

THE MANUSCRIPT

THE BLOCK

Cigarettes and Cracked Concrete

The steps were imperfect. Cracked and aged. The dirt from decades of use and mistreatment seemed to fuse to the rough concrete that always seemed dark and unlevelled even on the brightest sun filled day. The damp cracked steps led to even more cracked dirty concrete, only the landings were large and equally dirty. The whole block appeared to be a degrading adaptation of the gardens of Babylon if they were suddenly found today, only forgotten.

Three large platforms make up the block's elongated rectangular shape. Each offset a little more than 10 feet from the next. Viewed together from the streets, they follow the heavy incline; where topography is not usually found in such dense urban streets of Chicago. Sidewalks frame the block, contrasting the steps by slope, that allow one to reach one end of the block from the other.

The grass, that only resided in a small square at one end of the block, was more brown than green only just hanging on for the slightest bit of sun that may peak over the neighboring building to make it the slightest bit more green. This is not a place to sit, this is not a place to escape a concrete jungle that the grass was nestled in. This is the only living (barely) remnant of what was left on the block. All other life growing or flourishing through the block had all since left.

The dizzying ambiguity of the block possessed no purpose but to add to the concrete jungle. The unsafe feeling of your steps subconsciously quickening as one scurries through the sidewalk to even dare pass the site or climb the cracked and aged imperfect steps. Even in the daylight, the unease of lack of one's safety sets in when you are trapped in the middle of the block attempting to cross to the other side.

Grey-yellow cigarette butts flood the block in every crack and gather in every corner. They flood the block like somebody splaying seeds over fresh soil in hopes for something to grow. Quite the opposite case is here, with each empty slightly yellow tar filled end, the tiniest bit of life is taken

away from some passerby and gets dropped to the ground to live at the site forever making somebody walking through them feel as though they are traversing the river Styx.

Even the graffiti, that somebody tried to make a statement with, isn't readable because it has greyed too deeply by being absorbed into the concrete walls. The age of the art piece may suggest that it belonged in a museum by now, but instead fades away into the walls getting more and more unreadable. The statement lacks its presence today and will every day the catalyst of the sun fades it away further and further to grey.

The Clock

The middle of the block lays flat, by doing so it contrasts the sloping street. This section of the block was not much different than the others. It still had dirty, cracked concrete squares, and just as many if not more cigarette butts gathering in the corners. In the middle step of the block however, lay large abrupt stone numbers and dashes. Circularly arrayed about the axis of a central barrel-like object. Reading the numbers and understanding the relation of distance between the next stone makes the person say to themselves, "oh its a clock?" as if the hopefully obvious sculptural element would provide the city with the time of day.

The red-grey blocks originating from a stone quarry were blocked and squared. They did not possess any sort of ornate nature. Square edges chipped from years of winters bringing cold weather. Slight coatings of dirt cover each numbered block along with the dirty concrete like a blanket encapsulating the whole block in a time capsule that belonged in the past. The clock was large, nearly a 50 foot diameter of the arranged blocks stayed there waiting their turn.

The dial in the middle held two large metal arms to tell the time. They suspended from the barrel-like axis like a jousting sporter sporting his lance aiming at his competition, because the distance they spanned seemed unsupportable by the weight they carried but somehow it was. Slowly the hands rotated the axis, almost omnisciently they rotated day in and day out. The only redeeming quality the block had was that the clock worked to tell a time.

A lot of people say what they don't like about the block, and rarely was anybody saying something about what it could be. It's the thought of something better, for the better that makes this thing barely keep breathing. That's why the block was so repulsive to so many people.

It tends to be those that have no intention of actually changing anything that have things to say. Whispering words like "that's an eye sore," or "somebody should really do something about that." It's the exchange of whispers about the block that made the worsening more apparent to a

larger audience. The passing whispers and criticism dug a hole that the reputation of the block resided in. The hole so deep it was a grave that couldn't be dug up.

