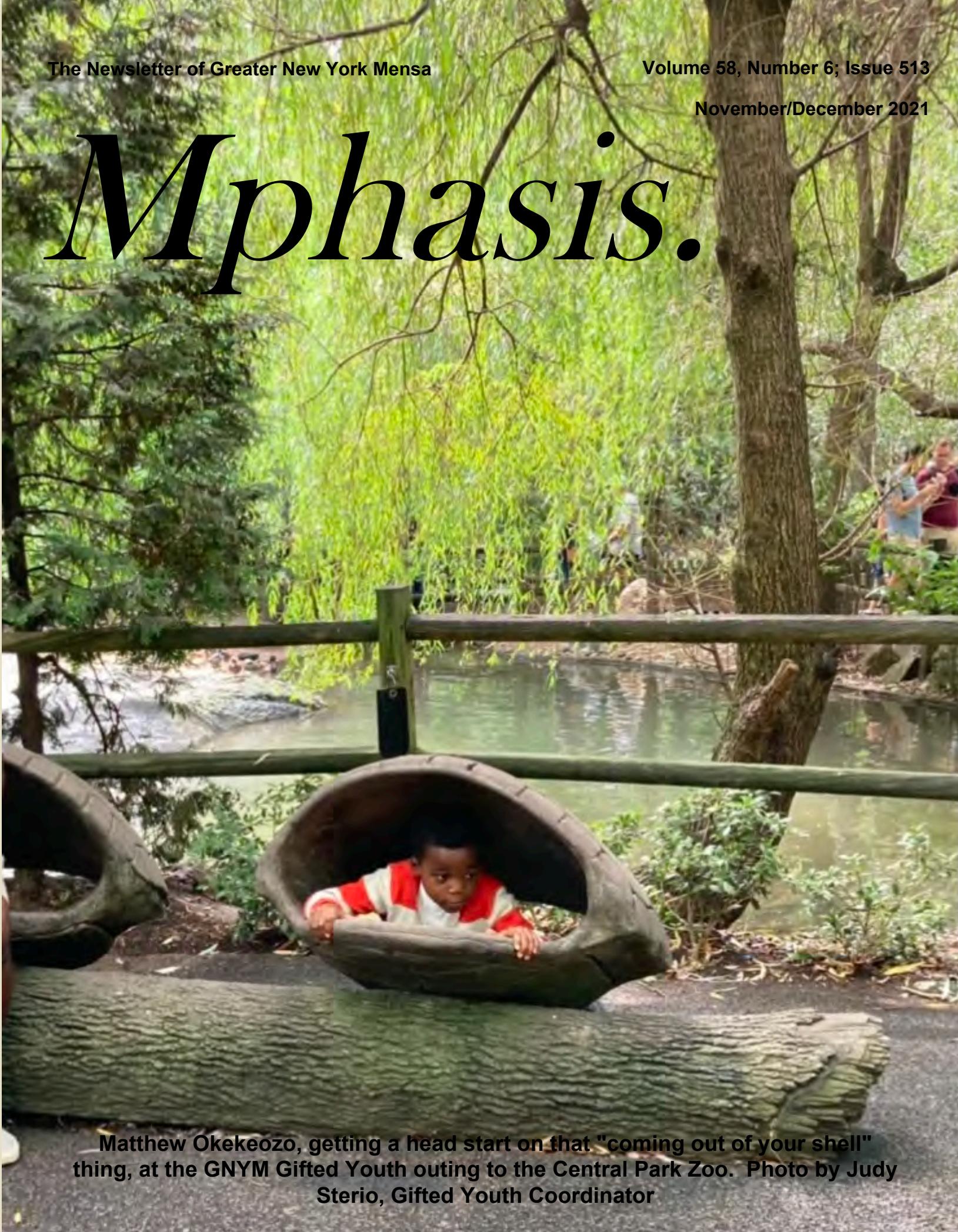


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# *Mphasis.*



**Matthew Okekeozo, getting a head start on that "coming out of your shell" thing, at the GNYM Gifted Youth outing to the Central Park Zoo. Photo by Judy Sterio, Gifted Youth Coordinator**

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## Borrowing Time: A True Love Story

By **Judy Katz**

I thought the Rabbi was kidding.

"You want to introduce me to a 98-year-old who wants to date?"

"No," he said, "I want to introduce you to a 98-year-old who would be open to getting remarried!"

"Won't his adult children object?"

"Not at all. They want him to be happy. His son came to ask me if I knew anyone exceptional."

At 75, I was still youthful, cheerful, and happily engaged in running my business. However, I was at a point where online dating had led me to a string of men who continued to disappoint me. I began to think maybe the sun had set on my romantic life. Then I met Jerome.

Before our first get-acquainted date, he had to cancel because he had a bad cold. "But," he said on my answering machine, "We will always have mañana." And, for a time, it seemed as if we just might. His positive attitude, brilliance, wisdom, warmth, and charm captivated me completely.

