

## ROZARIO Spotlight

### **The Spirit of an Entrepreneur Should Never Fade**

*By: Rovin R. Rozario  
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It was a cold blistery Tuesday morning. I got on the B38 bus headed to work in downtown Brooklyn. As was usual, the bus was crowded with spirited passengers cramming into a small space to get to Dekalb Avenue and Flatbush Avenue to get to the subway. There were students chatting about school; some with enthusiasm, others with disdain. Nothing was out of the ordinary. After all, this is Brooklyn, USA.

When the bus finally arrived at Dekalb Avenue everyone got off, with the exception of two to three passengers who intended to continue the ominous journey to Borough Hall. There was one passenger who boarded the bus, who caught my attention immediately. From my observation, he was certainly elderly, probably 80-90 years old. His coat was green in color and tattered, with holes in the sleeves and at the base of the coat. His hair was all gray and disheveled. His pants were black and discolored and appeared a bit less than clean. He was wearing black shoes. His laces did not match. He used a cane for support. His facial hair was certainly not groomed. His eyes were brown but glossy as if glaucoma had won the long and drawn out battle. The gentleman sat directly across from me. From looking at him, you could tell

that he looked worried, concerned and certainly uneasy.

By comparison, I was wearing a traditional black suit, white shirt and blue striped tie. My shoes were black as well and polished and my shoe laces matched. My wool coat was almost new, clean and pressed, and my fedora matched my coat. I looked like I had purpose. Like I was on my way to something important.



*Rovin R. Rozario, Managing Partner*

The gentleman looked at me and said “you are very well dressed!” I thanked him for the compliment and asked how he was doing. It would have been so easy to brush him off or to simply ignore him. I could tell, however, that he just wanted to talk to someone, even if it was for a brief moment. He wanted to

feel connected and relevant and human. He responded by saying that he was fine. A bit under the weather, but in good spirits. I told him that in the winter we have to take care of ourselves even more, to which he agreed.

The gentleman then proceeds to ask me the nature of my profession. I told him that I am an attorney and that I own a small law firm in downtown Brooklyn. Immediately I could see in his eyes how proud he became, as if I were living out his hopes and dreams. Like I was the grandson or great grandson he never had. With utter pride and certainly some sadness, he explained to me that he, like me, was once an entrepreneur. He told me that he once owned a shoe repair shop in Bedford Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy), Brooklyn in the late 1940's but later closed the shop because when he was drafted into the Army and deployed to Korea.

I was simply amazed that I was actually talking to a war hero and veteran. He told me how proud he was to serve his country and how lucky he was to make it back home although many of his friends and fellow soldiers were not so lucky. It was a sad moment for both of us. For him, the obvious. For me, it was the witnessing of a war hero in such a desolate state. It almost seemed like he was forgotten, pushed aside and now the appearance of a burden on society. It angered me. It would anger anyone. Despite my clear uneasiness and my immediate pity-filled responses and projections, the gentleman politely changed the subject back to the hay-day of once owning his shoe repair shop. He told me he remembered how exciting it was for him to work in the community where he lived. How he enjoyed repairing shoes. How he enjoyed being his own boss. He had aspirations of growing his business. He wanted to expand. He wanted to create jobs. Those dreams, however, did not materialize. After

all, the Korean War happened. He was now a soldier. His duty was no longer shoe-repair-business-building. It was now the business of war.

Our conversation did not end with his deferred dream that was ultimately denied. I did manage to ask him where he was headed that morning. He told me that he was headed to Landlord/Tenant Court. He explained that he has lived in his apartment for over 25 years. He lived alone. He explained that he constantly received notices from the landlord to go court because the landlord wanted to evict him from the apartment so they can rent it at market rate in the now rapidly gentrified Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood. I, of course, could not in good conscience let an elderly war veteran and hero, go to court unrepresented and risk losing his rent-stabilized apartment. I offered to represent him. He responded by saying he probably could not afford to pay for my services. I politely smiled and responded "this one's on the house." I gave him my card and entered a notice of appearance on his behalf. He became our pro-bono client and my friend for life.

His name **WAS** Henry, by the way.