



All's well that ends well - by Steve Freidus

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When I first met Johnny, he wore a work shirt, jeans, and sneakers. They had seen better days.

Looks can be deceiving. And was I deceived. Johnny parked cars in a garage he owned. In an office so small he had to leave it to change his mind, Johnny also kept the books and monitored the comings and goings of the garage traffic.

I broker property in Manhattan and with the very few exceptions my clients are charter members of the Bridge and Tunnel Club. They commute from their suburban homes to their Midtown offices.

Their uniform for the day—and for everyday—is all business. Applicants need not apply unless they wear a tie and a suit (until very recently the club was all male). Four years of college appear to be almost a prerequisite. And for some, an MBA or law degree guaranteed membership.

Johnny was the exception and exceptional. No suburban home for him. Instead a fourth floor walk-up tenement in what today is Clinton, but was then Hell's Kitchen.

His longshoreman father schlepped containers on the nearby docks. His mother waited on tables in an Eleventh Ave. diner. Neither made it to the sixth grade.

By his parents' standards, Johnny was educated. He graduated high school and then entered the School of Hard Knocks. His so-called "graduate work" was jockeying cars, changing tires, and repairing cars.

His recipe worked well: a strong work ethic sprinkled with native intelligence and a winning and pleasant disposition.

He saved his pennies and lived frugally. Ultimately, he purchased the garage and lived happily ever after. But—there usually is a "but"—his child was born with a very serious medical condition. Visits to many doctors were in vain. Finally, an intern diagnosed the problem.

His daughter is now a doctor and the intern who saved her life was her medical school professor.

Johnny is retired, collects a healthy rent from the company who leased his garage, and lives in the

suburbs.

But in all the years I knew him, he never wore a suit and tie.

Never judge a book by its cover.

Caveat: This is a mix, as is most writing, of fact and fiction. Yes, there is a Johnny and he grew up in Hell's Kitchen. His is a rags to riches story. Thanks to an intern turned professor, his daughter is a doctor. As to his parents' lives, take their mini-bios with a grain or two of salt.

Oh, there isn't a Bridge and Tunnel Club, but I hope you get the drift.

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