He stood outside my building, the image of a perfect gentleman, when he came to pick me up for our first date—an evening on the town. There he was, with a glow about him, so elegantly dressed, smiling, proudly relating that he had a great night planned for us. And there, behind the wheel of his car, sat Tony, his longtime driver, bodyguard, and confidante, grinning ear-to-ear, pleased that "the boss" seemed to be so excited about a new relationship at this stage of his life. Jerome did not look his age: he had a full head of hair, intense blue eyes, and the slim build of a former avid tennis player and golfer.

For our first date, he took me to one of the many private dining clubs to which he belonged: The Lotus Club. Every single person, from staff to the other beautifully dressed and groomed patrons, greeted him with affection and respect. We each ordered a "Dewar's on the Rocks." I noticed on the menu that the night before, the special dish had been Beef Wellington. "Oh, I wish I could have that tonight," I said. "I had it some years ago, and it was amazing. "Done," he said and called over the Maître d'. The dish lived up to my expectations! He, however, hardly ate. Perhaps I should have seen his lack of appetite as a warning. It was February and lightly snowing, but as Jerry said, "When you have a driver in New York, you are impervious to the weather." Sure enough, as we stepped outside the restaurant, there was Tony, holding the door for his boss, whom he adored. They drove me home, and Jerry gave me a feather-light kiss on the cheek and just said, "Good night."

I would be lying if I said that I was not awed by the lifestyle he shared with me in our short four months together: a Fifth Avenue Apartment out of Architectural Digest, filled with significant artworks and a live-in housekeeper; his sprawling art-filled home in Mamaroneck, complete with a live-in couple with extraordinary culinary skills, not to mention lavish meals we shared at The Harmonie and Lotos Clubs, Cyprian's, and several other fine dining establishments. Then there was an added surprise: his stunning, fully staffed, oceanfront villa that he had appropriately named "Casa de las Gaviotas" (House of the Seagulls), which was in the gorgeous La Romana area of the Dominican Republic, and which we reached by private jet—my first such experience.



My beautiful Jerry, 7 weeks shy of his 99th birthday.

We had a complete connection and were able to take pleasure in each other in every way. I was honored that he wanted to share so much of his life story with me. He talked almost non-stop: this titan of industry telling me how he built his business, describing all the events of his life, asking my opinion of things, and then really listening! He was a serious man, but he could also make me laugh. We would watch the news together, discussing the presidential candidates. He was deeply supportive of women and had held fundraisers for Hillary in his home. I was impressed by the politicians, university presidents, and other VIPS he had on speed dial—but he told me not to be overawed. "They are just people," he said. Though many of his closest friends were also fabulously wealthy, many others were not, and he enjoyed them equally.

Jerry was a secret philanthropist, anonymously supporting students from low-income families to attend college and make something of themselves. "Giving anonymously takes courage," he once said. When I asked why, he replied, "Because we all want admiration and credit for being generous. Giving anonymously for no credit is the purest form of giving."

On our second trip to Casa de Campo, Jerry asked me to move in with him—and I said yes, I would gladly do so when we got back. We had so many exciting plans for the next few weeks and months. This was to include family occasions, dinners out with more of the ridiculously successful, brilliant, and fun couples he delighted in taking me to meet, and even a gala at the Waldorf, for which he had recently had his tuxedo altered.

With Jerry, sleep was always elusive. He had to take many pills to get any decent rest, and even that did not always work. In Casa de Campo, he would often go to breakfast with me and then return to his bed for a nap. That following day after he had asked me if we could live together, he was fatigued. However, by lunch, he had rallied, and we had a lovely afternoon in the pool, walking back and forth, talking—always talking. Well, he did most of the talking. I was happy to absorb his penetrating insights about the world around us and human nature.

Later I helped him dress for a cocktail party, bringing him one of his many freshly ironed Brooks Brothers shirts in his dressing room, along with crisp white slacks and a gorgeous cashmere sweater he wrapped around his shoulders. He had been losing weight, and the belt for his pants went in yet another notch, but he laughed it off—as he did every frailty. He used a cane but resisted a walker, even though his gait was a bit uncertain and he did need help with stairs. Overall though, he made few concessions to his advanced age. "I still feel like a teenage boy," he told me more than once. I believed him. His 99th year was a few weeks away, with a big party planned. I felt sure he would make it to his centennial celebration.

Before dinner, he hosted a cocktail party in his villa. As his guests—several other Casa de Campo homeowners—enjoyed the canapés and cocktails, he held forth—on the state of the election, the state of the world, and many other topics. He was his usual brilliant self. I sat across from him on one of the couches, talking to others.

