BIG IMAGE OF HUNTS POINT

<link href='http://fonts.googleapis.com/css?family=Libre+Baskerville:400,700,400italic' rel='stylesheet' type='text/css'>

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On one corner of the room, an arm lifts from inside a black curtain around a bed next to the window. A middle-aged woman wearing a bright pink t-shirt and jeans comes out, sniffing and stumbling through the room to the kitchen. “What’s with all this racket,” she says. “I can’t sleep. I have to work tonight.” Frankie continues to play the bongos. The man sitting in the corner is still staring at the television, transfixed. There are four people in a cramped, one room apartment yet the only sound that could be heard are the loud beatings of the bongos and the slow breathing of the men in the room.

The kitchen is bright yellow, clean and looks almost untouched. Brenda opens the drawer and takes a needle out and hands another one to the man wearing the bright red t-shirt. Both pull in the heroin, strap a plastic wire around their arms and try to find their veins. The man is lucky, Brenda find a vein and jabs the needle in. Now it’s her turn. Her friends probes and prods but can’t find a vein fit enough for him to use. Brenda gets impatient, she takes the injection and plunges the needle herself. Small drops of blood bubble out of her raw and exposed gash, trickling down her arms like a steady stream. She washes it away and goes back to her bed. Half an hour later, she gets a call. Brenda goes to the bathroom, cleans herself and puts on fresh clothes.

A man is waiting for her downstairs in a car. $20 dollars for sex, $ 10 for a blowjob. Brenda’s target for the night is at least a hundred dollars . She needs the money for heroin. It’s ten dollars a pop. “I have been using since 18- started with marijuana, then with cocaine and then heroin and then I started shooting up. It’s a high school thing. Trying to be a part of,” she says.

Brenda Vega is 46 years old, she was born and raised at the Points. Her father was a drug peddler, she said growing up she had everything she ever needed. “I had a good childhood. I can’t complain. When I started growing up that I started being messed up. Maybe it was the environment,” she says, “When I first did my injection I didn’t feel it. I was like what is this, then I started doing again and then I started feeling it and I liked it, and then I started doing it more. The rush, the rush.”

Growing up at Hunts Point, Brenda never thought she would ever join her friends on the streets. She got married and had four children. Two of them were born inside prison after she was arrested for drugs. It took her 33 years and desperation for a shot of heroin to get inside a car with a man. “When I saw myself that I didn’t have no money, there was no drugs I could sell, there are no jobs. I was like let’s go make some fast money with a friend of mine and we went man! That’s how I did it. I jumped in the car with a man and that’s how it happened,” she says. She was scared. She fought hard to say something appropriate to the man but she blanked out.

Her children were taken away by the city’s Administration for Child Services, her sisters took one each and the rest landed up in jail. It began one night when Brenda and her husband were living at a shelter in the Bronx with the children. Brenda had popped a few Xanax tablets. She doesn’t know what happened except that her mouth was dry and her husband was screaming. She grabbed her purse and took out her knife and jumped at him. She knew she wanted to kill him. Next morning, when she woke her family had disintegrated. The ACS intervened and took away her kids. Her husband left her and went to a shelter for single men.

“He is clean, my husband is clean. I want him to be part of no drugs. He is a good man, he is a good man. He was on drugs and then he came clean. He doesn’t want to be involved,” she says.

The knife that she took out to plunge into her husband’s heart is the only protection she has when she is out on the streets in the dead of the night. When technology reached Hunts Point, it meant not just less police interference but also more convenience. The days of long furs and skimpy thongs strutting on the streets and leaning inside cars are over. The streets these days are usually deserted. A few women troll about for a few quick bucks near parks and at some odd corners. But with technology it’s now even more difficult to make the quick split second decision before getting inside a car or rushing to an alley behind a truck following nothing but street instincts. Brenda doesn’t have a pimp, her clients look her up on ads and call her on her number that she changes quite often. When she gets desperate for a few bucks and for a quick shot she walks out of the building to the corner.

