

Only In New York Episode 1

6/9/25

VC: Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: If you've ever lived in or visited New York, you've got a story. Maybe more than one... You know, something that could only happen in the great city of New York. We all have them. So we sat down with some friends to share our stories. And here's the first episode of Only In New York!

KK: So, who wants to go first?

VC: Do we have a volunteer?

JH: I'll go first. I'm Jennifer Hassan. It's a pleasure to be here with everyone telling our New York stories. It was hard to pick just one. But I think this is kind of a good one and it's a definitive one in my life. Rush hour, after a long day at the office. Jam packed, noisy, sweltering R train heading downtown to where I live. At 34th Street Herald Square, a tall, thin young man with blond hair and disarming blue eyes walks onto the train, very handsome. He's wearing a cowboy hat. He steps in, he squeezes into an available seat next to me. Very exotic looking. I'm New Yorker and he clearly ain't from around here. He looks at me and he asks, "Wanna hear a song on my harmonica?" Sure. He pulls a harmonica out of his back pocket and proceeds with this dulcet sort of melancholy version of home on the range. (singing) "Home, home on the range where the deer and the antelope play." Now antelope is the operative word in my New York story. So, the subway car falls silent and the riders are mesmerized or maybe just grateful for this momentary unexpected respite from the rat race. And of course it ends too soon. At 42nd Street he leans over and kisses me on the cheek. He stands up, he tucks his harmonica into his back pocket and walks off into the crowd. Now this was almost 30 years ago. Now here's where it gets interesting, because life takes us in interesting directions. I often joke that my cowboy and that experience was a foreshadowing and like a portent of things to come in my life personally because years later I found a part-time home in the west in Arizona. Now it's not the range where the deer and the antelope play as the song goes but on the wide-open acres of the citrus farmer I met and fell in love with... (KK: There you go!). The first time I had ever seen an antelope was in small herds along the highway. I had no idea what these creatures were and now I live with about a dozen of them mounted on the walls of Mark's house because he's an avid game hunter so the hunting trophies, there they are staring at me. I know it's not connected because of my harmonica-playing cowboy, I ended up here but I think of it as a segway in my life, as I said, a sort of foreshadowing of what has turned out to be quite an adventure.

VC: Yeah, it just seems like it was definitely a sign of things to come for you.

JH: I think so, I like to think so.

KK: Something happened to me recently and that's what gave me the idea of, everybody's got a New York story.

6:28 VC: So why don't you tell it, Kat?

KK: OK, I'm on the Lexington bus going downtown. And it wasn't very full. And I'm looking out the window and this girl is in front of me and she's sort of, I can see she keeps, with her eye, getting my attention and she says something so I get closer and I say "excuse me?" and she said, "did somebody force you to look like that?" I go, "no, did somebody force you?" And then I figure, OK, walk away or just forget it, and then she comes back and she says, "I've never seen anybody like you." And so, I said, "Where do you come from?" Ready? "Brooklyn!" (laughter)

JH: The hinterlands!

KK: I swear to God. Brooklyn.

VC: Brooklyn.

KK: So, if I got this, I figured everybody's got something. (laughter)

VC: Absolutely.

DR: You should have said, I'm a unicorn. Haven't you ever seen a unicorn before?

JH: How do you answer that?

VC: Really... I know. So, Donna, why don't you do yours.

DR: So, I'm Donna, and I live at the crossroads of the East Village and Union Square East, right there on the corner. I'm gonna go back. My story takes place in either 1979, or 1980, give or take a year or two. Coming home from work, my then-husband and I, too tired to cook, we pick up the phone, we call a local Chinese place, order in. Now my floor, the floors in my building, are L-shaped. And we're in the short part of the L. So even if we looked out the door out of the peephole we couldn't see anything. So, we're hanging out waiting for our food. We get a phone call, my husband answers it, the doorman's calling, your food delivery guy is here. The doorman says, can't send him up. I'm not allowed to send anyone up to the 11th floor, you have to come down and get it. He says, no, no, no, send him up. The doorman says no, you gotta come down. Very frustrated because now the food is gonna start getting cold. So, he opens the door and there's a cop standing in front of our door and the cop says, "Go back in your apartment." And my husband says, "no I can't, I gotta go down and get my Chinese food. It's going to get cold." So, the cop said "Oh yeah, OK, fine. So, here's what you do. You can't walk because there's an incident on your floor. So, crawl over to the stairwell, go down one flight, take the elevator down and then reverse the procedure coming back but you can't get off the elevator on the 11th floor." So, my husband, who'd got terrible, terrible knees, and I said, "I'll go." And he said, "no, no, I'll go." Because he wanted to see what was going on. So, he's crawling on his knees and he goes down, he comes back, brings back the Chinese food and while he's gone, I hear a gunshot. Seriously, there may have been two gunshots. I don't know if the police are shooting into the

