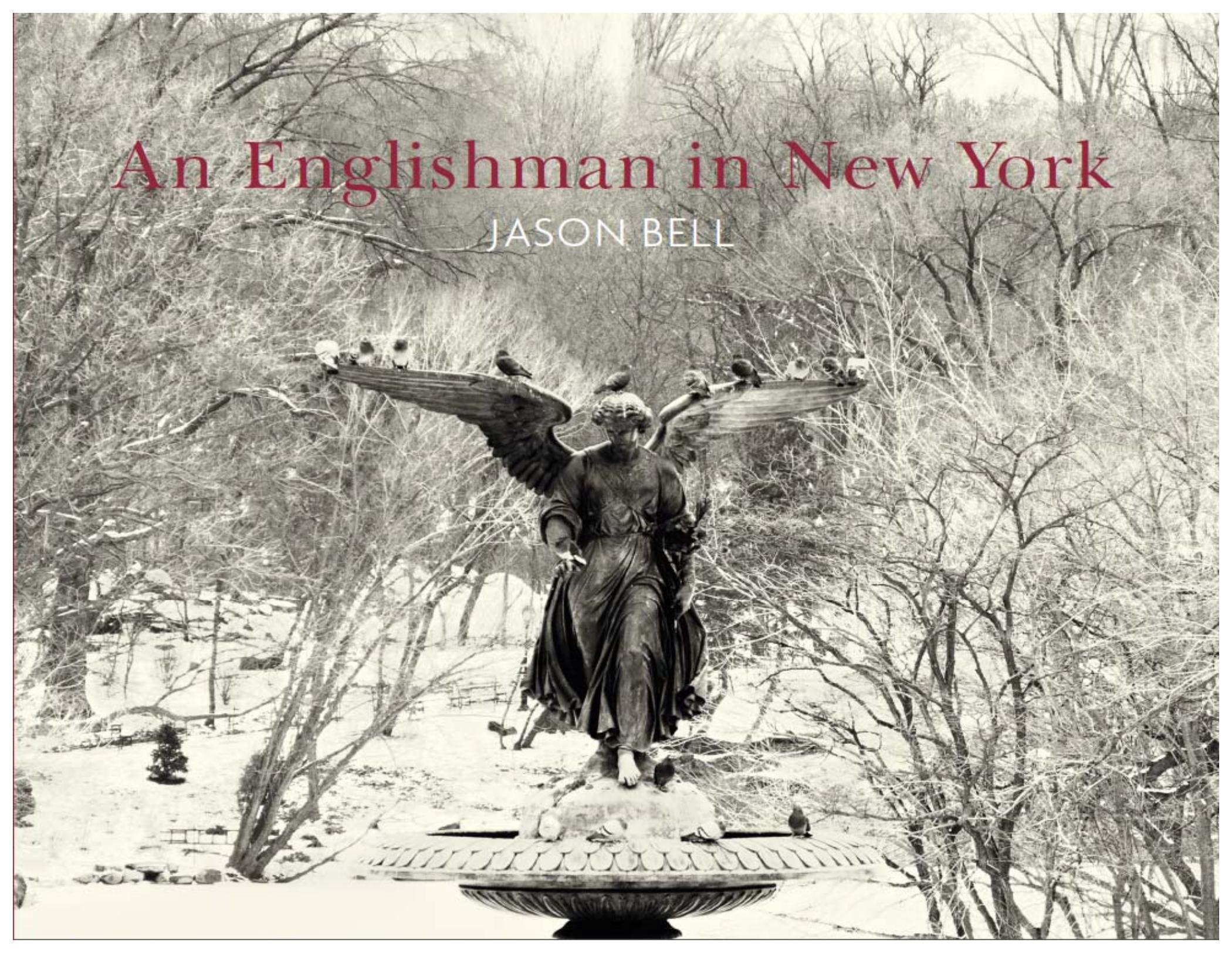


An Englishman in New York

JASON BELL



Quentin English, Founder, quentinsfriends.com, Pier 11, East River





Quentin English
 Founder,
 quentinsfriends.com

I moved to New York on July 28th 1998. I'd been living in Paris for the previous eight years, so I had already left England.

The interesting thing about being in a foreign country is that you can escape the social stereotyping that occurs so much in England. People there can often place you quite accurately from the way you speak. I notice that I still stereotype others. I met an English guy recently and I was describing him to my wife and I said, "Well, I already know this much about him just from the way he speaks."

