

# Private Circulation

The Bulletin for Proposals

## The Gift Pool

**I**N November 2004, the New York City police department had finally returned my camera. They had confiscated it three months earlier, and it was apparent that they had thrown it around—there was a new dimple on the top left corner and another gash on the side. But it worked, so I didn't complain.

I first saw the pool from Rose's ground-floor apartment when Max and I were invited in to sign the lease. The house had been in Rose's family since Williamsburg had been, what she called, a family neighborhood. The neighborhood was different now. Most of her family had moved ten or fifteen miles north-east over the hill to Queens and the top two floors of her home were no longer rented by families, but by young out-of-towners like myself. Some of her family, however, had not yet left. Rose's sister lived just around the corner. And her daughter's family was staying with her until they could find a house in Queens.

We sat on a bench at a table across from her. My back was very close against the wall and Max was to my right. Almost immediately she gave us the keys to the third-floor apartment and told us to move in any time and not to pay rent until the first of August, which was two weeks away. There were red, yellow, and blue toys on a baby's blanket. Across the table, behind Rose, there were vertical floor-to-ceiling blinds that swayed easily with small breezes. They were nearly shut but I could see the pool in the backyard behind the chairs and the portable grill. From there the backyard looked as if it routinely hosted family gatherings.

You could tell Rose loved to be around kids. That's why she rented to us. That's why

she rented to the kids on the second floor who shot fireworks out the windows. And that's why she rented to the drug dealers who lived on the third floor before us. On Easter Rose left a basket of candies outside our door. The swimming pool was also a gift. Rose had it built for her grandchildren several summers before, who used to come over to swim and sunbath, but the pool had not been used this summer and neither had it been cleaned. From the roof it was evident that the backyard was going to seed.

The single window in my bedroom faced south toward the backyard. The Venetian blinds were always down but tilted open. From my desk I could see the pool and the rose bush that was adjacent to the gravestone. No one believed me that there was a gravestone in the backyard.

My idea for the project was to document the pool every day without fail: I would go to the roof each morning to make a photograph. I started the morning after a strong wind. It was hard to know how the story of the pool would unfold—I was either expecting slow disaster or eventual reconciliation.

But the backyard was not completely unused. The chubby grandson and his friend occasionally shot hoop with a flat basketball. Sometimes his dad played for ten or twenty minutes. From my desk I could hear the father yelling loudly at his boy; he thought the boy should be tougher, the toughest. The ball came close to my window. In the summer the sound of the basketball reverberated sharply, which was odd, since the ball was flat.

In August, with no air conditioning, short cat hairs stuck to my skin. My dual window fan, the Comfort Zone, jammed repeatedly,

screaming until I clubbed it with my fist. And it became apparent that the pool would probably never be used again. The window was open and I thought of jumping from the roof into the pool. The pool became more and more like a pond, attracting mosquitoes. At night, uncovered legs were blanketed by itches. Hardly uncommon circumstances for the horse latitudes of August, the month when the people who can leave have already left. The month when people who have pools swim in them.

I stopped photographing the pool each morning on 7 January 2005 after losing confidence that the project was a worthwhile pursuit. Occasionally, when I visit friends who still live in the apartment, I go to the roof and look down at the pool. Nature has begun to take over. But the house itself has also decomposed considerably. The downstairs neighbors have cut holes through the walls. During rainstorms water pours through the ceiling tiles and down the staircase. The carpeting from the hallway has been removed, exposing a bare patchwork of plywood. Whole sections of the ceiling are missing or caved in and the floors bow as if toward a hidden underground vortex. No one is allowed on the roof because it is rotting through. And, although the two are inextricably linked to each other, I sometimes wonder if the pool, which I always expected would soon destroy itself, will outlast the building.