The Restaurant Owner

The man reaches for his keys that jangled around the worn ring in his coat pocket. Approaching the door, and inserting the key into the almost rusted deadbolt with one hand, and grasping his thermos in the other, a dark empty room faces him just as it has every day before this one. The fluidity of his movement in the building while simultaneously flicking on the lights and continuing his directional walk to the back of the room displays that he is very much a veteran of this experience.

As the light's hissing noise begins to slow, the lighting in the table filled room begins to brighten. The lighting of which comes before the sun, as if though it had won the race to make the environment visible. By this time the man is in the back office, reviewing the paperwork and receipts left from the night before. Eyes lower still because of the coffee he had brought with him in the thermos hasn't been nearly half finished yet.

He lets out a sigh,
not a tired sigh,
an afraid sigh.

The numbers of the receipts make up a number that is not larger than the number than his paperwork. Next to the current month, he writes a number written in red. He sighs to himself again, rises from his chair, and leaves his small corner office. By this time, the sun has peaked out around the towers and across the river. His trudges lead him across the table filled space again as he glances at the picture of his father on the wall. The black and white picture showed a proud man in a dirty apron, serving savory Italian food to patrons with smiles on their faces.

His trudges stop as he reaches the window. He sees glowing signs and people flowing in and out of the sub and burger chain restaurants across the street. His eyes slide away to his feet again and up to the glowing tube sign that from his perspective reads "NEPO". He flicks the switch and the red letters illuminate the window. He returns to his office with a little less hope than before.

The Old Man

Eyes crack to a fresh sun. Sun light and the smell of bread baking down the next street. His head slowly raises from one of the concrete blocks tucked into the corner of the crevice on the block.

With his head raising as the sun does, another self analysis happens. Another night waking up thirsty and dry from the plastic bottle of Phillips vodka he had had from the night before. The 13 dollars that somebody had left at his feet that could have gone to two sub sandwiches went again to unflavored vodka. A stale biting taste of the alcohol still lasts on his breath, he begins to use his body finally. Limbs working again but only just. He limbers his way to the sidewalk at the edge of the block. Looks to both sides, and analysis again happens. Where to go now? Where to eat? Where to wait?

He had waited so long again and again day after day. He was a war veteran who had a friend who had mentioned to him before that he would visit him. The friend had mentioned a place to stay where they could live together for a while to support each other. The spare bedroom of his friend's place that was offered seemed so comfortable at this moment. Any fresh linen bed that was of any possibility was what made him continue to wait again. The friend told him he would pick him up from the L station on Thursday afternoon. It's now Sunday and the week is beginning again.

Did I miss him? Did he try to find me but couldn't? Is he still going to look for me? The darkness of not knowing what was going to happen next began to set in. Back in their days they shared with one another fighting wars they didn't agree with, they were each other's lifelines. The old man had just hoped that his friend would answer the call to be his savior one last time.

The Beautiful Women

Time had done them some, and at some times no favors. They had still possessed their looks for women of their age which aged like a fine wine. The downside to that is life was not as forgiving of their age. Each of the three women used to have a husband. Their regular meet-ups used to include them talking about family plans, light gossip, and subconscious yet friendly comparison to one another. Now their meet-ups were mixed with drinking more and heavier dirtier gossip.

The sense of innocence that the women used to have had gone as they were not getting any younger by lying to themselves or holding grudges. The divorces that each of them went through were different but they could all relate to one another. They would meet now at the floral nursery and pick out what types of flowers they wished some strapping young gentleman would bring them. Most of that time was just dreaming though, they realized as they walked out of the nursery empty handed as the gossip continued.

The Child

His feet ran faster than his thoughts at times. Always running around, sometimes too fast and too far, he would run. Running “too fast” isn't normally an issue but the boy was young at the age of four years old. To keep him from running too far ahead or in the wrong direction, his mother had one rule, he had to hold his mom's hand when they were in public. On and off the bus and on the sidewalk especially of North Columbus. They would get off the bus and walk over to the college two blocks west of where the bus would drop off.

