

# Through Loss, Comes Art

By Laura Farrell



In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, Peter Tighe began to focus on the one possession the storm couldn't take away from him, his art.

The storm had wiped out his home, taken most of his personal possessions, and put his entire life on hold for the next two years. Through all the tragedy, Tighe, when things were at their worst, gained hope and inspiration from his art work.

Born and raised in Bay Ridge Brooklyn, Tighe drew pictures throughout his youth, and graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology in 2000 with a degree in Illustration and Marketing Design.

Like many new graduates, life initially took a different path. Tighe joined the NYPD in 2005, and then moved over to the FDNY in 2006. Up until the storm, Tighe's career was fighting fires in Crowne Heights, Brooklyn.

The repercussions of the storm forced Tighe into a whole different lifestyle, but that wasn't all negative. He started to merge his firefighting with his passion for art.



This wasn't an easy transition. He was forced to create his artwork in the basement that belonged to his relatives. Tighe and his wife had been residing there while their home was being rebuilt. Unfortunately, it was eventually deemed as a total loss and finally demolished.

"We spent the night of the storm with family in Bay Ridge and never went back," said Tighe. "We were going to go back the next day, but we were never able to. We moved what was above the waterline back to the family's house and stayed there."

Tighe and his wife were forced to accept that their one-story ranch and everything they possessed in it had been taken by the storm. For the last year and a half, the couple has been waiting for the construction to start in order to build a new home.



A handful of financial programs have attempted to accommodate the needs of Sandy victims who have lost their homes, however many residents have suffered significant financial losses.

Despite the Build it Back Program's recent reports it has surpassed its Labor Day goals of "500 homes in construction and 500 reimbursement checks being issued" many communities affected by Sandy are waiting to rebuild their homes and get their lives back to normal.

"There is no governmental assistance, Build It Back is not helping us, and so the SBA loan is going to fund the new house. We're basically taking on a second mortgage," said Tighe.

As Tighe and his wife dealt with the painful process, the lives they lived remained the same.

Tighe continued to create his art in the basement, despite the fact that he didn't have his own table or space to work in. Although he was grateful that a relative took him in, it couldn't subtract the fact that pursuing his artwork in the cramped space was a challenge.



“My wife would want to give a gift to somebody so we’d do a kid’s portrait and give it as a gift,” said Tighe.

From there, Tighe has slowly watched his life transform as an artist. He began creating portrait illustrations, paintings of the Rockaway landscape, and sculptures. However, space still dictates how much work he can do and how large his creations can get.

“We were living in the basement and I couldn’t really get too much work done, but that’s everybody’s story out here,” he said.

Through all his loss, reconnecting with his artwork was a personal gain he did not see coming. Now that Tighe has started to make another career out of his artwork on top of firefighting, his future has spread its horizon so much further than he’d ever imagine.



Recently Tighe and his wife returned back to their Belle Harbor community. He hopes to move into his new home within the year.

“I was so excited to be back,” he said, talking about the community he loves. “I’m real happy to be here.”

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