apartment or if they're shooting out of the apartment, anyway, I'm not going to go look. Although I did open the door and the cop said, "Get back in there!" What was going on was that there was a Hell's Angels family at the end of the hall. Great people. Loved them. So, my husband comes back, we're eating, and it gets very quiet out there in the hall. The next thing we know there's a knock on the door and the cop says, "All clear, you can come out." And we said, OK and my husband turns around to the cop and says hey, we've got some leftover Chinese food. Do you want some? And the cop said no, no, thanks, I really appreciate it, but wait a minute, do you have an egg roll? And I said oh, we just ate the last egg roll! And the cop says yeah, story of my life! And that's my New York story. (JT: Wow) (KK: Crazy) (VC: Scary)

JH: I admire the trek to get the Chinese food. I love Chinese food but not that much.

DR: You can't let it go cold. You can't let it go cold. And that's all there is to it.

VC: Christmas in New York is special, and a great time for New York stories.

JT: My name is Johnny Tammara. Brooklynite, born and raised. Will never leave New York. Never. I'm going to tell you a Christmas New York experience that I had. I'm at the famous toy store FAO Schwartz in Rockefeller Center. I'm the toy soldier there. I've been there since 2018 and I love every minute of it. I get to wear my toy soldier uniform, I'm outside, I'm inside, creating magical, whimsical memories for children of all ages. It's about three years ago, I think. Oh, and I have to also add that during Christmas time I do that during the day and at night time I work at Macy's Herald Square as the man in red. Ah, Santa Claus. (JH: I love it!) So, it's Christmas time, I'm outside. The line is out of control, the crowds are out of control, it's like a week before Christmas, really, really busy and to get to the break room to change, if I went through the store it would take me, I don't know, 15 minutes because people will stop me, take pictures and the crowds, the this and the that, so this particular day I'm like, I'm not going through the store. I'm going around the corner. So, I walk around 49th Street. And I'm booking because I gotta get upstairs, change and walk over to Macy's. So, I'm walking down the street, I'm on 49th between 6th and 5th and all of a sudden, I hear, "Oh look, Luca, a toy soldier! Could we take a picture with you?" And I'm like, grrr, of course I have to do it. So, I turn around with a big smile and there's a woman and a man, her husband and then a little boy and a little sister. So, I said, "of course you can!" So, I turn around, and I said, "Your name is Luca?" And he's like, "Yes!!" I said "oh my gosh, do you know the movie Luca?" He goes, "Uh huh." I said, "I love that movie. It's a great movie." And then his friend says, "Silencio, Bruno!" And it's part of the movie, it's a cartoon. And we take a picture, and they say thank you so much, and I go inside, I go upstairs, I change, I go downstairs, get my coffee and I take my stroll to Macy's. I get to Macy's, I go upstairs, I transform and I sit in my throne in my house. And the families are coming in, families coming in, families coming in. Then around 9:00 I see a family in the little vestibule before they come in and the mother is bent over, I see her back and she's fussing with the children and when they turn around and come in, I notice that it's Luca and his mother and the father and the sister (VC: Awww). And I said, oh, my God, I'm about to blow this lady's mind. (Laughter). So, there I am sitting as Santa and I said "hello and merry Christmas... oh my goodness, it's Luca! (Laughter) And the mother was still fixing his shirt collar and her head went like this – boom—and she goes, "how do you know his name?" I said "Well, I'm Santa! (Laughter) I know all! (VC: Of course!) I also know that you went to the toy store today, and you

encountered the toy soldier. And he said to you, 'Silencio, Bruno!' And the mother is just looking at me like with this stare and this look, like what the hell is going on? So, we sit on the present, we take a picture, say merry Christmas, what do you want for Christmas, he tells me and they leave. And as they leave, she shuffles the boy and girl with the father out the door and she comes over to me and she comes really close to my face and she says, 'how did you know his name? and how did you know we went to FAO Schwartz today? And how did you know the toy soldier said silencio, Bruno?' And I looked in her eyes and I said, 'because I'm Santa (Laughter)' And she started crying and she said, 'I know how this works, but this was the most magical moment of my life!'

VC: Love it. Indeed, that was a great story.