When the guests had left, we went into the 'bohio'—a vast space open to the elements, surrounded by wraparound terraces that faced the sea. We sat at a huge round table with other members of his extended family who were visiting. All of us were enjoying the conversation, along with a delicious dinner, beautifully prepared by his Dominican cook and served by his longtime devoted house staff—each of whom he had, over the years, gifted with a house, while also helping many of their children attend private schools and colleges.



Coconut trees Often, while we were in the pool, one of the staff would shake some down



Me waiting for Jerry to take us to lunch in his golf cart



Relaxing in the Bohio with a visitor. We ate most meals there. The cook was amazing

As usual, he ate lightly, but at one point, I noticed that he was silent, just staring into space—very unlike him. "Are you okay, honey?" I asked. "Want to go back to the room and rest?" "I don't know," he responded in a strange voice.

Immediately after he said that his eyes rolled back in his head, and he began to thrash his arms and legs around, making odd noises. Two of his adult children jumped up and held him, trying to comfort him, saying, "It will be all right Dad. We're getting you help now...relax. Breath, just breath," and more like that. We were all saying and doing whatever we could think of to try to calm him and stop the frantic waving and twitching of all of his limbs, while others called for an ambulance—the nearest hospital, unfortunately, was quite a distance away.

Suddenly his voice rang out: "Rub my feet." He very much enjoyed having his feet rubbed, and I gave him that pleasure every night before bed. So now I sat down on the floor under the table and rubbed his feet. He stopped thrashing for a few moments, but then it began again, and the strange foot rubbing session ended.

The idea that he was soon to die never entered my mind. He had promised me mañana: in fact many tomorrows. We have plans that stretch out for months, if not years. No, this had to be a minor setback. Once the ambulance had finally arrived, and the attendances had started him on oxygen, and whatever else he needed, I told myself—he would revive. He would be my Jerry again. He had to be!

It took the local ambulance too long to get to him, and the ride in the ambulance to the local hospital was bumpy, with the oxygen tubes they put into his nose continuously falling out. He never regained consciousness and died a day later. He had suffered what turned out to be a blood clot to the brain. I think if he'd been in New York rather than in the Dominican Republic, he might have been saved. It's something we can never know. He left this earth in a place he loved, never being an invalid, which he feared more than anything. He died fast, without pain, after a very long and wonderful life. I was so privileged to have been with him even for a brief period and able to make him happy at the tag end of his charmed life.

The party invitations for his 99th birthday celebration had already been sent out. He never got to do his classic birthday party "egg trick." He will never have another Dewars. And I will never again feel his arms around me. I will miss the way this brilliant man trusted me and confided in me. He made me feel worthy.

How do you move ahead from this kind of loss? Whether you have lost a lifelong spouse, or another beloved family member or dear friend—or even someone who graced your life briefly but profoundly—Death always wins.

I am not a woo-woo kind of person, but sometimes when the evidence is this clear you have to believe. The night after this remarkable man died, still, in his villa, I lay on the bed in the room we had shared, eyes swollen shut from crying—and felt his hand in mine. It was as firm and natural as any other time he had held my hand. It was his unique touch. I knew there would be no one there if I opened my eyes, so I kept them closed, and the fingers stayed around mine. About ten minutes later, I opened my eyes—and of course, no one was there. Those who have never experienced such a phenomenon will say it was all my imagination, mere wishful thinking. But the physicality of the connection was real. That's all I can say about it. He was there, then. And I believe, on some level, he still is.

Having just lost this phenomenal man, I wonder if I can find another man to love. Jerome had married the love of his life and spent 45 beautiful years with her. Four years after she died, we found each other. I asked him once if he thought we each have only one soul mate in a lifetime. He said no that we could have more than one. Then he added, "After my wife died—she as you know was a woman I adored beyond measure—I could have chosen to sit alone in a darkened room, poring over photo album after photo album. But why focus on what is lost when life is so precious?" And," he smiled at me: "Look what I found!"

So yes, I wish we could have borrowed even a bit more time. Nonetheless, I am grateful for what I received and what I was able to give him in those magical three months of our lives.

Love the life you live. Even if it's over when you turn 100, it will be over way too soon.

### About Judy Katz



**Breakfast in the Bohio: Starting another wonderful day with my honey, and making lots of plans. He would die seated beside me, in that same chair, a few days later**

Judy Katz is a ghostwriter, publisher, and book marketer. She has helped develop storylines for prospective authors and has completed, published, and publicized 50 books so far.

Judy is a proud member of the Author's Guild, PEN America, Greater New York Mensa, and many other prestigious professional and networking organizations. Her website is [www.katzcreativebooksandmedia.com](http://www.katzcreativebooksandmedia.com). She can also be found on LinkedIn and Facebook. Judy can be reached at 212-580-8833 or [jkatzcreative@gmail.com](mailto:jkatzcreative@gmail.com).



**80th birthday - Celebrating at Dairy Queen - (Pathetic bucket list!)**