CITY ISLAND

BY SARAH STINSON-HURWITZ
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City Island flourishes today as a nautical yet artsy community where friendly mom and pop businesses work together to preserve the family atmosphere that the small town creates. Shimmering blue-green water caresses the island at the end of every street while on land chachki shops and seafood restaurants welcome passerby. A salty air engulfs the area causing unseasoned noses to twitch at its foreign flavor but simultaneously alerting residents of the island that they are home. Weathered driftwood, nostalgic works of art, and gifts of nature speckle the Island with their brilliance. It is these things that make City Island such a magnificent place to grow up in. The island represents the perfect mixture of safety, adventure, and family for the upbringing of a child.

Residents of this miniaturized town love begin a part of it and grow together with the community. For example, upon being interviewed about City Island, one small shop owner gleefully explained his favorite part the community to be “the wonderful warm people. Every new generation seems to be a little better, (he continued), more serious, less drugs.” He explained how the lack of friction between ethnic groups was a refreshing break from the outside world where racism and prejudice are often quite present. This man went by the name of Captain Smitty and owned The Silver Arrow Antiques and Things (Meet Captain John Schmidt). Preceding his interview, this adorable 93-year-old character was found using his cane as a drawing utensil to create a heart with an arrow on a snow-covered car. When questioned about his unpredictably innocent and heartwarming actions, Captain Smitty simply responded “this is only normal. . . everyone does it.” His comforting words regarding his actions and the people of City Island represent the nurturing and loving community it has become. The Island is a simple place where people are happy enough to make gentle beautiful gestures to brighten up the day of an absolute stranger. An island of loving, kind people who support and care for each other is the perfect place to raise a child.

While Captain Smitty’s kind words tell the tale of a warm affectionate environment, it can be observed that in city island’s past, this small down did not represent the family-centered city it does today. Beginning in 1614, when the land was taken for the Dutch by Adriaen Block, the hardened European settlers of City Island ruthlessly forced the Siwanoy Native Americans of the small island. Later however, an Englishman by he name of Thomas Pell properly purchased the land. After Benjamin Palmer bought the island in, 1761, he tried to transform it into a town that could commercially rival Manhattan! His town attracted bunches of oyster fishermen, sailors, and hellgate pilots, which today represent a strong part of City Island’s history and a sense of nautical pride for its residents. During WWI and II, the Island’s shipbuilding industry went on to create minesweepers and tugboats, not exactly the delicate inventions one would want to raise their child around (History of City Island). However, theses inventions as well as the sea-toughened sailors and oystermen that might support the observation that City Island would not make a good home for children, are in the past and today the town thrives as a loving center of community growth. What used for the assembly of destructive was ship, now harbors family-friendly yacht clubs and small-boat building companies. What once was a town of weather sailors has since been transformed into a tiny city of small artistic shops and businesses.
These tiny boutiques and stores, combined with the parks, playgrounds and areas of natural habit on City Island create the perfect safe environment for a child to grow up in. The trees and water become oceans of mystical beasts and enchanted forests filled with magical sprites and dragons in the minds of children. They can climb, swim and play to their hearts desire, never making their parents worry over their whereabouts, as the island is a mere 1.5 miles long. City Island’s extremely low crime index, 57% lower than the New York average, which is only 3%, assures parents that their children can roam freely within the safety of the town’s borders, maybe stopping at Papa John’s Deli for a bite to eat, or taking a short swim out to a dock. City Island is a whole 72.8% safer than the other neighborhoods in New York, making the perfect place for children to walk to school, go out for an afternoon jog, or simply take a bike ride to a friend's house. “The estimated chance of being a victim in a violent crime is 1 in 409 (City Island, New York Crime information)!” Because City Island is such a safe place for residency, its inhabitants often allow their children “off their leashes” so to speak, from an extremely young age. The community is extremely trusting, thus is something were ever to happen to a child when he or she was not with a guardian, it is extremely probable that another member of the community, such as Captain Smitty, would help them out. It is the close-knit people and businesses of City Island that give its residents such a sense of safety and protection.

My personal photos of City Island portray the lighthearted cheerfulness shared between the small cottages and businesses of the town. They depict little shops, like Early Ruth's: The Antiques and Art gallery, and the Kaleidoscope Galleries, one of the more famous chatchki stores. The bright colors and contrasts of my photos give them a sense of warmth and character that is so present in the island itself. I took pictures of water and buoys, to show the nautical pride shared among many a resident, as well as shop owners and friends to give viewers a sense of the eccentric, yet sweet character City Island has to offer.

City Island’s warm, loving residents allow it to endure as the family centered town it strives to be. A gentle gem in the midst of a chaotic enormous city of New York, City Island represents a soft-spoken escape to its residents. It’s blend of protection from close-knit population, adventure of beautiful natural areas and love from small proud businesses help to create the perfect environment for raising a child.

Works Cited