The Consuming Young Man

The young suave man kept consuming life. He wanted more and wouldn't settle for normal. Consuming and consuming life. Drinking at any chance because if the moment was appropriate to drink, it would make it better. That's what he would be doing. Spending money. Eating expensive foods. If he wasn't living he wasn't doing it right.

To him for many years, there was always a better place to be then where he was at the moment. He was always looking for more. He was never content in the moment. There could always be more friends, more booze, more women, more fun. He found himself always looking at his phone, hoping it would light up from a text or call from somebody else rather than words from the people sitting right across from him.

He was always trying to live, but did not realize that living wasn't at the other end of a cell phone like he thought. Empty living. The only light at the end of his tunnel was what was illuminating in his pocket.

The Taxi Driver

He sat there, as he did everyday to start his morning, waiting for some potential customer to walk out to his old yellow town car parked on North Park Drive. The engine's low muffled running indicated that the car had been running for more than enough time for the engine to heat up completely and even overheat. The muffled sound continued out of the early 2000's long car as it sounded rougher than years before. He thought to himself as he sat and waited, it's only a 2000... until he shortly realized that it had already been 20 years since he had purchased this large yellow car, an investment to make his own business.

Day in and day out, this short side street was his spot. Perfect enough that he could remain parked there for long periods of time, devoid of most traffic, and on a street that had three large highrises right next to it, one a hotel, one a condominium complex, and one a large media conglomerate and not to mention the block that had allowed potential customers to spot his large yellow car from other side of it. It used to be worth it because in the first year, he had paid the car off twice over waiting at this spot. Now the car has taken more of his work time in the shop than ever before. Maybe it was time he thought of getting a new car?

Then just as suddenly as his thoughts flew through his mind, somebody walked out of the hotel, gazing at their phone. This could be his first customer of the day, he thought to himself as he shifted the gear mounted by his wheel from P to D. He put his foot back on the brake and was waiting for the young gentleman to wave him over. The drivers hope shifted however to defeat when the man hopped into the small hybrid car that pulled up before him. He knew this one was a lost cause the second he saw the large UBER decal in the window, and gave up by shifting the lever back into P. He continued to wait. Maybe it was time he got that new car.

The Gardener

Moving to downtown Chicago wasn't always in his intended plans. His employer, a banking agency, relocated him from his rural small town bank when they bought out his company. The son of a farmer, fresh air and wide open space was what he associated with home. Chicago was nowhere near the idea of home to him. Confined to four walls in a studio apartment on the 28th floor that he was overpaying for, he would peer out the small window to the clock like structure that was visible below, the clock may have been upside down from his perspective but he could read it either way.

He would watch the dial turn to another spot when he would revisit the window. Curious, he was from that angle and view, the block didn't seem that bad but when he would walk by the clock on the way to his corporate job he would see from human height that the block needed some work. The grass at the end of the block needed some t.l.c. and a little bit of water and it would grow. He had to turn away and continue to get on the bus that was loaded on the west side of the block and return late when it was dark out.

The Artist

The artist walked down the street to a serving job that she hated. Yes, she was lucky enough to have a job at all and understood that but serving at the italian restaurant down the street that

wasn't getting very much service was inexplicably a dead end. When she moved to Chicago, she had to find something to make ends meet and a fellow art student that she knew recommended her to the restaurant owner years ago.

Day in and day out she thought about her dream of making it as an artist. The dream was getting closer and closer to dying and to her it was depressing. Trying to catch any break in one of the most profound art capitals in America was a big task and few are able to do it and the odds are typically not in one's favor.

