

# Lighthouse Plays the Blues in Ukraine (cont'd)

## By Jeremy Bigwood

Lighthouse and I talked over a table of shandies in Kahn's garden and more recently over Facebook Messenger from a much colder Sweden, Poland, and Ukraine.

Long-haired and lanky, with an easy smile, Lighthouse, 50, has led a safe existence playing gigs here and up and down the East Coast. "So why," I asked him, "are you going to Ukraine?"

"I've toured there since 2012," he told me. "...before the Russian annexations of Crimea and Donbas." His group returned again in 2015 and 2017. "At that time, the war was a background presence. There were military checkpoints when we got closer to the fighting in the east of the country," he said. Russia was confined to what Moscow calls "annexed territories." During this seeming lull, however, Putin had surrounded Ukraine with massive troop deployments based just across the northern border in Belarus, in Russia itself in the east, and in annexed Crimea in the southeast. Then, on February 24, 2022, Putin ordered an immediate invasion on independent Ukraine, a truly massive attack, the likes of which have not been seen in Europe since WWII. Putin's forces destroyed all civilian and most military airports, killing thousands in the process.

Lighthouse called Max Tavrishesky—a fellow blues man, friend, and booking agent—who told him Kherson in the southeast of the country had just been invaded. Tavrishesky's aunt and parents were stuck there, with no way out. His dad was crippled and confined to a wheelchair on the 9th floor of their apartment building.

Lighthouse said, "All I could think of was, 'Oh, my God. What to do?'" That's when he decided to tour war-torn Ukraine to support their defense against Russia's aggression. "I'm going to do what I do! I play music! To spread a little bit of hope and joy and lift morale!

Max replied. "Let's do this!"

It took nine months to arrange a tour. Lighthouse said when they arrived in March 2023, "People were still in shock. There weren't many concerts, so I guess we came at the right time. Some Ukrainian soldiers said, 'if you want to help, come out and fight with us.' But that is not what I do! Other things are needed – including music. And that is exactly what I do!"

The war was never far away. In Zaporizhzhia, Lighthouse played a concert "next to a mill that had been hit by a missile just a week earlier." All the windows had been blown out, and the club completely wrecked, but the locals had fixed it up just days before the band arrived and managed to turn it into a nice and warm place again. "It was a great night. A local band opened, and we played together at the end."

In besieged Mykolayiv, Lighthouse said, "I was invited to play a set in the House of Naval Officers where an exhibition of gruesome photographs of the war was displayed." A rocket had recently missed the building by about 50 yards, blowing out all of the windows. Workers had boarded up the windows to prepare for the Lighthouse concert.

"I had also played there last summer on the open-air stage," he added, "and lots of people came. It was great." But the blare of air raid sirens accompanied their performance. Lighthouse realized "that a rocket or drone hit could happen any time."

When Lighthouse returned this year for his three-week Ukraine 2024 tour he played his first performance in the town of Peremyshl on the Polish Ukrainian border. The date was February 24, the two-year anniversary of Putin's invasion of Ukraine. His last two shows are scheduled in Kyiv.



*Robert Lighthouse playing at Sunduk in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo: Jeremy Bigwood*

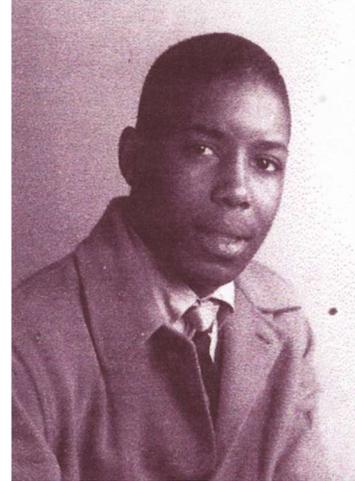
“I’m not under the illusion of thinking I’m doing something super-important,” Lighthouse said. “I’m just happy I’m able to do some little thing that will lift the spirits of a suffering people. I’m doing my little bit...it’s the only thing I can do.”

And when you think about it, that is a lot!

