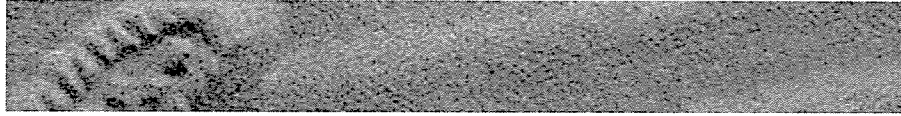


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...words...from some great local writers

Boxed OUT!

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karen amster-young :: The Beach Chair Chronicles

**...weekly observations & discoveries from manhattan to the east end.**

Mayor Bloomberg talked a lot last week about "blocking the box". As usual, he had an aggressive and, as much as some of us hate to admit, likely effective recommendation about fixing something in Manhattan. This time it was about how to alleviate the "blocking the box" issue in New York – the box being the area in an intersection in Manhattan that numerous drivers block with or without realizing it, adding to the already congested streets of the City. He announced he would be adding more traffic cops to issue tickets to these drivers without needing to actually stop them (thereby not adding to the congestion). They can simply take a photo of the unsuspecting obnoxious driver's license plate and a ticket would be issued. Despite being an avid news reader, this was my first conscious exposure to the word "box" in the last seven days. I did not think much of it at the time. "Smack in the Box" was the headline from the Daily News and there were numerous others. I think I liked the headline. That is what I thought about really. But the news is the news and often applies to life: don't block the box or there are consequences, perhaps just irritating, but consequences.

Around the same time my six-year old developed a fever of unknown origin. It seemed to last forever. No strep throat, no ear infection, none of the usual suspects of infant, toddler or childhood fever. I remained calm for

about a week; let's face it: once you have a kid who is six years old you already have some battle scars and like to think you are an 'ol pro with these things. When the first week went into the second week and the penicillin was not kicking in, I got a little stressed-out. When my daughter's pediatrician was rambling on about bacterial versus viral infections and hypothesizing about the cause, I stopped him mid-sentence (I mean this was the 10th call and I was sleep-deprived) and I said in an irritated tone, "Could we think OUT OF THE BOX for a moment?" As the words came out of my mouth I realized that this was one of the only times I used this phrase where I was not participating in a creative brainstorm. There was a pregnant pause and then he responded, "Yes, we could." And he continued talking about our next steps. But this time it did not sound as rehearsed or as if he was placating a nervous Upper East Side Mom. I was reminded that thinking out of the box could be a productive thing. Think out of the box; especially when someone you love is struggling or not well. Think out of the box.

An unbelievably huge box arrived at my door (well, at my doorman) around the same time this was all going on. Not surprisingly, I had forgotten about some phone or on-line purchase I made the week before from one of the thousands of catalogs we get in the mail. I am not an obsessive on-line or catalog shopper. However, I do get freaked out for some reason about throwing out great catalogs before I look at them; and once in while I see something I absolutely MUST have. It is funny how unimportant this shit becomes when you have a kid who does not feel well. Anyway, I brought the 100 ton box upstairs that day and could not even remember what the hell I ordered until I saw "Aged Terra Cotta" on the outside and realized it was during a "weak", spring fever moment when I ordered a freakin' planter for my balcony; I admit, I had succumbed to that pathetic New Yorker ritual of trying to make a balcony look pretty so we create an outdoor space to pretend for a second we are not in the city. I did not realize it was so huge. I must have looked at the dimensions, I thought to myself. I have been told

I am spatially challenged with some things. I am also bad with directions. Same side of the brain I believe. The huge box sat in my living room. I need to return the huge box to the overpriced home and garden company. It is too big. The box is too big. Some boxes are just not right. Always return boxes that are just not right.

On the Lower East side of Manhattan at this specific time in Gotham, as many of you probably know, there is the hot nightclub of the moment, The Box. There is always one club of the moment. When my daughter was finally, fingers crossed, out of the woods late last week I was desperate to get out. Despite feeling run-down from two weeks of worrying, I felt trapped in my apartment – boxed in. My first choice was to be out with a close friend – just one person that I could meet with my bad hair and chipped nail polish and recap the worry I had been feeling (let's face it, beauty appointments are the first to go when you are in anxiety mode). Unfortunately, without getting into the story, it was a group dinner or nothing. So I opted for the group dinner. Maybe it was the best thing: light conversation with fairly new friends and acquaintances in the West Village. Later that night, after a few chardonnays, I heard that another group of friends was, coincidentally, at The Box. Risking a bit of humiliation by sharing this, I could not get in that night. According to my sources, if you make a table or show reservation you don't have to deal with the lines or politics of getting in. I did not even think about this as I headed over to the club, by myself, fairly late in the evening. I think the last time I was in this part of town was when I watched "Crossing Delancey" and just HAD to see if there was really a pickle man! Once you are past a certain age you feel like you've "been there, done that" and I really have not had to wait on one of those obnoxious lines where they pick and choose who gets in for about 15 years. That was my first mistake. Never underestimate the power of a BOX. Any box. Girls half my age swirled around me. I think it was a movie called "The Mirror has Two Faces", where Jeff Bridges' best friend was trying to explain that he was unfulfilled despite

his numerous dates because most of them thought that "A Farewell to Arms" was a diet book rather than a classic novel, alluding to his penchant for young women which was not getting him anywhere on the happiness scale. Most of the girls on line that night looked to be in that category. But I will admit that for a split second, as if I was "twenty-something" again, I did feel humiliated waiting on that line and not getting in on my own accord! Now, I could have called about three people that my husband and I know and dropped some names and gotten in (I think!), but I just would not do that at midnight on that particular night. I remained calm and thought about what the hell I was doing there. I felt old, I will admit. I am not used to not getting in somewhere! How could this be happening?? I go to most of the hot clubs at least once in a while and it has not been an issue. I knew I looked tired from two weeks of putting cold compresses on my daughter's head, taking her temperature and worrying. The very young "bouncer" looked at me and asked, "Do you have a reservation? Do you know anyone here?" I decided to just play sweet and not use the names of our better known connections because they were not here and I just felt like it was beneath me. So I just said, "I am meeting some friends." He responded, "Sorry, if you don't have a table or give me a name I know I can't let you in." I was deflated but certainly did not feel crushed. I mean, I knew by next week I may be here again (having at least pre-planned a bit or called ahead with my non-chipped nails!) or perhaps I would just be at a cute café uptown or another hot club in the Hamptons (prepared again); or maybe I would go after some Botox injections (I am kidding!). I just knew that this particular BOX did not mean that much that night. I was more important to get home to make sure my daughter was okay. Some boxes matter. Some boxes don't. If things are not perfect with people you love, some boxes matter more than others. Maybe another week I would have cared enough to let it bother me for more than a New York minute, but I doubt it. There

are a lot of boxes. Some we have to care about; some we should only care about for a second. Don't block the box. Think out of the Box, especially for things that matter. Return the big annoying box. Get in The Box when you can. Leave The Box when you have to without losing your dignity... Till next week...

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