Sigrid Nunez Takes a Walk

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By
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After publishing nine novels over the last three decades, she's just seen two of her books adapted into films. Pedro Almodóvar's English-language debut The Room Next Door, based on Nunez's 2020 book What Are You Going Through, was released last December. The Friend, based on her 2018 National Book Award-winning novel, opened in March. A lifelong New Yorker, Nunez says she draws inspiration from her frequent walks around the city. She invited us to join her for one of them.

I grew up on Staten Island, spent college and graduate school in Morningside Heights, and have lived on 13th Street since the 1980s.



I'm not sure there's any advantage to staying in the same place, but I do think there are advantages to being in New York City.



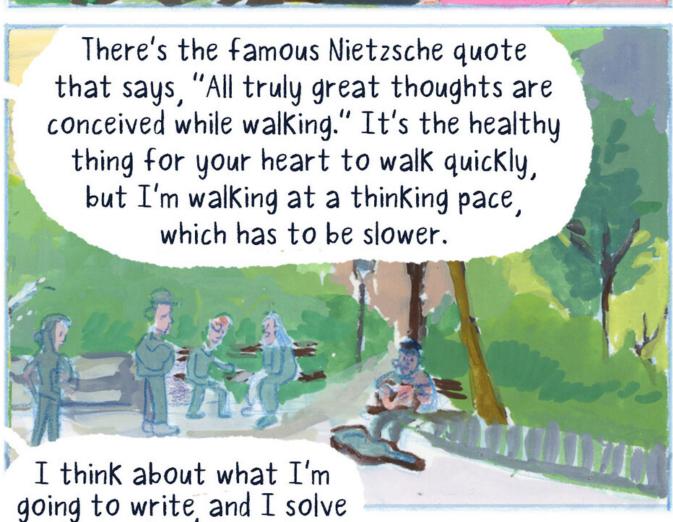
People love walking in the city precisely because, as the writer Vivian Gornick once told me, "There's always some drama happening." Vivian is my neighbor and one of my best friends.

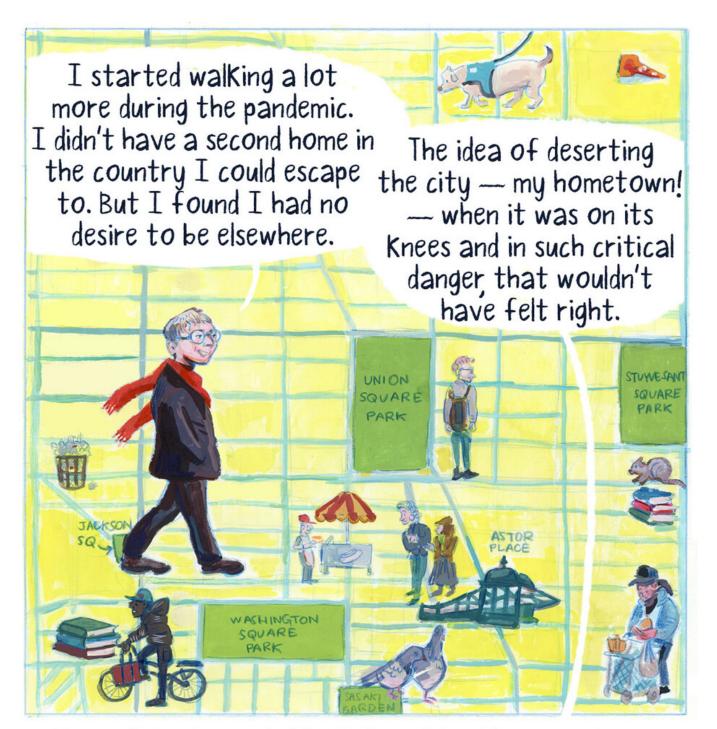


A certain amount of my work is autobiographical. The narrator of *The Friend* — who takes in her mentor's Great Dane after the mentor dies — is about my age and my gender, teaches writing, and reads a lot. But she's not me.









In my latest novel, The Vulnerables, the narrator is asked to take care of a bird because the bird's owner gets stuck on the West Coast during the pandemic, and macaws are social creatures that need attention.

You know what they say: when you're depressed, which she certainly is, find someone who needs your help. It just so happens that there isn't any human who particularly needs her help, but the bird — who is beautiful and entertaining — becomes a lifeline.



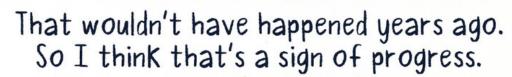
I like bringing animals into my books as characters, because these books are about some heavy things: aging, dying, suicide, cancer. When you introduce an animal, you have the opportunity for warmth and humor and lightness.

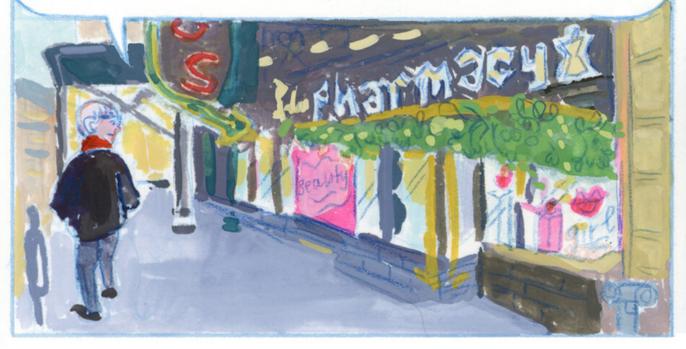






The lead role is played by Julianne Moore, who is 64. Naomi Watts, the lead actress in *The Friend*, is 56. They can be very glamorous of course, but they were perfectly willing to make themselves look tired and older for these roles.





The success of *The Friend* brought more attention to my writing, and it led to many foreign translations. Before 2018, my work had been published in seven countries; now it's around thirty-five and growing. That's how Almodóvar came across it.



















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