## Recollection Part 2: Walking Down Mount Pleasant Street (cont'd)

By Bette Davis

*Bette's older brother, Johnnie Davis. Photo: Bette Davis*



Our neighborhood Safeway was between Lamont and Kilbourne where the Best World market is now located. On the corner of Lamont Street was David's Men's Shop. My brother Johnnie shopped there to buy shirts and men's slacks to maintain his Ivy League dress style. I believe the owner thought a lot of Johnnie for patronizing his shop. Johnnie was a hardworking man who liked to dress well. Johnnie was admired by everyone who knew him.



*Heller's Bakery (to left, Will, Louis and Augie Heller, circa 1952) in the building that is currently Elle. Photo: Courtesy of Mara Cherkasky*

Down the block were the liquor store and the Georgetown cleaners and Samber's grocery, which are still there. Across the alley there was Heller's Bakery which sold delicious pastries, cherry vanilla ice cream, eclairs, apple turnovers, donuts, and the pound cake with rum-flavored icing that my mother liked. Johnnie would stop there to bring Mama a slice of it. In the middle of the block there was Mr. and Mrs. Pumphrey's small shop which sold delicious ham sandwiches. My mother patronized the Sorority shop owned by a nice lady in the same block.

Across the intersection at Lamont was another cleaning business. Further down this block were the District Grocery Store which we called "DGS" and High's Ice Cream store. Mama sent us to DGS to buy fresh fish: porgies, croakers, butterfish, and trout.

There was a Gulf gas station at the corner of Kenyon where McCormick Paints is now. My mother had purchased a big, green, used Oldsmobile convertible for us from a young White guy who lived in the 3400 block of 17th Street. In those days gasoline was 25 cents a gallon. My sister, Ora, drove the car because she had passed the driving training course in high school.

Just before Hobart Street, there was another gas station called Bill's Timely Service Station. They served Esso gas there. And across Mount Pleasant was a pharmacy in the Kenesaw Building at the corner of Irving Street that didn't have a welcoming atmosphere for "colored folks" as we were referred to at the time.

Mount Pleasant has been home my home amidst many changes and it's still a "pleasant" place to live.

Next month: Bette recalls work, school and integration.

## **Talking Diversity: Our Park Regent Neighbors (cont'd)**

### **By Rick Reinhard**

Recently Village member Eddy Perez saw an announcement about a program of documentary shorts at the MLK Library on Oct. 20th. One of the films was about the Park Regent by Victoria Broadus who had lived there for three years while in grad school at Georgetown and who teaches at Oberlin College in Ohio. Seven of us from the Diversity Committee attended the program and came away very impressed.

Here was this large building that none of us long-time residents really knew anything about!

As revealed in the film, the residents had created a community behind their front door. At the same time, Village was attempting to nurture a community in the broader Mount Pleasant. However, for the most part we were non-intersecting circles!

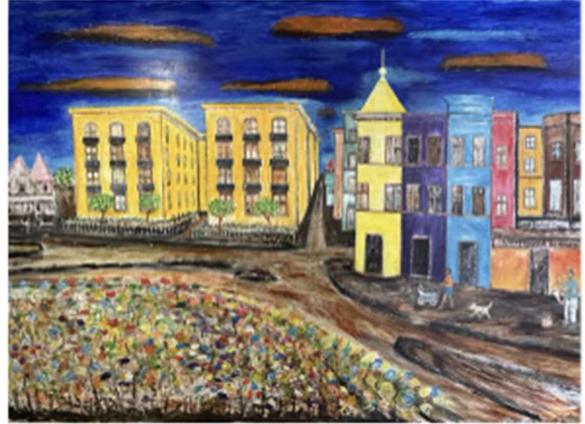
What can we learn from this missed opportunity?

It seems that prior to late summer 2021 there was a general sense of the tenants getting along quite well—fueled perhaps by what family ownership of the building brought with it and then even more importantly by the spirit of building manager Art Bildman, who is also a member of the ownership family.