She was different however. She was good. Neo-expressionist painting (influenced by Basquiat) was her specialty. The problem with that is, unless you were a star, it is difficult for your work to become anything. She had done some of her most inspired and personal work while she was here in Chicago because she had nothing else, an apartment that she was overpaying for, a dead end job, and nothing but freetime to paint.

Clocking out of another shift with little to no money from tips, she left the restaurant. Her commute was to walk across the street and through the empty dark block with the clock spinning in the middle. She would usually do so with her head down and to mind her own business. She would often get cat called by people from the inside of the block's hidden areas which she put up with but hated. She climbed the stairs to her apartment and locked her door from the inside, put down her stuff, and walked to the large canvas against the wall and examined it. She began to work on it more. In her mind though, her usual inspired drive was depleting. Her dream seemed further and further away.

THE DAY THE CLOCK STOPPED TICKING

The only redeeming quality of the block was the clock that kept ticking. Timing was truly everything. This was because one late dusk afternoon, the lance-like arms stopped moving...

When people noticed that the clock stopped working, people questioned what somebody was going to do about it. From those subtle whispers and spider like lashes of negativity from the dark and anonymous on the block by the public created friction. Those whispers would have to reach the right ears. Not only the right ears but the perfect ones. You see, the easy way out to accomplish any sort of change that is noticed by the public may be that only of a spit shine and another coat of paint. Would the public be satisfied? Sure. Would they be likely to visit the block? Maybe some, but not for long. Would they be in awe? Not in the slightest.

When the city gets involved in any sort of public pushed project, it takes time. More importantly it takes public funded money. That's where the public gets divided. "Why should our money go towards that thing?" More whispers. People kept pointing fingers. The taxpayers pointed at the neighboring businesses. The businesses pointed at the city. The city pointed back at the taxpayers. Nothing happened. Sunup to sundown, the clock continued to lay stagnant, motionless and as dead as the cigarette butts on the dirty concrete ground.

THE SHIFT

The Spark

The day the clock stopped ticking made people think the block was no longer useful. The only redeeming quality of it was now inactive. Day in and day out, people began to see the block as an even bleaker atmosphere. The ones who would commute through the block even took separate routes around the block's large platforms because they felt even less safe now than before.

It was until one outlier in the crowd had enough. One divergent soul who got tired of the blanket of dirt, the cigarette butts, yellow grass, and broken time mechanism, did something. It started with the trash piling up in the corners being picked up and thrown away in the city receptacle across from the dying grass. Such a simple neighborly task. That was the spark that was needed. The spark needed to light the fire and make change.

It was from that point that the garbage cans began to fill around the block faster than before, and the businesses around the block, whose job it was to empty the garbage, did so and noticed that the clock was not working. The message went up the chains to the building managers of the hotel company to the south, then to the branch's business managers, then to the executive boards of the company. The simple message that started out as more of a notification turned into a “what do we do about it?”, question.

It started with demolition crews that swept through the site, leveling everything except for the three large platforms, 3 sickly shaded trees and their planters that they were grown in, and the remnants of the clock. Then teams visited to replace the cracked unstable steps, while also adding ramps and making the block more maneuverable to anyone. New concrete and solid, deep hued, quarry stone would be added to replace the faded grey cracked concrete.

You could now see directly from one end of the elongated rectangle of the block to the other. This made the whole block feel safer. The ability to see what lied in the corners at any time withdrew the need to speed up your walk as you proceeded through it. The new sloped ramped concrete also allowed for easier transportation along the stairs so one in a wheelchair didn't have to go around to the other side via the sidewalk. One could finally see from one side to another and walk down the uninterrupted ramp that cut through the middle of the block.

Safety Returned to the block.

When the national broadcasting network to the west saw those changes, and were encouraged by the hotel company to do their part, they obliged. New stepped platforms encased the block at the

ends. Supporting new dirt areas to someday host new grass. The addition of wooden block benches and tables were added near the end planters.

