

Spotlight On...Sharis Ingram

1. When did you move into the co-op?

We moved into Building 7 November, 2003. We're currently in Building 14, though, and I don't expect to ever move again.

2. Why did you move? How did you find us?

We had been living in a one-bedroom apartment in central Harlem before moving here. Just after my daughter was born someone in the office of the development we were then living in told us erroneously that they were not accepting any internal transfers at that time, and had no idea of when that would change. When we shopped around in Harlem we could see that there



was no way we were going to be able to afford to stay there, as it was the beginning of the real estate boom and people were asking for outrageous amounts for homes that needed serious gut renovations. Lucky for us, just as I began to think we might have to leave the city, we got the letter telling us we were next in line to move in here.

My mother had a co-worker who lived in the Towers. She called and nagged me into mailing a request for an application, which I eventually did. The funny part is my husband has no memory of filling out the application. We got the letter telling us we were at the top of the waiting list after 2 years or so and he said, "How did that happen? When did we apply?"

Back when I was first dating my husband and we were very young and very broke, we used to walk past here on our way down to Broadway for a glamorous night out at IHOP. I remember always looking at the buildings here and thinking somewhat wistfully that it looked like a nice place to live. When I filled out the initial application I thought it was only for the tower buildings and Park Reservoir. I never expected to live in one of the other buildings we had walked past so many times. Between this and the fact that he doesn't remember filling out the application, I tease him that our living here is all magic and was meant to be.

3. Who lives here with you?

It's me, my husband, Victorio, my 7.5 year old daughter Kalindra, and my son Malachi, who is almost 4. You've probably seen us around the neighborhood, probably at Train Park or Classic Park, a million times.

4. What do you enjoy about living here?

What's not to like?

I like the commitment to moderate-income housing. I think the rest of the country is experiencing a wake-up call as to what happens when one puts profits ahead of people, especially with regard to housing. I know too many people who are completely “upside down” on their mortgages and are basically doomed to take a loss on their homes no matter when they sell because their homes will never again be worth what they paid. That is never, ever, ever, going to happen here, and that sort of peace of mind is priceless. People visit my home, hear what we paid for it, and are flabbergasted to realize that such a thing is even possible. Market value is not the only way to do things. Housing should be for people, not for profit. What is more basic a right than shelter?

I like the community. People know one another here, they know my children at least by sight, there is a solid sense of place and neighborhood here that is not so common any more. Even when the community is at its most contentious, it tends to be because we all want what's best, we just don't agree on what that “best” is.

I like that you get as much or as little out of the community as you put into it. There is always something going on around here. If you want to be active and involved, it is easy to do so—just be willing and show up! If you are a homebody and don't want to be bothered, that's okay too. No one will hold it against you. The satisfaction of being involved is more than worthwhile, in my opinion, but it truly does make this a better place to live. The education office makes it easy for anyone to come forward with an idea of how to make things better and get in touch with likeminded people. I am always amazed at how quickly they can make things happen that would never get off the ground if it was just one person working alone.

Basically, it is an excellent place to put down roots, rear children, and grow old. My daughter had a classmate at the nursery school who was a 5th generation co-operator, I think. That's my idea of a strong community.

5. Tell us a bit about your family's history.

My husband grew up not too far from here just off the Grand Concourse. I grew up in Washington Heights on Riverside Drive. His family is originally from Puerto Rico, and I come from a long line of black folks from down south. My kids are third generation native New Yorkers. We stay in touch with our roots, we visit our cousins all over, but we will never leave here.

6. Tell us a bit about your job, hobbies, interests, etc.

Right now I am a full time stay-at-home mother, and with kids this young I don't really have time or energy for serious hobbies. I do still manage to read a lot of books. Most of my free time is spent volunteering at my kids' schools. Malachi has one more year to go at the Amalgamated Nursery School, and Kalindra is in second grade at the AmPark Neighborhood

School. You know you want to buy some raffle tickets from me for the Nursery School's Spring Bazaar on May 17th.

7. What activities/services do you use here at the co-op?

The Nursery school, the gym, the CSA, the credit union, the playgroup... There's probably more I'm not thinking of right now. We usually go on the apple picking trip in the Fall, and we often attend the events scheduled for kids during the school vacations. When my kids are bigger and don't need as much attention, I have hopes of joining the ceramics studio, the yoga and other exercise classes, and the book club. I keep joking I'm going to pose as a senior so I can get in on the NORC shopping trips too—they go everywhere!

8. What would you like to see happen in the future at the co-op?

For the most part I'd just like the co-op to continue to thrive.

The CSA is good, and I am so glad we have it, but I would love to see a food co-op here in addition to it. Not necessarily as intense as the Park Slope Food Co-op, for example, but something on a small scale would be nice to start.

I also think the co-op should look into providing space for a car share program like Zip Car. The difficulty of finding parking is one of co-operators' biggest complaints, and if we could share cars as we share other resources that might alleviate some of the problem. It is environmentally sound practice, and it is in the spirit of co-operative living. I am not sure how it would work best, but one of the best things about living here is that you don't have to figure everything out yourself, there is always some smartypants to help think of a better way to implement a good idea.