I quite enjoy being a foreigner but one of the biggest advantages in being here is how they treat entrepreneurs. In New York it doesn't matter where you're from, it doesn't matter what your accent is, if you have a good idea and you have the energy, someone will listen to you. This doesn't just apply to entrepreneurs but also in business and culture. I work in the city as a Director of Branding and the multicultural nature of the office is amazing. There are people with the strongest accents who are doing really well because they do a good job and no one cares. That's the same even in the upper echelons of management. I know it's a cliché, but it feels like anyone can make it. Statistically, do people make it more in America? I'm not so sure. When you read *The Economist* they might beg to differ but, especially in New York, I think if you've got good ideas you'll get someone to listen to you.

New York is a wonderful melting pot and I love its cultural diversity. In my daughter's preschool, over half the sixteen kids in her class are bilingual and each speaks a different language such as Spanish, Japanese, French or Hindi. The first question they ask each other is, "What languages do you speak?" When I was a kid in England growing up in the suburbs, I probably knew twenty people by the time I was five. I really didn't have a big social circle, whereas for my five-year-old daughter, her circle of acquaintances is enormous and she knows many people that I don't.

The cultural advantages are balanced by the high cost of living, which makes it hard. I recently compared our income to the national average and we were in the top two percent which I thought was relatively good. When I compared our income to the New York average we were in the lower forty-fifth percentile which really goes to show the kind of money that people make here. To break even and have a little bit of fun each month means that you have to make a lot of money, especially if you have a family, which is why so many people move out. It's certainly something that I'm constantly struggling with.

I definitely think of myself as a New Yorker now because I have many New York attitudes, especially expecting things to be exactly as I want them. When English people go to a restaurant they're scared to ask for things or to complain if something isn't right. I will send something back if it isn't right. I notice that when people come to visit they start to adopt the same attitude after spending a few days here.

Being an Englishman in New York isn't that exceptional as there are over a hundred and twenty-thousand of us living here. It's nice not having people react to your difference all the time.

Having said that, I know that I still benefit from having the English accent. Some New Yorkers still find it intimidating and think that it makes you sound more intelligent. People certainly give more weight to what I say than I probably deserve

When I go back to England I feel like a foreigner. I feel different. I have no desire to live there again, although I would like to be able to spend more time with friends and family when I visit. For the moment I'm very happy living in a city with such incredible energy, diversity and wealth.



Robert Fader
 Book Buyer,
 Posman Bookstore

I flew to New York for the first time on Sir Freddie Laker's 'Skytrain' for a little over fifty pounds. It was 1981 and Bobby Sands was on hunger strike and I was amazed at how New York was affected by that. In the neighbourhoods you'd see flatbed trucks with guys dressed in paramilitary uniform complete with balaclavas. It was dirty, covered in graffiti and dangerous. It was nerve-wracking.

Ten years later I felt I'd become stuck in my career and in life in general. Margaret Thatcher was bringing me down and I thought I'd come over to the States for six months and just see what would happen. I needed a change and it was very appealing not to have to overcome a language barrier.

I'd been influenced by Martin Scorsese films and had a clear idea of the things I loved about the city. Sure enough there it all was. I thought tyres didn't squeal when they went round corners in parking garages but then I came here and realised they do. It was every bit as exciting and visually stimulating as I had hoped.

The only job I could get was as a bike messenger, so I did that for just under six months. I'd had my third bike stolen by then and I was running out of time when a friend said to me to apply for the green card lottery. I went back to England and got a job and didn't really think anything more of it and then got a call. I'd won, I had a green card.

One of the things I felt when I came here was, 'Oh good, I've shrugged off the class system and the significance of my accent. An American is going to listen to me and not know what kind of school I went to and what kind of house I live in.' That was incredibly liberating. When I left England I was a bar manager and then I came here and I was a bike messenger and I didn't feel judged for getting those kinds of jobs. I think having been here for eighteen years now it's not quite as simple as that. There are different kinds of barriers to social mobility and here it's a monetary class system. It's so expensive to live here that if you're young and starting out you're going to have to go and live on the outskirts of Brooklyn in a dodgy area.

I don't go home very often but when I do I'm always struck by how much I miss conversation. When I sit down with family and friends I notice how much more content the English are to have a cup of tea and just chat and to talk about stuff. Without it being redundant or irritating the conversation feels more expansive. It's more interesting. That observation extends to the media as well. I miss news. I can't sit down at 9.00pm with a cup of tea and watch the news. It's like, where is it? After a while you realise how insulated it is here. There's America and then there's the rest of the world. I don't feel well informed

living here and America can become a little boorish after a while. I miss the character of England. America is a little cocky and not necessarily as smart as it could be.