The thing that the block lacked still, that it had before, was the beating heart. The clock. For decades the only thing keeping the block alive was the clock. This was what made the block unique before, and yes fresh concrete and benches would maybe polish it up temporarily, but it was lacking something; meaning. The numbers that were moved for renovations looked like they had tumbled from a tall clock, leaning about one another and appeared to be worthless.

It was then the apartment building to the east, after seeing what was remaining, decided it was their turn. They understood that the block was still lacking something, and needed something to liven it up. Like a defibrillator, they needed to restart the heart, to bring back the breathing which let life happen.

The middle of the block, where the clock numbers and hands once radially sat in the middle platform, were now raised. Fan-like clock hands erupted out of the middle platform. Boasting numbers in a linear fashion. The clock was ticking, but differently now. Which used to work in a traditional radial fashion was now changed. The clock told time again.

The sun peeked through the buildings, illuminating the new and improved block. Whispers turned to words.

Words.

People were talking about the change of the block. They weren't subtly making spider like comments. They were vocally explaining their opinion about what it had become.

Awe.

The initial opinions shifted to silence the moment people started to see the new block up close, or let alone visit it. The eyes got wider, the people's steps got slower. The whispers had now completely changed to awe. Awe because of what had started this change was just because of one decent neighborly act. Change began to happen.

CHANGE

A story of how time was brought back to the block

Through a long era of glim suppression built environment that was Ogden Plaza, when hope was lost of any reconciliation of the error brought on by misuse of urban environment. There stood a chance to be whole again. The day the clock stopped ticking was the day the line went flat. With what part of the block that held any sort of history once was now dead. It's as if when the clock stopped ticking, so did the people that used the block. The absence of the perception of time taken away with the clock also took away the perception of time in relation to the individuals that thrived there. The block was a void left by our own doing until the change resurrected the plaza like a life that we had deemed ended. When the clock rose again from the ashes like a phoenix on its next life, so did the people that used the block to dwell. With the movement of the clock continuing again, so did the people.

Like a jewel sitting on a ring, the clock sat perched at the highest point of the block for everyone to see. It wasn't always clear to the first impression that this was an instrument to tell time. It looked like the spine of a marlin more than it did a clock. Fin like angled clock hands raised perpendicularly from the large shape in a linear fan like manner. Which fin was perpendicular would indicate what time it currently was. The hour hand fin was on the west side, and the minute hand fin was on the east. Twelve fins on each side. It would start from the south side of the block each day. At 12:00 the first fin would stand. When it would be 12:00 P.M. the other ends fin would stand, and the motion would continue in the other direction. For the east hand, the same function would be operating but each fin would represent 5 minutes and one trip to the other side would equal one hour.

The fins would lay for most of the day rested on top of one another waiting for their turn to erect and declare that it was their turn to tell the time. A motorized mechanism would lay beneath each group of dozen fins to operate them in such a linear manner.

During the maximum daylight hours for the block, the shades were larger to accommodate for actual sun shading. It was the mid morning and the mid afternoon sun that would shine through the neighboring buildings and onto the block. The sun shining through would hit the hour and minute fin that would rise and lower and provide a sundial like effect on the shaded parts of the block that it overlooked giving depth to the surrounding area that moved like a shadow following its owner.

Time was always what aided the people to use the block because it was the perception of what people do going forward that will forever be able to be framed again in comparison to where the clock stands at a given moment.

A story of how nature returned to the block

The gardener visited the site again after peering out of his window and seeing things be treated more closely. When he visited the block this time, he brought with him a cart of infant plants he had gotten from a nursery outside of town. He spent a sunny afternoon digging up the reused empty planters, disposing of any remaining yellow-grey cigarette butts as he cleaned out each and every planter.