SK: I'm gonna go ahead, if that's OK, because my story is also a Christmas story. It's called My Christmas Angel. I'm Susie Karpman. It's a Christmas story. It happened about 20 years ago. It was Christmas, the week between Christmas and New Year's because I was a teacher and I was off that week and I wanted to see a Broadway show. So, I did what I usually would do at that time, I went to the TKTS booth on 47th Street just to see what they had, although I will tell you that the show I was most interested in seeing at the time was Jersey Boys which I believe had opened that year. Anyway, but I'm like, let's see what I can get tickets for at half price. Well, the booth was closed. I had never seen that happen either before or since. But I think the reason it was closed was that there were no tickets. So, I said OK, plan B. I started walking uptown from 47th Street, and I think I went into every damn theater between 47th Street and the end of Broadway and every single show that I checked in on was sold out. And then I arrived on 52nd Street. It was at—I checked it out—the August Wilson Theater where Jersey Boys was playing. It was like the last theater I was going to hit at that point. And it must have been close to curtain for the matinee. There was a big crowd outside the theater and of course I asked the theater guy who was outside, are there any tickets? No tickets. Sold out. A guy in the crowd turns around to me and says, "do you want a ticket?" And I said yeah, how much? He's like oh no, it's my fifth time, my wife couldn't make it. That's a particular kind of New York story because New York is a magical place, it's full of adventures, sometimes bad things happen, sometimes good things happen, but that was like, I needed a ticket and that was the show I wanted to see. (KK: What a great Christmas story!) Handed to me on a silver platter.

JH: People outside of New York think New Yorkers, they don't have time for each other, they're rude, they're brusque...

DR: I think they're generous.

SK: Not only generous, you know I say that New Yorkers get a bad rap for that reason. You go outside of New York and people are polite but in New York people are intimate. We're in it together and people help each other and it's not formal. You could be on a crowded bus and some stranger will be like, honey, your slip is showing. (laughter) They're family. Now I will have to say that the guy that gave me the ticket was from New Jersey. (VC: OK) It was Jersey Boys, after all.

VC: But he was in New York.

DR: Things move very quickly in New York but he was very generous.

SK: We take care of each other in New York.

AS: We're in the trenches together, it feels like.

VC: Speaking to that issue about New Yorkers being very helpful, I have a story, I'm Vanessa, one of the producers of this podcast along with Kathleen. So, I used to work for Sesame Street at one time and I was coming home from work, and I was taking the crosstown bus that goes across on 66th Street to the East Side. So, I get on the bus, the offices were right by Lincoln Center so of course there are a lot of tourists, right? So, these three Japanese guys, tourists, get on the bus and they ask the driver how can we get to such and such a place and the driver told them, well, you take this bus across, get off at Madison Avenue, then you get on this other bus... so there's all these people standing around and they go, no! That's not the way to do it. What they should do is go across here, take this other bus, and then they only have to walk... Then somebody else chimes in, no! that's not the way to do it. So, they had all these people telling them how to go and I don't know what they did eventually because I got off the bus before they did. So, I'll never know. I thought that was great because all these people, like here are these tourists, and all these New Yorkers said, I'm going to tell them what the best way to go is.

JH: Eager to help.

AS: New Yorkers love to give directions.

VC: Always ready to help. And you know, we're kind of in your face. And they're not just saying, excuse me but you should do this, they're like, no, you need to take this bus.

AS: We own this city, we know where to go, what subway, what bus. (VC: Exactly) You almost feel, like, really proud of it.

KK: You know, I wasn't going to tell this story but with everybody saying how people help you in New York, and it's true I'll make this short. I'm not taking the subways any more, just 'because I don't. And I had a metro card and I went down on First Avenue to fill my metro card so I could go on the bus and I see, I can't even say it, the reason I don't take subways any more, an R, it starts with an R, I freak out and I don't know what to do. It's having a ball on its own, moving around (VC: What was it, Kat?). A rat. (VC: Thank you). So, I'm freaking out, I don't know what to do so I jumped on the turnstile. So, I'm literally, one leg here, one leg here, on the turnstile, and then God was with me because I heard the voice, the L train is coming and I thought thank you, they'll help me. I swear [on] my mother, they got off the train. Nobody looked at me. Nobody gave me... there's this lady on a turnstile, until this man, I was begging him, help, help, and he came over and he took me off the turnstile and we walked hand in hand, or I was on his arm, upstairs to First Avenue and 14th Street and I thanked him and thanked him. I don't think he spoke English but we just waved as he ran across First Avenue, and he really was a hero to me.

