I Lived in a Slum

Sickening Story Unfolds
In City’s Blighted Areas

By ROBERT H. PRALL,
World-Telegram Staff Writer.

More than one million people are living in the filth and squalor of New York City’s slums. The blighted areas of overcrowded, rundown homes are spreading farther and farther through the city.

Although the Welfare Department spends $16 million a month to help some of these destitute families, thousands upon thousands of them are trapped in festering tenements, rooming houses, and ramshackle dwellings.

To learn at first hand what it’s like to live with the rats and roaches of the slums, the World-Telegram assigned staff writer and housing investigator Woody Klein to spend a month in three of the worst slum areas—the upper West Side, the lower East Side and and Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

Mr. Klein took an assumed name—Ben Clarke. He said he was an unemployed actor from Los Angeles who came here to look for work on the stage. He grew a stubble of beard, donned dirty khaki pants and a torn shirt. Then he moved into a slum rooming house and began his assignment.

In the long days and long nights that followed, Mr. Klein went from flat to flat to talk to the people who exist in the dingy, overcrowded rooms for which they often were charged exorbitant rents.

He ate and drank with the slum dwellers and listened as they described their frustration and their fear. He was sickened by the nauseating smell of the slums and by the dreadful, unsanitary bathroom facilities in many of the buildings.

He talked to old people living out their last years in

Staff writer Woody Klein as he appears, above, in his normal street attire, and, at right, as he appeared during the month he spent in the city’s slums.

dreamy rooms, no bigger than oversized closets. He talked to children whose only toys were wine and whisky bottles tossed away by neighborhood drunks. He talked to the ill and the feeble-minded.

Applies for Relief.

Like many slum tenants, Mr. Klein applied for relief from the Welfare Department. He sought unemployment benefits from the state. He accepted no money from city or state. From those already on relief, he learned the tragedy of families forced to use their food money for excessive rentals charged by many slumlords.

There were times when Mr. Klein, revolted by the human misery he found, regretted having undertaken the mission. But he stayed on until he completed his research.

His series of articles, illustrated with photographs taken in the horror houses, will start tomorrow in the World-Telegram.
I Lived in a Slum

'At Home' in a Filthy Cage
Family Is Trapped in West Side's Jungle

More than a million people live in the filth and squalor of New York City's slums. They live a miserable life in unsanitary, decaying, overcrowded buildings infested with rodents and roaches. Just last week in Harlem a 4-year-old girl's hair and left ear were bitten by rats two nights in a row. To get the inside story of what it's like in the slums, the World Telegram assigned staff writer Woody Klein to live a month in one of the worst areas of blight in the city. A series of articles based on his experiences starts today.

By WOODY KLEIN,
World-Telegram Staff Writer

I was sitting in a dark, flooded basement apartment in the heart of the Upper West Side "jungle" during a heavy rainstorm. Water was coming in through holes in the roof, pouring down the walls of the five-story building and forming a pool three inches deep on the wooden floor.

The air was stifling in the windowless flat. If there was any ventilation at all, it came from a rathole in the wall. Greasy dishes and cooking utensils were strewn throughout the cramped area which served as both living room and kitchen.

One adjoining room, 8 by 10 feet, contained a double bed for three of the tenants and a crib for the 24-day-old baby. The only clean article in the room was the baby's birth certificate which, framed in glass, hung proudly on a wall.

Sitting dejectedly on a wooden crate near the doorway, his pants rolled up to his bony knees to escape the rising water, was a frail, pathetic-looking little man. This was Jose, the superintendent of the building.

He ran his fingers through his long black hair and muttered dispiritedly, "It's a mess, isn't it? Six months I live in this hole. All I want is to move up one flight, but the landlord don't listen. He says the super must live in the cellar."

I was horrified by the thought of a family trapped in this filthy cage. I had selected at random this room.

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Rains Flood West Side Jungle Home

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On the first day of my assignment last month, reporter Woody Klein typed out this story of living primitive conditions in a slum area of New York City.