Fresh troweled soil had been turned up that had so many nutrients laying underneath the coating of silt and dirt that laid across the visible surface. Each new infant plant spaced properly and dug with care now lined the planters. He spread fresh grass seed and raked it into the fresh new dirt areas that were leftover from the renovations. Then he used buckets of water he limbered over to hydrate the grass seed and the new plants. The water flowed down the sides of the planter and began to trickle down the sloping sidewalks all the way to the street. Vibrant green colors returned to the block.

Now when the gardener peers out his 28th floor apartment window, he sees life and growth that subtly reminded him of back home, looking forward to the growing season of crops. Even on his walks home everyday, he would purposefully walk by the plants and check how much water they were getting. Even to him, it was amazing how much the littlest of things could make him feel so much more happy as this small essence of home.

A story about how art was brought back to the block

The faded concrete walls of the past had been replaced by fresh and clean stone that were almost begging to be painted on again. The young artist visited the block a number of times on her way home from work. This day however was different. It was a new day and the block had an aura about it. It was redone, there were new fresh concrete surfaces.

She had an idea. She could make a great example of her work there at the block and somebody would be bound to see it. One of the side walls could be her canvas... then she paused her thought. This could be vandalism... her thoughts paused again. This could be vandalism! That

was what made this so provocative and profound. It would catch eyes whether people liked it or not.

Then one mid morning day, she began. The expression and flow of paint covered parts of the new low walls that now only joined the stairs to the next platform. Color and hue clinged to the new fresh wall. The essence of her movement and work were elegant and planned. She moved quickly.

The difference between her work that day and the work she had usually done was the need for it to be successful. This was risky. Not only legally, but also personally. She had never had the opportunity to show her work to such a vague large audience, the public, which made her shy at times. She didn't know what she would do if people didn't like it. She continued.

Two hours later, she had finished. Less than three sets of eyes had seen her paint it and they didn't seem to think it was important enough to intervene at this point. Her expressionistic mural was filled with color. Deep blues and saturated reds covered the wall with each stroke, color, and movement, intentionality filled the wall. What began to form was a scene, a reflection.

The new mural was of people. People she saw, people she observed, people she remembered. All of which were operating in this mirror-like art piece that filled an entire wall. The people were full of movement too, walking, jumping, moving, and talking. Dozens of people, young and old, different sizes and colors, painted in an expressionist manner lived on that wall now.

A story about how friendship was brought back to the block

Almost giving up because today was the day. The old man and his friend agreed they would meet today at noon at the corner of Michigan ave. and Illinois St. and he had no way to tell what time it was, the old man walked his way down the street to the block.

The clock tower's numbers drew him in. Up the street and down the fresh concrete ramp. He looked up at the numbers and wondered what it meant until he dissected it himself. When the number was encapsulated by the frame, that must have meant what time it currently was. He stared at it for a while to make sure it was a working clock, then wondering how it worked, he sat there for another few seconds.

A voice loomed over his shoulder, "Hey old man, can't you read the time?" The old man turned quick expecting to explain himself, or ask questions, he wasn't really sure. Then the face of the

question he wore turned to a smile. It was his friend, jeering him like he used to back in the day. A reunion.

A story about how food was brought back to the block

The restaurant owner gazing out from his storefront windows saw activity at the block for the first time in weeks since the clock stopped ticking. He saw the gardener rolling his plants on a cart to the planters. He saw the artist's painted murals begin to liven up the space. Care and refurbishment to a city block by people who probably weren't the ones responsible for such change.

He looked back at his restaurant floor before the doors opened to the public for him to inevitably wait for somebody to come walking in, which began to be few and far between at this point. Then something happened in the man's head. His eyes widened with the sense of a profound idea.

The man spent all day cooking his family recipes and making them portable. He wrapped the Italian inspired meals of sliced pizza, calzones, and breadsticks and got a cart of his own. He set out with his hot meal cart, carrying with it smells of oregano, basil, tomato, and freshly grilled meats. The aroma followed the cart wherever he went like the exhaust trail following a jet. Rolling the cart across the street and to the block, he parked and the smell filled the area. The gardener and the artist looked up from their work, and proceeded to take a small break. They bought food from the restaurant owner, which made other passerbys see that this was a food cart with some of the best smelling authentic food at the most convenient time.