JT: Well, you know why nobody gave you the time of day is because you decided to look the way you look, on a turnstile? Are you nuts?

JH: Did he carry you in his arms?

KK: Practically. Really, I would have asked him to give me a piggy back ride to go up but he was wonderful. I didn't know what else to do but the funny part is that New Yorkers are so used to everything.

JT: Nothing fazes them (VC: That's true, that's true).

32:09 KK: I don't know how I got up there, even, but I got out.

VC: So, Anita, how about your story?

AS: OK, my name is Anita Salvate and I live on New York's upper east side, I'm from Westchester, I was born and raised in Peekskill, NY and I came to New York to be an actress, and I'm an actress and a teacher. And this is a story about when I was going to the America Academy of Dramatic Arts, and I was doing a matinee of the play In the Summer House by Jane Bowles, and I was playing a comic relief role. My mother, a friend, my aunt Luciana and my aunt Lucia, my Italian family, came to see me at the matinee. I think my sister was with them, too. My aunt Lucia has a thing about bringing food with her wherever she goes. Whenever she's hungry she decides she's going to eat. So, she's on line to get into the matinee at the American Academy and I'm in the dressing room getting ready to go on, so I don't know any of this. And she begins to crack eggs against this pillar (laughter), and she's peeling the eggs and all the shells are going on the floor and she's eating her egg and my mother was mortified. They're sisters, you know, and she says, "Lucia, you can't do this! You're in a theater!" And she says, "I'm hungry." So, she's eating her eggs. So, my director Herbert Machiz, who was very dear friends with Tennessee Williams. He invited Tennessee Williams to come to the play that day because it was Tennessee Williams' favorite American play, In the Summer House, I don't know why because it's a very strange play. But anyway, he's in the audience that day and Herbert Machiz came out to look around at the audience and he saw my aunt with the eggs and he saw my mother, so he knew it was my family. And he came back in the dressing room and he said to me, "Anita, he says, your mother's out there and your whole silly family." I said, "The day that Tennessee Williams is in the audience, my aunt is cracking eggs against the wall. "(laughter) And I said, "God help me, please help me. (KK: I can imagine). But anyway, it was a day to remember, because he did come backstage and it was just like a moment in my life, etched in my life, and he said to me, I had a comic relief role and he came in and said, "That was a very nice job" and he said to me, "You're very funny." So, I always hold on to that. That's one of my New York stories.

VC: That's great. I can just see her peeling the egg.

AS: There was no stopping her.

JT: Anita and I, the way we're connected, is through Tony and Tina's Wedding. I was in Tony and Tina's Wedding, both of us, a very long time. And the food story you told just now reminded me of when my mother, one of the many times my mother came to the show, (AS: I remember your family coming). One time she got three of the middle tables, very long tables, and basically had it catered. (VC: Love it) She has pasta brought in, and cheeses and meats and vegetables, and all her friends and the whole cast, the whole show, was only at my mother's table because they were eating.

AS: And the other cast members were wondering, where the hell do you get that? They were having baked ziti and focaccia and salad and they're looking at that, when are we going to get ours?

JT: Everybody's going, where do we get that, when are we getting that, when are we getting that?

JT: I said, I'm sorry, that lady brought it from Brooklyn.

JH: Can I add a brief, it's just because we're talking about subways right now. On the platform, waiting for the train, there was, he looked to be a homeless man, he was elderly, and kind of disheveled, his clothes weren't clean and he had a sign and it said "repent now, pray" and he sang, "Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming, repent, make amends" and this cute little boy with his mother pulls on her jacket and says, "Mommy, is Jesus coming on the A train?"

VC: Does anybody else have another story they want to share?

AS: I have another one. I was taking an improv class in the city with the First Amendment Theater Company. So, I'm going up Fifth Avenue, actually I'm going down Fifth Avenue. Suddenly I look and I see this clown dressed in full clown regalia coming up on one of those unicycles in the middle of traffic and he's coming and everybody's staring at him, everybody's looking at him, traffic is stopping and he's pedaling and he's holding out his arms. All of a sudden, I'm staring at him and he looks over and he's wheeling and he goes beep beep and he knew me, I'm like who the hell is this clown on a unicycle going up and down Fifth Avenue, turns and looks at me. I said, I can't believe this! It was my teacher from the improv class.

VC: Thank you all for sharing your stories. We hope you enjoyed them. If you have one, please let us know, and we'll reach out to you when we do our next episode of Only In New York!

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