One day a man pulled up his car and asked her to get in the back seat. She knew something was wrong, she felt her knife inside the purse and said no. The man clenched his fist and looked at her with bloodshot eyes. He was angry and she was alone. Brenda’s legs froze, her hands lay limp folded on her bag with the knife inside. “ I had to talk him out of it. I said just be easy, easy. We will do it this way- this way, everything is ok. That’s how I got out of it.”

Brenda looks older than her age, her tired, wrinkled skin spreads out like worn out elastic around her owlish face. Her eyes are sunken and hollow. Her thin lips barely mask the gap between her front teeth. Her high forehead has deep lines cutting through like razor gash. She is painfully thin and walks with a slight hunch. “I wanted to be a nurse! I tried to work with disabled kids- and then I got into drugs. They put a smile on my face. Most got lost in the sauce,” she says while wiping her constantly running nose on the sleeves of her faded, blue jacket.

At a corner next to her makeshift bed are a few green candles and paper flowers neatly arranged in front of a dresser. “Oh I miss Millie, she is the only friend I had, I had known her for 19 years” Brenda said. Millie was the oldest among the residents. She died in January of sepsis. A heroin addict, she got a kick out of injecting heroin in an open wound on her arms that refused to heal. The wound festered into gangrene. Brenda found out about her death three months later in April. Everyday she lights the candles and mumbles a prayer. “It scares me in a way and in a way it don’t. She had abscess she kept shooting in the abscess if I have abscess I am not going to keep shooting in the abscess why will I keep shooting in the abscess?” she said before slipping inside the kitchen for one more shot.

Brenda leans against the kitchen counter and pulls out the syringe. Drops of blood spurt out and falls on the wall as she turns towards the sink to wash it off. Three tiny drops of blood splashed across a bright yellow wall. There are small faint brown spots of dry blood lining the wall like freckles.

“I need help. I am just tired of being tired- I am using drugs since I was 18 I am 46 years old, I want my kids back in my life. I am tired of using drugs. I need help,” she says with her eyes glistening with tears before walking back to her corner in the room.

Hunts Point: A History of Decay

Hunts Point is located in South Bronx in New York City. It has one of the largest food distribution facilities in the world. The area also increasingly became known for its [high crime rate](http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/crime_statistics/cs041pct.pdf) , violence and drug problems. The area’s police precinct consistently records the highest violent crime rate per capita in New York City. More than half its population lives below the poverty line.

[Drug related deaths](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/datatable33.pdf) in Hunts Point and Mott Haven is the highest in New York City. Deaths due to heroin overdose in the area is also the highest in the city.

The Europeans first settled in Hunt’s Point in 1663. Edward Jessup and John Richardson arrived on the peninsula and purchased the land from the indigenous Wekkguasegeeck tribe of the area. After Jessup died, his widow Elizabeth, entrusted the land to Thomas Hunt Jr., her son in-law, after whom the area is named.

Between 1663 -1850 several wealthy landowning families occupied the peninsula including H.D Tiffany, a member of the family that owned the famous jewelry and decorative arts store Tiffany & Co.

After World War I, Hunts Point’s status as a residential and recreational spot for the city’s elite came to an end. A train line was built along Southern Boulevard. Apartment buildings replaced mansions.

In the early 1900s there was massive industrial & business expansion in the area because of the access to the Tri-State region and the existing rail lines running through the Hunt’s Point area.

The New York City Produce market opened in 1967 and Hunts Point Meat Market in 1974. Hunts Point was designated as an In-Place-Industrial Park in 1980.

After World War II, 170,000 people displaced by slum clearing in Manhattan belonging mostly to Black and Hispanic community moved to Hunts Point.

The SOUTH FERRY HOTEL- WEST 57TH STREET

Between 1960s and 1980s there were frequent cases of arson. Almost 60,000 residents, approximately two-thirds of the existing population, left the neighborhood during the 1970s.

The frequency of truckers going to markets gave rise to prostitution in the area. According to some approximations, [eleven thousand truckers](http://books.google.com/books?id=RQGvwRPPciMC&pg=PA221&dq=Hunts+Point&hl=en&sa=X&ei=fQAVU-C3IIP70gGy04C4BA&ved=0CEQQ6AEwBTgK#v=onepage&q=Hunts%20Point&f=false) ply through that area daily.

