



The Wizard of The Bronx: Dr. Elias Karmon

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By Eliezer Rodriguez

Recently, I was invited to give a motivational presentation to encourage realtors and real estate professionals to join The Bronx-Manhattan North Association of Realtors (BMNAR) and to encourage more community involvement among the numerous groups that exist in The Bronx. My instructions were for me not to give statistics about the growth of the real estate market in The Bronx as the panel of experts were going to enlighten the attendees with their facts and figures. I was there to tell a story.

My story takes place behind the moon, beyond the rain... No, I am kidding. My story takes place in The Bronx.

Once upon a time, I asked a friend, a few months before he passed away in 2008 at the young age of 98, why didn't he retire and move to Florida after actively serving The Bronx for 65 years. He smiled and quoted Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz and said, "If you want to look for your heart's desire, you do not have to go further than your own back yard."

My friend was Dr. Elias Karmon. Every 5 years after his 75th birthday, he would hold a birthday bash fundraiser for himself and he would donate all the money to Bronx' nonprofits. He donated millions of his own money on top of the money he raised to making The Bronx a better place for everyone because - "The Bronx was his home." If you visit the Bronx YMCA, you will find that the indoor pool and the gymnasium are named after him. There are several buildings in The Bronx that bear his name and recently so does a street. Many churches and non-profits exist in The Bronx because of Dr. Karmon. Dr. Karmon is also a founding father of The Bronx Chamber of Commerce.

When Dr. Karmon spoke of The Bronx he would smile and you could feel the joy and love in his heart. It is true that once you smile with Dr. Karmon, a part of you is forever brighter. That joy has been passed on to every recipient of his generosity. No one loved the Bronx more than he. For the many years of service and all he did to help build and promote The Bronx, Dr. Karmon was affectionately named "Mr. Bronx." Most people knew him as "Mr. Bronx." Dr. Elias "Mr. Bronx" Karmon is and will always be the only "Mr. Bronx."

When I was practicing law, Mr. Bronx would call me and say, "Eliezer, may you take me to The Bronx-Manhattan North Association of Realtors, there is a meeting of the board of governors." I would then, physically, carry his ailing body up the stairs so he could attend his meeting; a meeting of an association where he had been a member for 45 years. For the last five years of his life, when "Mr. Bronx" made an appearance it was because I took him there. It was an honor for me to take him places. He taught me so much about compassion, about The Bronx and about real estate.

On January 1, 2013, five years after the death of "Mr. Bronx," I walked up the same stairs where I carried him on many occasions. This time I walked up the stairs as the new association executive officer of BMNAR. I like to think that my friend put in a good word for me.

As the new AEO, I have been active in preserving the American dream of home ownership. I have traveled the state of New York and beyond to make sure The Bronx real estate market is being protected. The Mortgage Deduction Tax is an example of legislation we are addressing. We are against increasing the Mortgage Deduction Tax as it authorizes counties across New York to impose an additional \$0.25 per \$100 financed on the recording of a mortgage as well imposing additional local transfer taxes. This legislation will discourage the purchase of both residential and commercial real property and will negatively impact economic development in the state.

It is no secret that New York consistently ranks highest in the nation in closing costs. The ever growing number of taxes and fees imposed on the real estate transaction provide yet another reason for businesses and taxpayers to flee the Empire State. Our neighbors in N.J., CT, MA, PA and VT do not impose any mortgage recording taxes. I ask that you take a few minutes of your time and contact your elected officials to ask them to support legislation that promotes the American dream of home ownership.

The new BMNAR will be playing a more active role in assisting the communities we serve. If you are realtor or a real estate professional with a business in The Bronx, but are not a member of BMNAR - come home and become a member. A portion of our membership fees will go to helping our youth and seniors. Why? Because they are worth it! BMNAR will strive to build and sustain the communities we serve. Last year, BMNAR members donated over \$100,000 to charitable organizations.

I miss my friend, "Mr. Bronx." He was a wizard when it came to helping others. "Mr. Bronx" instilled in me a direction. He shared with me that the value of a person lay in what he gave of himself and not what he was capable of receiving. What keeps us going are our memories of the past and our dreams for the future. When there are no visions, there are no memories. He believed that memories cannot be replaced, but new ones can be built. Mr. Bronx taught me that: you have to live by your standards even if you are alone and unpopular. Being principled exceeds the value of popularity. The death of "Mr. Bronx" did not signal an end to his love for The Bronx - as that love now continues through me. Do me a favor, if you live in The Bronx, do all you can to better the street you live on, support your community board and always promote your borough in the best light possible. Why, and "Mr. Bronx" knew this well, because - "There's No Place Like Home."

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