The restaurant owners eyes began to glow, customers getting in line for his food? For years he could barely get anybody to get into his establishment, but now he was selling food faster than he ever could. His cart was cleared of food before lunch hour was over. People began to loiter around the cart, eating the fresh italian food. Other carts brought in their food as well. Variety was drawing more and more people in until this became a regular lunch spot for people. Words were spoken to one another here again. Lunch was had at the block for the first time in a long time, and it would continue to happen day in and day out.

A story about how youth was brought back to the block

Getting off the bus on a slow Saturday morning on their usual stop, the boy held his mother's hand as they walked down the west side of the block. They noticed that the block was different

than before. The change made the boy and his mother look at it. The food trucks and the art exhibits that popped up brought a lot of attention. “Do you want to go look?” the mother asked her son. He looked up and nodded to her from her side. “Okay go take a look but no too far!” she said as she let go of his hand. The boy’s feet ran just as fast as they ever had, but not until he gave the softest happiest smile back to his mother.

A story about how experiences was brought back to the block

The young man walked, head down and thumbs out, tapping away at the black mirrored screen in his palms. In his peripherals, he stepped around his usual commute to his home that he had memorized since living there. Though, when the new block had its renovations completed and things weren’t where they were a couple days before since he last made the walk, he was intercepted.

Toes hitting a new fresh concrete step that wasn't there before, and body flailing down new stairs, cellphone two feet higher than his head because his grip was focussed to brace for landing. He fell... and so did the little black box that his life clinged to. Smashing into the new stone platform, the cellphone split into two pieces. The young man looked up now noticing what had happened, grimacing teeth turned to frightened eyes as he looked up seeing his phone lying there on the same level as himself in two.

He rushed over, already knowing what had happened before he could do anything. There was no point in even trying to fix it. He cursed to himself and stood there in silence for a number of minutes looking at the pieces in his hands. He put the two pieces of tempered, now cracked, glass and plastic in his pocket and wondered to himself, “When does AT&T close? Oh my god, I didn't get the insurance.”

Sitting now on the block's new table, he contemplated. More minutes went by before he stopped thinking, and feeling the clean wooden bench he was sitting on, and looked around finally. Was this new? He asked himself. His eyes raised to the crowd forming in front of him, which he had no idea what for. Standing up now from the fresh wooden bench, he walked slowly to the side not to interfere with any of those waiting in what appeared to be a line.

He was in a dream like trance at the people that were there. Nobody was ever at the block for any reason other than a cigarette break, he thought to himself again. Then the smells hit his nose. The smell of fresh hot pizza, something that was so fresh it couldn’t belong to one of those chain pizza places down the street, no sir, this was original. He had nowhere to go now, maybe he could ask somebody when this got there. He got in line.

When it became his turn, he pulled out two dollars out of his pocket, which he realized was sitting next to the broken plastic pieces in his pocket, he snapped out of the dream like trance of conversation and movement of the crowd for only a second before the restaurant owner asked him, “What can I get ya?” the young man's eyes lit up.

“Uh... I'll take one pepperoni please...” he said to the stranger who pulled out a fresh slice of the most appetizing piece of deep dish pizza out of the cart and exchanged the two dollars. Before he could even ask about the new block, the next customer had taken the restaraunteer’s attention away. The young man took a few steps away in no clear direction.

The pizza was so tasty, the cheese melted underneath the sauce that was just sweet enough. The young man hadn’t experienced food so authentic; a change from his usual diet of fast food and chain burrito places. He forgot to even realize that the plastic pieces in his pocket were not getting any closer to being fixed, because he now had a new favorite place to eat.

