where strong family ties and tradition prevail over innovation and change. Join us on a visit to the most exciting and delicious neighborhood *in the Bronx*.



The subway train leaves Manhattan and crosses the Harlem river. After stopping at Yankee Stadium, it winds its way towards Tremont Avenue, shrieking relentlessly as it goes. Low brownstones bathe in the afternoon sun, colorful murals brighten up dull warehouse exteriors, and reflections dance across the rooftops. It's an endless patchwork urban landscape, painted in ochres. I get off at Fordham Rd, and wander along this busy main artery in the warm afternoon sun. I turn onto Arthur Avenue, and notice that the bustle of the crowd hasn't followed me here. It's as quiet as a back alley in a small town.

MURAL STORIES

The first thing any visitor to Arthur Avenue will see is a long, colorful mural. Across it, the quote *The saddest thing in life is wasted talent* is written in bright yellow letters. A Bronx Tale is a stage play, movie, and more recently Broadway

musical that tells the story of a young Italian-American boy growing up in the Bronx of the 60s, where he is torn between different worlds and two conflicting role models. The world of his strict, law-abiding father contrasts starkly with that of his other father figure: local mob boss Sonny, who comes to represent a completely different set of morals. At the wall, I meet up with the artist Mike A. We've agreed to meet here so he can show me his enormous mural, which is positioned in such a way that it directs the viewer's gaze towards Little Italy and Arthur Avenue.

— I wrote a comic book years ago. It's in A Bronx Tale kind of style, so there are Mafia pigeons in it. Then you've got the tomatoes and peppers, the Arthur Avenue food, the pasta and all that. The white negative space in the back with the red and green over it brings the Italian colors in to it.

Mike A is a pop artist and creative director. He's is Italian—and born and raised in the Bronx. When the Bronx Business District asked him to paint the mural, and he understood that the actor Chazz Palminteri had given the project his blessing, it was a no brainer. Chazz Palminteri

THE SADDEST THING IN LIFE IS *wasted talent*

based *A Bronx Tale* on his own experiences growing up in this neighborhood, and produced his one man show in the late 80s, which eventually led Robert De Niro to contact him to ask for permission to turn the story into a film. De Niro wanted Palminteri to play the part of Sonny in the movie, which premiered in 1993. The mural was commissioned to be an uplifting piece, which would express the essence of Arthur Avenue, while also reflecting the story, of course. I'm still in a good mood from seeing the painting when I say my goodbyes and walk on down Arthur Avenue.

A BRONX TALE - BELMONT

Belmont is a neighborhood of about eight blocks North to South, stretching from Fordham Road to 182nd Street, and nine blocks across from East to West. There's a lot more to Belmont than just Arthur Avenue and Little Italy. Puerto Ricans, Albanians and Croatians all call this area home, as do countless other nationalities. Belmont and the Bronx is multicultural in a way that other parts of the city can only try to be. Germans and Irish flocked here in great numbers during the second half of the 19th century, and in the 20s, waves of Italians made their way here in search of a new life. This diversity is perhaps best reflected by the local food culture.

Chef Gabrielle del Gado is half Ecuadorian and half Puerto Rican, and cooks Italian/Spanish fusion cuisine in

what has to be the smallest kitchen in New York. Small plates and craft beer. Somehow, she magics up tostones, bruschetta, and whisky wings within the confines of this minimal space. It's an absolute mystery how her father manages to fit in there as well. He has to tuck his elbows in and tilt his baseball-capped head in order to squeeze past his daughter. Gabrielle brings out even more food! Coconut shrimp, octopus, and shrimp ceviche, all made from recipes passed on to her by her great, great grandmother. Local, home-grown, and as faithful to family traditions as possible.

— Everything is local, from the market across the street. We grow the herbs ourselves, and buy meat from the local butcher. My uncle brews the beer. The old recipes are the most popular ones, so I guess people notice the authenticity, Gabrielle tells us.

After jotting down the family's recipe for sangria, I move on. Back outside on Arthur Avenue, I can't resist trying some incredibly fresh Black Berry Point Oysters from Prince Edward Island. Both sides of this tree-lined artery are packed tight with delis, cafés, pork shops, restaurants, and bakeries. Italian, Albanian, and Spanish voices blend in with English ones. Some cats lazily follow the lilt of everyday life from behind a recessed window. You could find anything you need without ever having to





Gabrielle del Cado, Chef with green fingers.

Arthur Ave, the heart of Little Italy.



YOU KNOW, he didn't speak English and whatever... BUT SOMEBODY WAS SELLING THEIR PUSHCART, RIGHT HERE ON ARTHUR AVENUE. HE BOUGHT IT, AND HE LIKED IT, HE LIKED DOING IT.

leave Arthur Avenue, and a strong sense of family permeates the whole area. I browse the delicacies on offer at Teitel Brothers, a family business that has been in this location for more than a century. Regular customers enter, greet the staff absent-mindedly, and pick up their usual orders. Provolone and gorgonzola cheese, soppressata salami and capocollo ham. Fresh pasta, tomatoes, garlic, and herbs for your tomato sauce. I walk into the Arthur Avenue Retail Market, which is the true heart of Little Italy. Generations of locals have come here to buy sausages, cheese, vegetables, and spices for their dinner tables. Now, a younger generation is also finding its way here thanks to the Bronx Beer Hall, which takes up a significant amount of space at the center of the market. I order a plate of cold cuts, and let the bartender guide me through their selection of craft beers. Grimms Rainbow Dome, a dry hopped sour ale brewed with apricot and conditioned on oak, turns out to be the perfect companion. While I enjoy my meal, I discuss the history of Belmont with Paul Ramirez, who owns and runs the Bronx Beer Hall with his brother Anthony. The Bronx Beer Hall may be fully focused on the present and the future, but it remains firmly rooted in historic soil. It's an example of continuity and change in perfect harmony, and of powerful family ties. When closing time approaches, and the activity in

the market starts to wind down, the music in the beer hall is cranked up, and the seats start to be filled. The market gradually transforms into a rowdy meeting place for students from the nearby Fordham University.

However, some of the traders stay open later, and I make a last pass through the space.

A BRONX TALE - THE LAST OF THE PUSHCART GUYS

Belmont's ties to the past are what hold it together and make it unique. Here, restaurants and stores stay in the same families for generations. David Greco at Mike's Deli offers a selection of some of the largest cold cut platters I've ever seen, and fifty or so different sandwiches.

Richard Liberatore's market stand is located at stall four, the first one to the left of the entrance to the market, and one of the most desirable locations in the market. At Liberatore's garden, Richard sells plants and seeds, like his family has done ever since the market first opened in 1940.

— My father came to the United States in 1936. He was actually born here, but when he was just a year old, the family returned to Italy after the First World War. When he came back at seventeen, his father didn't know what to do with him. You know, he didn't speak English and whatever... But somebody was selling their pushcart, right here on Arthur Avenue. He bought it, and he liked it, he liked doing it.



Proud son
Richard
Liberatore.

A BRONX TALE

THE SADDEST THING IN
LIFE IS WASTED TALENT

