

**Janet Zweig*****Your Voices, 1997***

Walton High School, Bronx

**Janet Zweig**

Artist

My name is Janet Zweig. I'm an artist living in Brooklyn, New York. I've been working primarily in the public realm for the past 30 years. In this audio, I'm talking about my very first public art commission, *Your Voices*, at Walton High School in the Bronx.

In 1994, after I was selected for the Walton High School Commission, I spent many days walking around the school. It was very different than it is today. In the typical classroom, the students sat mostly quietly at their small desks, some looking bored or tired. It was very quiet during class periods, but right when the bell rang, the halls were filled with noise, students shouting at each other, finding friends, passing notes, all while rushing to the next class. I asked students a lot of questions. They were bursting with opinions. This led me to the idea of making a place where their voices could be heard.

At the time, the school construction authority was renovating the school, they were removing all the old beautiful art deco details like clocks and brass doorknobs and wooden doors and marble columns and walls. I asked to salvage only the marble for the lobby walls, but it was very hard to convince them of this. I finally succeeded. I replaced that marble and made 12 bronze boxes placed on the two walls. The bronze boxes each have a different word in raised letters. Each has a slot and a lock. The words are wishes, fears, dreams, secrets, problems, opinions, worries, suggestions, fantasies, complaints, obsessions, and ideas.

My original plan was that each year, the notes would be compiled and made into a book placed in the school library, but that ran into some resistance. Eventually, we settled on a team of students and teachers who would vet the notes and choose which to publish in the student newsletter. For several years, a counselor named Jim O'Toole took this project on and published the notes. When he moved on, the next principal said she would keep the tradition going. I feel that the piece belongs to each class and each administration, and it has to be up to them to use the boxes and express the students' voices in whatever way they choose. As Tom Finkelpearl explained at the time, however they used them, the presence of the boxes are always a reminder that the students can have a voice.