Having said that I think New York is a very good place to grow old. I'm in a sixth floor walk up now so I'm hoping I will have improved my lot somewhat; moved a little nearer the subway in a building with an elevator, which most buildings have. You can have anything delivered, so as you grow old and infirm you can have a tremendous amount going on. You can still walk a few blocks to go to the cinema or all you have to do is get downstairs and put your hand up for a taxi. You can stay very connected in a city like this and I believe that will still continue to be the case.

I'm definitely an Englishman living in New York. I feel that it would be dishonest to present it any other way. I'm happy to be here.



Jilly Stephens
 Executive Director,
 City Harvest

I first arrived in New York at the end of 1995 to work for the charity Orbis International. I now work for another charity, City Harvest.

City Harvest is the New York City community's response to hunger. We link the food industry and countless organisations, foundations, corporations and private citizens together to help feed the hungry. Each week we feed more than 260,000 men, women and children.

The levels of poverty in New York City are shockingly high. People are always very surprised to hear that, by some estimates, over 2 million people are living in poverty. There are eight million people in total so that's twenty-five percent who live in poverty or near poverty. There is a whole other sector beyond that that are still really struggling to get by. You just don't expect to see that in New York City. Traditionally you think of people in soup kitchens and food pantries as the homeless, but the bulk of people we're serving have got homes. Many of them have got jobs; it's just that they're living in poverty and they need help when it comes to putting food on the table. Every third person standing in line at a soup kitchen or food pantry is a child. We put a great deal of emphasis on food and nutritional education for children because they have to be ready to learn at school. They're already leading very stressful lives, wondering where their next meal is coming from or whether they'll be starting the day with breakfast in their bellies, so there shouldn't be another level of stress for them.

Although there is a degree of Federal support available City Harvest doesn't tap into that. We're more of a private response to hunger. We receive donations from farmers, wholesalers, manufacturers and restaurants.

We're doing OK and we're finding that, especially at times like this, New Yorkers love to stand by other New Yorkers. No New Yorker wants to think of another as hungry and in need. People here are incredibly responsive to our fundraising appeals. We're raising much more than we projected, even though many people are cutting the number of charities that they support. Many have a list of ten that they're reducing to three. Luckily we seem to be one of the three.

It's a very resilient city, very optimistic. There is a 'can do' attitude that really struck me when I first came here. Nothing you ask seems too much of people. I always get a positive response. As I've been here over the years I can see it is a very resilient city. It's a city that seems to be hurting again now. A lot of people have lost jobs but the city will bounce back fairly quickly.

Until I started the job at City Harvest I only saw myself as living in New York as opposed to America. Through the work I'm doing to fight hunger in the city, I'm very aware of the poverty in the rest of the country and that I'm part of America. It's very easy not to see past Manhattan. I think that for many English people we're drawn to the whole nature of living on an island.

I now have three children, all American and all born in New York. I think that because of them I now see myself as a New Yorker but one whose heart is really in England.



Stephen Daldry
 Director

I live between London and New York. We have a house in Hertfordshire and a place in the Meatpacking District. I have two daughters who go to school here. They're becoming New Yorkers. It wasn't that much of a choice to live here; it just sort of happened. My wife is a New Yorker, born and raised in Brooklyn, and it sort of evolved. The kids started going to kindergarten and now they're in first grade. It's a strange thing to say, and it's probably a surprise to people that I say this, but it's actually an easier place to bring up kids than London. It's smaller and easier to get around, there are more parks and it just feels more child-friendly.

I can remember the first time I came to New York in 1980. I got off the plane, and went straight to see *Barnum* on Broadway. I was struck by the profound energy of the audience, an audience that was very happy to demonstrate its appreciation for what was happening during the show as much as at the end of the show. I loved it. Watching theatre felt like a rock 'n' roll experience.

New York has changed radically since then. AIDS in the eighties wiped out a significant proportion of the artists in this city. It was a much more dangerous place. 42nd Street was full of hookers and hustlers, police and drugs. Now it's a very safe tourist area. The city has become gentrified and a little sanitised. Much of the wild energy has been replaced by a bourgeois sensibility. As I get older that's good for me because I've got kids, but the wildness I remember as an eighteen year old seems to be tempered with genteelness. There was a time when people used to perceive New York as the wild and crazy place. In my experience it's definitely the reverse. London is the crazy wild place, and New York is more sedate and more organised. London feels more like the Wild West, more like the New York of the eighties. New York is now where I come to sleep and to recover.

There's a huge amount of theatre here in the city, but there's nowhere near the amount and diversity that there is in London. With subsidised theatre the level and depth of the programming in London isn't repeated anywhere else in the world and inevitably I miss that level of diversity here. New York loves to describe itself as the entertainment capital of

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