During the summer of 2021 tenants in the 96 units were told that the building would be sold.

With the cohesion and general camaraderie that existed as a base, Sam D'Amico and Carol Earnest set about forming the Park Regent DC Tenants Association (PRDC-TA). Sam sent out a letter on their Google group and Carol created a website. Eventually 56 units joined the PRDC-TA. The first meeting took place in October 2021. There was a great deal of energy, so much in fact that Sam pulled back and others stepped up. The goal was to organize around the rights granted by TOPA—the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act - which ultimately led to two options: one, buy the building; or two, form a unified front to negotiate for the best options related to having to move out.

It was prohibitively expensive to buy the building but their work to help craft lease termination agreements the PRDC-TA considers to have been very successful. The owners offered very generous buyouts, and all but 6 residents took them. These six were guaranteed a return at their current rent. The Tenant Association was also able to have significant input to the process so that American Housing, a socially responsible, mission-oriented development corporation became the new property owner. A small additional plus, the new owners, at the urging of the PRDC-TA, agreed to preserve the two murals in the lobby. Victoria's documentary was made during this process and reflects the many positive aspects of the community.



*Artist Cherif, a former tenant of the Park Regent and creator of the building's colorful mural showing the Park Regent and the northern-most block of Mount Pleasant's retail strip.  
Photos: Rick Reinhard*

The story of the mural blends several strands of tenant history at the Park Regent. I very recently (March 10th) serendipitously encountered the muralist Cherif at Eastern Market. I told him that I remembered him from a Mount Pleasant Day where he was helping children paint in front of Bestway. He was dressed then and now in painter's overalls. He told me that in 1997 he was living on Sherman Avenue and working at the Starbucks in Cleveland Park. His bus route took him past this big white building that just called out to him. So one day he went up to the door and they had an apartment, very small. The community was interesting. He wasn't an artist then. There was a change of ownership and Art Bildman became the building manager. Cherif loved Art and the vibe that emanated from him. He knew that there was a larger apartment available and he moved in. He told Art and he said fine! After Cherif broke up with his girlfriend (who had told him that he was an artist) he began to paint. One day Art asked him to paint a mural in the lobby! That's how it was then. Cherif was born in Cote d'Ivoire and grew up in France. He resided at the Park Regent from 1997 until 2013.

When Sam D'Amico arrived at the Park Regent in 2011 he was just looking for an apartment, a place to live. He had seen the peace banners and they were an attraction, but then he met Art, who was so welcoming and genuine, "a real salt of the earth guy." Sam said to himself, "I'm in!"

Five years later in 2016 Carol Earnest moved in. She had never lived in a city before and was feeling a little anxious. She met Sam almost immediately and his spirit made her feel safe. She was in, too!

Sam and Carol both describe the residents—as different and eccentric as they were—as folks who uniformly arrived and stayed. There was remarkably little turnover in the apartments! Before TOPA organizing began, a primary building activity for many was happy hour at their adopted local bar—Marx Café.

Finally, our Village member Stella Tarnay shares her reflections on her time at the Park Regent. Stella has lived in the building since 2017. "I noticed the Park Regent because of its slightly funky, historic appearance, and then its beautiful peace banners during the holidays. It is one of those throwback, quirky buildings that still have personality, like Mount Pleasant itself as a

neighborhood. I got to know people in my building when I decided to put some potted plants on the front stoop. Art (Bildman) being Art, who also made the mural paintings possible, said, if no one complains, you can keep them there. Soon I had cosmos and rosemary growing on the stoop. People would stop and say hello to me, and ask me what I was doing, and that's how I got to know people. They began to call me Plant Lady! When the Tenants Association formed to fight for better terms with the sale, we all made many new friends. I only wish it didn't take a building sale to get us to know each other!"

Stay tuned. The Diversity Committee is planning to show the documentary on the Park Regent and have the filmmaker present either in person or via Zoom; visit the murals after the program; invite residents from Mount Pleasant apartment buildings and have a roundtable on how the Village can be more relevant to apartment residents.