On 84th St. in the slums of New York City and I found the first real home I had ever seen. It was in a small house in the back of an alley. The room was an elongated room that contained an old iron bed, a rusty, torn mattress, a tiny, dirty sink, a toilet without a flush, and a small, rusted refrigerator.

There was one toilet for the six apartments on the floor, but it was not used by the residents. The building was in poor condition, and the floors were dirty and wet.

I was told by a neighbor that the building was being abandoned, and that the residents were moving out. I decided to stay and see what would happen.

In the early morning, the smell of garbage and dampness filled the air. The dirty, crowded conditions were overwhelming.

I noticed that many of the residents were struggling to make ends meet. Some worked long hours to earn a living, while others relied on welfare payments.

I spoke with some of the residents, and they told me about their struggles. One woman said that she had no money to buy food and that her children were hungry.

Another resident told me that he had been unemployed for six months and that he and his family were living in a room that was too small for all of them.

Despite the poor living conditions, the residents were determined to make the best of their situation. They shared stories and laughter, and they helped each other whenever they could.

I learned that the slums are a part of the problem in the United States, and that the condition of the residents is a reflection of the larger social issues.

I was affected by the harsh realities of life in the slums, and I realized that there is a need for change.

In the end, I felt a sense of hope and determination, knowing that there are people working to improve the lives of those living in the slums.

TOMORROW: (Upper West Side Story)

Staff writer Woody Klein describes his new neighbors in the house on 84th St.
I Lived in a Slum

Bugs Reign in Squalor

Select West Side Area Becomes Hodge-Podge Of Blighted Dwellings

More than a million people live in the filth and squalor of New York City's slums. They live a miserable life in insanitary, decaying, overcrowded buildings infested with rodents and roaches. Just last week in Harlem a 9-year-old girl's hands and face were bitten by rats' two nights in a row. To get the inside story of what it's like in the slums, the World-Telegram assigned staff writer Woody Klein to live a month in three of the worst areas of blight in the city. A series of articles based on his experiences continues today.

By WOODY KLEIN,
World-Telegram Staff Writer

Twenty years ago W. 84th St. was a "good address" in a highly respectable neighborhood inhabited by successful, middle-class residents of New York City. It was clean, well-kept, a community of traditional four and five-story brownstones.

But neglect, indifference and subsequent deterioration have lowered this once-select area to a hodgepodge of rooming houses and dreary apartment buildings. A few modern apartments defy the decay of the neighborhood but they are the exception.

Actually, what has happened on W. 84th St. has happened in many sections of the city. The slums are gobbling up residential areas faster than new low-cost housing units are being constructed.

Population Falls.

The City Planning Commission says it this way: Every year 11,000 individual apartments deteriorate into slums while only 5500 new low-cost public housing units are built to replace them.

While the over-all population of New York City decreased from 7,891,557 in 1950 to 7,870,000 in 1958, the city's population in slum housing climbed from 899,200 in 1950 to 1,132,000 in 1958.

And in the last eight years, while the number of...
An Editorial

Frankly, We're Shocked Too!

This is probably the first time we've ever asked our readers to refer to yesterday's paper. But we emphatically urge just that for any readers who may have missed reading the opening article in Woody Klein's "I Lived in a Slum" series.

Seldom has a story revealed in such dramatic and explicit terms the atrocity conditions under which more than a million New Yorkers live. Today's article and those that will follow present further shocking documentation of a great city's shame.

Naturally, we have not been oblivious to the existence of slums in New York—but this account of slum life from a skilled, perceptive reporter who actually lived in these hovels has shocked even the editors of this newspaper. It is almost incredible that such conditions could exist in New York City in 1959 A.D.

Many of our readers, we believe, also have had only a passing acquaintance, if that, with slum conditions. We think these articles will affect them profoundly, making them truly aware and conscious for the first time of what tenement filth and stench are really like.

No doubt the Commies will make what they can of these revelations. Let them. We don't happen to believe in giving the seamy aspects of city life the under-the-rug treatment. That is not the route toward curing these evils. Only an informed and enlightened public can provide the cure.

