All She Wants For Christmas Is A Dry Bathroom

Photos and text by Linda Steinmuller

Most people take a roof over their heads and a warm home for granted. They also don’t expect to be showered upon when using the toilet. Unfortunately, Tawana Myers can’t use her facilities without opening an umbrella in her bathroom at 185 Wortman Avenue in the Linden Houses — and doesn’t know when NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority) will fix the leaky pipe that spews water on her head when sitting on the commode.

Myers, who has lived in the East New York housing complex for 25 years, says that conditions are getting worse over time. At a November 18th meeting, NYCHA Executive Vice President for Operations Carlos Laboy-Diaz promised to resolve repair requests for 150 Brooklyn apartments by Christmas Day. If NYCHA holds up their end of the bargain, one of Myers’ issues will be resolved — but not all of her problems with NYCHA.

The 52-year-old asthmatic resident had two open-heart surgeries, uses a walker and must wear a mask to sleep. She depends on important heart medicine delivered by mail and told the Canarsie Courier in a recent interview, “This building needs new mailboxes. My medicine doesn’t fit in the mail slot and if a different mailman is on duty, I don’t always get my medication.”

NYCHA did manage to repair something in her apartment. They recently installed a new kitchen sink, since the old one leaked, and there was mold growing underneath — not a good thing for someone suffering with respiratory ailments. But Myers claims that the contractors did shoddy work and the sink will need to be replaced again shortly. “The sink is already loose. I’m going to have to put in another ticket, and it could take one to two years to fix. Putting in a ticket to NYCHA is like trying to win the lottery. You hope they pick you and eventually fix the problem.” Myers says that NYCHA is not hiring contractors with enough experience. “They need to fire the contractors and hire new ones.”

Myers is not ready to give up the fight for decent living conditions. Two weeks after heart surgery last July, she was already organizing meetings with tenants in her building. “So many people live in terrible conditions here. We have two elevators and one call button at 185 Wortman Avenue — for three buildings with 14 floors. Sometimes, we wait forever for an elevator.” Her list of complaints continues. “We only have two janitors cleaning three buildings so our hallway floors only get washed every few months. We need security cameras too.”

In spite of all her issues with NYCHA, Myers is grateful for all the support Pastor David Brawley of St. Paul’s Community Baptist Church has given her through her NYCHA nightmare and says she owes him a ‘special thanks’. The pastor pushed NYCHA to promise to make necessary repairs in several housing projects by Christmas. “He has supported me through all of this.”

Hopefully, Myers will have a nice surprise by Christmas and can put her umbrella away for good.