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx2profile.pdf>

heroin overdose related deaths in the city.

DATA:

INTEACTIVE TIMELINE OF HUNTS POINT AND ITS HISTORY

DRUG PROBLEM

<http://farm7.staticflickr.com/6060/6326818429_78dccb6a2d_o.jpg>

<http://www.bronxhistoricalsociety.org/bronx_archival.jpg>

<http://assets.nydailynews.com/polopoly_fs/1.1617633.1392677446!/img/httpImage/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/landscape_635/bronx-court-mural.jpg>

HEROIN IMAGES:

<http://www.svar-bookazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Jackie-Hunts-Point-Bronx.jpg>

<http://www.svar-bookazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Cynthia-Hunts-Point-Bronx.jpg>

<https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSJ-cozqEjDfQojabzXK0iv6Bd_qkwdZNQIrD6Qh96_f9GnocfH>

<http://books.google.com/books?id=o91dwhOMlXYC&pg=PA208&dq=Hunts+Point&hl=en&sa=X&ei=fQAVU-C3IIP70gGy04C4BA&ved=0CD4Q6AEwBDgK#v=onepage&q=Hunts%20Point&f=false>

<http://books.google.com/books?id=RQGvwRPPciMC&pg=PA221&dq=Hunts+Point&hl=en&sa=X&ei=fQAVU-C3IIP70gGy04C4BA&ved=0CEQQ6AEwBTgK#v=onepage&q=Hunts%20Point&f=false>

<http://books.google.com/books?id=U66IkdZMqYkC&pg=PA139&dq=Hunts+Point+heroin&hl=en&sa=X&ei=1wAVU7iQG4Tw0QGZ7YDACw&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Hunts%20Point%20heroin&f=false>

The Southern boulevard in the Bronx is lit up with red and green christmas lights flickering in the dark mist. Strollers with babies cramp the wet pavements knocking off hangers full of cheap clothes on sale. Glass doors open and close with hot, dry air meeting the cold wind outside, a small relief for the panhandler leaning against the cold wall of a store, craning his neck towards the door to warm his freezing, wizened face. At a corner, a gas station has a big sign in red and white- MILK SOLD HERE.

The boulevard ends and Hunts Points begins. A few delis line up the bare, cold streets serving burgers to young Hispanic men with heavy metal jewelry and black caps. Big cars with rolled up thick black glass windows line the streets. A man is walking briskly, singing aloud and pounding his fist in the air, frothing every time he says, “fuck” before disappearing into the corner.

A woman crosses the street, puts her hand in her denim pockets and takes out a $10 bill. A man in a white hoodie is waiting for her across the street. She stops and says hello and slides the $10 bill into the man’s hands. He takes out a small glass vial in a white packet and hands it to her before walking away. No nervous looking over the shoulder, just a casual amble for a specific purpose. The whole transaction lasts for just a minute. Heroin was bought and sold while an NYPD surveillance van stood parked around the curb.

“Business is always good mama, as long as there are truckers and drugs, there is money,” Titto said flashing his dirty, yellow rugged teeth that lit up his brown, unwashed face with bulging eyes, lined with a thin, prickly stubble. You can’t miss Titto on the street. Some people call him “curly” for his long, wiry, wind swept hair. When he walks, he looks like a whirling fan with his hands flailing wildly by his side. It’s as if a strong wind has lifted him and knocked him to the side as he helplessly stays suspended moving without control pitchforked on the road. He carries his world in a black, plastic bag which he drags across the street making a clatter of tin cans as he waddles along. His green, fleece jacket is caked with brown, pasty mud, his fingers are black with dirt. Titto runs errands for everyone. From cigarettes to condoms to the numbers of the best hookers of the block, to tips to the cops, he can get you anything. “Don’t enter inside the buildings. Buildings not good, if cops comes, you are in,” he warns me as he leaves me outside a building notorious for drug use and prostitution.

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