

Literary 'Hood Spins Tales of New York

March 10, 2011 11:00 AM Nick Marinello
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One woman recounts a subway ride across the Upper East Side of Manhattan, sitting next to a homeless fellow who is unabashedly engaged in singing Disney tunes. Another woman tells about the time she rushed to the aid of a man lying smack in the middle of Amsterdam Avenue after being clipped by a taxi. Both are denizens of Mr. Beller's Neighborhood, an online compendium of stories written about the Big Apple.



There are 10 million stories in the naked city, and you can find a bunch of them in Mr. Beller's Neighborhood, a website created by Thomas Beller, assistant professor of English at Tulane. (Photo of Manhattan by Massimo Catarinella)

Created in 2000 by Thomas Beller, assistant professor of English, [Mr. Beller's Neighborhood](#) has over the years attracted more than 1,000 stories about New York City. Contributors range from professional writers to unknown voices ? all of whom are compelled to share urban sketches that render what Beller calls “an eye-level view” of the city.

“The stories are a combination of personal writing and witnessing,” says Beller, who was raised and lived most of his life in New York.

“I'm living in the Big Easy now, but I grew up in the Big Difficult,” says Beller, explaining that it's the difficulties of life there that provide the fodder for stories.

“Because your apartment is so small and everyone uses public transportation, so much of your life takes place in public. You are constantly seeing people, and the street becomes sort of a theater. You naturally become curious about what the hell is going on.”

After two years functioning as the sole editor for the site, Beller now enlists the help of managing editors so he no longer flies as the “manic guy in the cockpit” selecting and editing stories.

In 2009, Beller published his second collection of stories culled from the site: *Lost and Found ? Stories from New York*.

Why are stories important?

“Can you imagine life if there were never any?” answers Beller. “Ask how someone is doing and the answer would always be, 'OK, fine, or good.' One-word answers.”

He adds, “Stories are like the air we breathe.”