A story of how transportation was brought back to the block

This must have been his third trip away from the hotel and condo block. The taxi driver, now turned uber driver, glanced at the digital projection clock showing 9:45 A.M. on the new dashboard that belonged to his 2019 hybrid Toyota. It wasn’t brand new, but new enough to still have that new car smell that allowed his customers to be fairly impressed every time they got in his car. Astonished at how early in the day it was, and how many rides he had already given, he dropped off this customer and already heard his iphone ping, indicating that a new ride was ready to be picked up. His foot held on his brake pedal, as he didn't even need to put the car in park to make a decision on his next drive. He continued working.

A story of how beauty was brought back to the block

The silence behind their voices when they spoke was deafening. The only sound at that moment were their crisp words of a soft voice. Behind that; silence. They noticed it even themselves at times that they were the only ones talking. Their voices silenced all the grey noise gracefully, and carried over head like a bird in flight until you couldn’t see it anymore, and the crisp tones ended.

There they were, in the iridescent opal skin and fresh linen dresses that raised modernly high off the floor. Some of which were bearing flower baskets. The baskets of fresh cut lily and lilac bunches with the most eye catching hues of yellow and purple. Their aura caught everyone else

off guard as if the record scratched in the background and a synth melodic tune played in the background. Catching an eye with any one of the ladies would make one sweat.

Though the flowers they brought weren't planted there, they belonged there. It was a sense of freshness that the block hadn't seen in many years. It was as if the original intent for a recreation of the hanging gardens of Babylon were being brought back.

When the block was redone, and the sense of safety was brought back, the women felt safe enough to be there again. They wouldn't be cat-called by creepy men from the depths of the corners. In fact, this was a better time than any to debut their fresh new dresses to the patrons that were flourishing in the new space, and they got the right reactions. The flowers they had brought to sell were almost all bought immediately by the crowd. Compliments on their looks, their flowers, or any form of small talk was all positive and appreciated from the ladies.

For the longest time the women had looked at the flowers in the shop, wishing a man would bring them some of their favorites. Then they realized, they don't need anybody to bring them flowers, they bought their own flowers.

A story of how breathing was brought back to the block

There is nothing wrong with cracked concrete and a few cigarettes laying around here or there, when they inhabit places that are safe and used. In fact some of those things may have meant that a place was heavily used. For the block, it was neglect. That neglect that the block had received was like a rope constricting around your lungs, not allowing them to expand and grow to provide air to the rest of the body. The constriction of the block inhibited public activity and interaction.

The rope was loosened, the lungs expanded on the block again. It wasn't just the new concrete, or the fresh soil, it was the people. It was the people who made the block work. Where there were issues there are now possibilities and hope.

COEXISTENCE

Each of these diverse and specialized individuals had a passion for something. Whether it was art, nature, or food, they each had some hobby that brings people together. The absence of anything that supported coexistence with one another for so long led to the block's cavernous low point. It's the sense of community and neighborhood that brings life to a city. The best things we as humans do is interact with one another and when we join together for a common goal, anything becomes possible.

The feelings the block now held began to make old people feel young and young people feel old. Young people can come to the new block and are intrigued by the culture and history of this place. The old people can leave the place blessed with nostalgia of memories of their younger years.

In the end, that's all the block needed; a little love. There was nothing different than the world famous plazas of New York and the old elongated rectangular block of Chicago. The concrete was made the same, the grass started as seeds on both ends, and people, the deserving people, were the ones that made the block work. With each person bringing something new to the block, more people took something with them.

This haven wasn't created by one person. It was created by each and every individual who thought about change and watched it happen. The block for some was just an outlet for expressional freedom. For others a comfort zone, a home away from home. It was everybody's space now. Open and helpful attitudes to one another and community made this thing work and all it needed was for somebody to start it. The block would have its own meaning to each and every individual that used it. Some would make more memories than others, some may never understand its importance to others, but for everybody it was a new place built to make each and every memory that followed there.