*Seven of the thirty-two photographs of the pool are reprinted in the following pages. The remaining twenty-five photographs are available in Appendix A at [privatecirculation.com](http://privatecirculation.com).*



28 NOVEMBER 2004



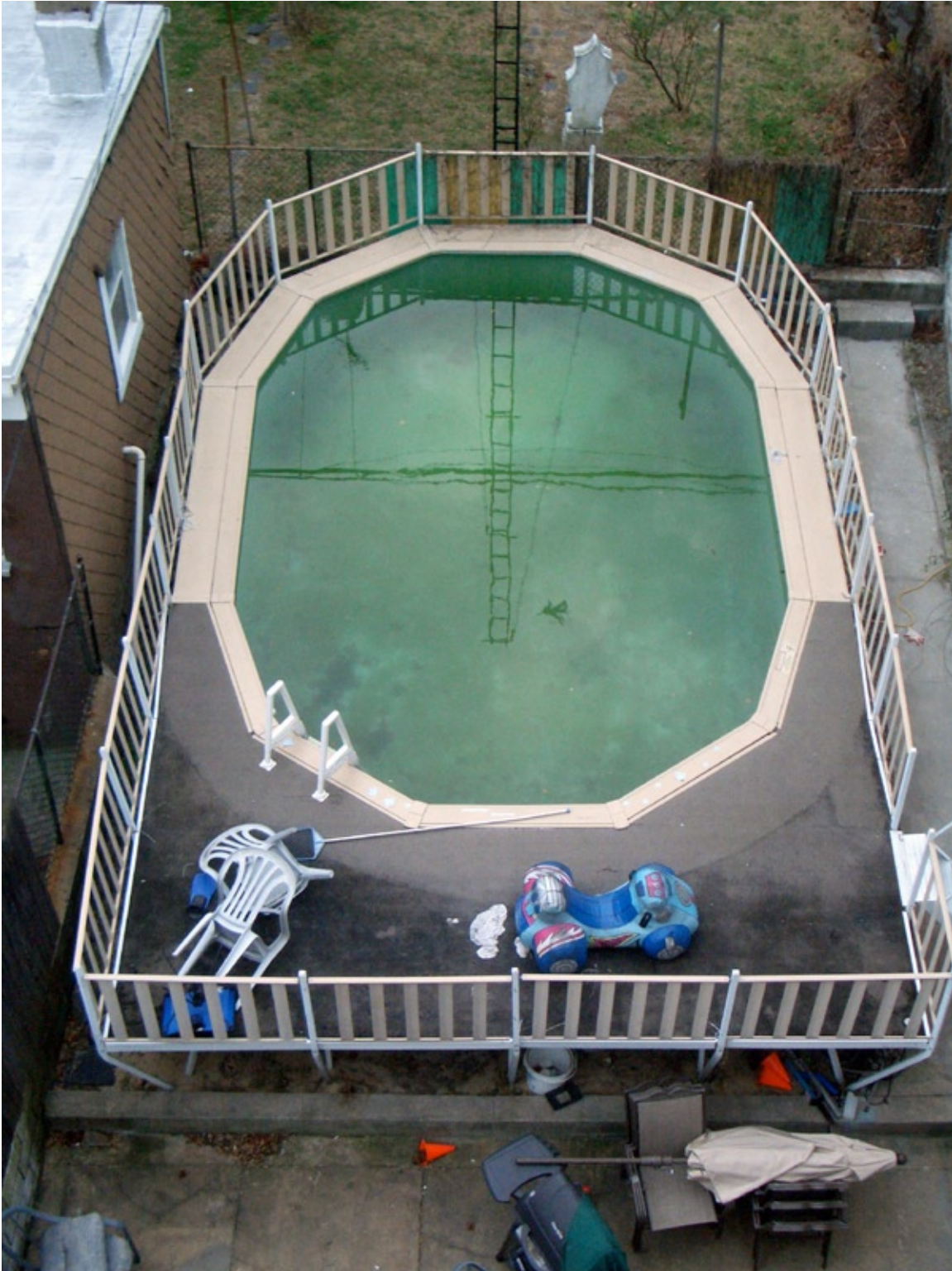


29 NOVEMBER 2004



8 DECEMBER 2004





12 DECEMBER 2004



19 DECEMBER 2004





4 JANUARY 2005



7 JANUARY 2005