

foreword

Hal Sirowitz

When my parents took me to Coney Island, Brooklyn, to ride the amusements and eat at Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs, I could tell from the first bite that Paradise was slightly overcooked. "That's what happens," father said, "When companies go national. Nathan's should have just stayed in Brooklyn." But if a whole baseball team could be packed and shipped to Los Angeles, then hot dogs would be next. As soon as a frankfurter is eaten away from the beach, it doesn't taste the same. It becomes flavorless, like other brands.

This anthology doesn't have that problem. It travels well. It's so full of the sights and sounds of Brooklyn streets, that it's the next best thing to being there. Whether reading it makes you nostalgic or compels you to take the next subway to experience it for the first time, this collection maps the human heart's desire to live in a utopian community. And even though most of the utopian aspects of Brooklyn are gone, it's invigorating to still see traces: for example, the largest private food co-op in the United States, Frederick Olmstead's Prospect Park, landscaped after Central Park so he could correct his mistakes. This book isn't only for Brooklyn residents but for all those who value community. It may take the world to make a village, but it must have taken the editors many trips to different libraries to find these poems.

The former Brooklyn Poet Laureate, D. Nurkse, said, "Brooklyn is a place where you can tell the residents have *lived* lives." And editors Kasdorf and Tyrell have collected *lived* poems. Like the book title, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, poetry is also endemic to this

borough. Reading this collection is a moving experience because the poems feel home-grown. It doesn't matter where they were written, each one makes Brooklyn come alive, and the poems find a home inside you.

My father always joked about the guy who was stupid enough to buy the Brooklyn Bridge. That's probably an urban legend. But after reading *Broken Land*, you understand what makes it seem true and why the guy was tempted. Who wouldn't like to own an entrance way into the borough which is as exciting and less disappointing than the place Dorothy was searching for? Wizards in Brooklyn only hide their faces on Halloween. The authors of these poems never tried to buy the bridge, but they did buy into the dream of Brooklyn. Judging from the mastery and enduring quality of their poems, it was well worth it.

I was the Poet Laureate of Queens from the years 2001 to 2003. Before my term officially expired, I had already moved to Park Slope, Brooklyn. I felt like a traitor. I couldn't stop fighting the urge to come to Brooklyn. I finally left Flushing, thinking Brooklyn would become my next stepping stone to Manhattan. But once I got here, I knew I'd stay. It also helped that my wife lived here. Living in the same place is good for a marriage.

Even though Frank Sinatra sang that if you can make it in Manhattan you can make it anywhere, I'd rather make it in Brooklyn. Manhattan didn't have as strong a pull. I've grown immune to its gravity. It's true Brooklyn's big cultural institution, BAM, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, sounds like the explosion of a cannon. And another major art community, DUMBO, is also the name of an elephant in a Walt Disney film. A performing stage is called Galapagos, which are a group of islands on another continent. But that doesn't stop artists and their fans from coming here. And you'll probably be counted as one of them after reading this book, because to know Brooklyn is to love her. And love gets stronger the closer you are.

Hal Sirowitz is the author of *Mother Said*.