

Work, Drama, Love and Struggle: A Day in the Life of the Aging Bronx

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In Riverdale, the Play's the Thing

By Jazmin Goodwin



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Riverdale Senior Services' Arts Studio Drama Club meets weekly to do read-throughs of favorite plays.

“Class Is In Session. Please Knock,” was the message on the back of a gray door at Riverdale Senior Services. Inside, scripts of plays were sprawled across a table. The theatrical voices of six older women ebbed and flowed across the room.

The women make up the local Arts Studio Drama Club that meets weekly to do read-throughs of favorite plays.

Jeannie Bowers, 71, the instructor, smiled as the women ran through the lines of Neil Simon’s “The Odd Couple.”

“Our aim is to express ourselves honestly and have fun,” Bowers said.

For some of the women in the room, participating in the drama club marked their first experience with acting. Shirley Small, 89, from the East Bronx, was intrigued when she heard of the club; she showed up thinking she was going to see a play.

“I didn’t expect to act in it. I expected to be entertained. Then we got assigned parts. I’m vision impaired so it can be hard to read the scripts, but I work through it,” she said. “I’m falling apart. My eyesight is losing and I’m always in pain, so I try to distract myself with different activities I like.”

Nerida Colon, 71 said she felt rejuvenated after joining. “I loved drama as a child,” she said. “When I joined, I realized this was what I was looking for. It keeps me moving.”

Colon said she often thinks of her mother, who died recently at 102.

“She always told us growing up to keep going and remain motivated. I tell myself to keep going and do the things I enjoy,” Colon said.