It's true enough that the Wagner administration cannot be held completely to blame for these dismaying slum conditions. The slums have been with us for many decades. Yet it is a fact that this cancer has flourished and spread during this administration while so-called slum clearance programs have beside the worst areas and reached for relatively presentable sections to raze and remake.

The salient question raised by Mr. Klein's harrowing account of his days and nights in New York hovels is, of course: How can these awful conditions be corrected?

The answer must come not merely from government, not merely from the town's host of civic organizations—but from the people of New York in the largest sense. And we believe it will come when the people realize the full, horrible dimensions of this unconscionable situation.

Editorial N.Y. World-Telegram & Sun

6-28-59
I Lived in a Slum

Tenants Battle to Survive In Lower East Side's 'Korea'

More than a million people live in the filth and squalor of New York City's slums. They live a miserable life in unsanitary, decaying, overcrowded buildings infested with rodents and roaches. Only today a 2-month-old boy died of rubeus in Coney Island. Last week in Harlem a 4-year-old girl was badly bitten by rats; two nights in a row. To get the inside story of what it's like in the slums, the World-Telegram assigned staff writer Woody Klein to live a month in three of the worst areas of blight in the city. A series of articles based on his experiences continues today.

By WOODY KLEIN,
World-Telegram Staff Writer.

Francisco and his seven small children are trapped in a dingy, unventilated two-room flat in a cankerous community called "Korea" in the Lower East Side.

Francisco was one of the first tenants I met after I became a slum dweller in that area of the city last month. My $10-a-week hole in the wall in a cheap rooming house on Forsyth St. was barren, rat infested.

The whole five-story structure was one big garbage can—fly-covered garbage in the hallways, filth in the four "community" toilets used by more than 30 boarders, and a terrible stench rising from the roach-infested stoves in the hallway kitchens. The heat was stifling.

Francisco's building around the corner on Eldridge St. was no better. But if the physical conditions were bad, they were dwarfed by his personal burdens. Surrounded by his seven glassy-eyed children, Francisco broke into tears as he talked with me.

"Somebody gotta help me," he said. "I gotta do something about the kids and I gotta get out of this bad place."

Francisco left the sugar cane fields of Puerto Rico

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Two decaying figures tell the story of the city's slums.

They walk a path to nowhere.

Photo by Ford.
Tenants Fight for Life on East Side

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10 years ago and came home with his wife and three children. Now there are seven ranging in age from 1 to 12. For a while he made a decent living as a construction worker, but he was laid off last year. Now he gets $99 a month as the superintendent of several slum buildings and a $16 welfare check every two weeks.

"All the places we live in are very bad," he said. "Ten years ago I saw the conditions. It's hard to make a home in this kind of place."

I asked him if he had children. "Yes," he said. "I have a daughter. She's 12 years old." He looked at me with a sad look in his eye. "How is she doing?"

I told him about the conditions in the slums. "I know," he said. "It's hard to live in this kind of place." He looked at me with a sad look in his eye again. "Can you help us?"

I told him I would do what I could. "Thank you," he said. "I appreciate it." He looked at me with a sad look in his eye again.

Domestic Fights Erupt

When I left Francisco I shook his hand and wished him good luck. He seemed to be in a good mood.

I left the slums and went to a nearby restaurant. I ordered a hot dog and a soda. As I was eating, I looked around and saw a man sitting in the corner. He looked sad. I asked him how he was doing. He told me about his troubles and I offered to help him.

I asked him if he had children. "Yes," he said. "I have three boys. They're 10, 12, and 14 years old." He looked at me with a sad look in his eye. "How are they doing?"

I told him about the conditions in the slums. "I know," he said. "It's hard to live in this kind of place." He looked at me with a sad look in his eye again. "Can you help us?"

I told him I would do what I could. "Thank you," he said. "I appreciate it." He looked at me with a sad look in his eye again.

A small boy, bringing home groceries to his mother, catches the attention of reporter Woody Klein as he enters the front door of his Lower East Side "home." Klein writes of people in Williamsburg who say "we ain't really alive."