**LEON SILVERSTEIN**

Contact info:

Leon and Angelica Silverstein

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This serves as a single vignette that was multiplied by thousands.

In May 2002 following 9/11, I moved to 200 Rector Place, a prominent high rise in a section of the City known as Battery Park City situated 2 blocks from the southwest tip of the island, the home of the international financial district, luxury housing, high end shops and restaurants and amazing security. As were others, I was enticed by the necessarily lowered rents and luxury living as part of the City’s incentive to keep current residents there and encourage newcomers, as many had left the City permanently, and, as we now know even though the EPA claimed the air was OK to breathe, it had been irradiated, so it was not at all safe to breathe, and the almost new streets and buildings had been rendered a total mess. Very simply, there had been a mass exodus of residential and commercial owners and renters, and the building owners needed to reestablish their incomes. Every day the NYTs ran items of enticement to this end.

My sanctuary while living at 200 Rector Place was the health club on the top floor of the 46-story high rise, where I could swim, exercise and bask on the deck in the sun. I often read, dozed and took photos for hours on the weekends, mostly all alone, as if it were my private space, as there were many vacancies in that building and all the other apartment and commercial buildings.

One day as I lay in my two-piece bathing suit I awakened with a start to realize that an undesirable male was standing over me, staring. I quickly threw my cover up around me, and it was obvious that he had no plans to leave soon. This was to be the first of many encounters I was to endure with Leon Silverstein over the next five years, mostly there in my “private” sunning space. He was like an ugly rash that just wouldn’t go away.



Leon made actor Steve Buscemi look wholesome, handsome and successful. Very simply, he did not belong in these environs, but he was a resident with important ties whom, as a single woman, I couldn’t antagonize. So I listened to the stories he was bursting at the seams to share, like a child with a secret he had been cautioned to never share. They were few, but integral, in the whole scheme of things; and since I now have 15 years’ perspective, I wish I could remember every detail he shared, as I believe his was a role in laundering money and transporting drugs, at the very least.

Leon, around 65, had been reared by his uncle, Larry Silverstein of the Twin Towers and Building 7 fame, with whom he seemingly had close ties, as if he were a son. He was a guy with little education or cultural aspirations, dressed more like an uncool, lesser gangster from New Jersey, had few friends and an undemanding career -- so it seemed, an aging and unhealthy wife who spent lots of time ill in the hospital and traveling back and forth to Argentina (?) to deliver large packages every 4-6 weeks with great regularity to “a large, needy family.” Occasionally, Leon accompanied her. They were regular flyers with American Airlines, I believe, who gave them special treatment, so he reported.

Leon ran his limo (yes, he looked like an unkempt taxi driver, not a polished limo driver!) business out of one of the minimum of four apartments (32W, 32M, 23E, 8Y) he and/or his wife, Angelica, owned in this building. My suspicion is that he/they owned apartments in adjacent buildings as well. It seems that he was the owner and only employee and had occasional, but regular fares from one of the World Financial Center buildings to LaGuardia or JFK.

It seemed that Leon really, really wanted to sell one of the apartments to me. Even the contemplation was a sad joke, as I had lost my photo agency to the vagaries of 9/11, had no savings of consequence and was struggling to pay the rent that would rise in my five- year occupancy from $1500 to $2,850 per month, the pre 9/11 market value. You begin to see that 9/11, was also about the real estate values in Manhattan – frightened or dead owners’ units were sold at bargain basement prices to opportunists, then resold at top dollar just five years later.

Knowing that this purchase/sale opportunity lay just ahead, it seems that Larry Silverstein urgently advised his nephew, Leon, to move his business into an apartment in the 200 Rector Place building and to buy several apartments. There were many dividends in store for business owners and owner/residents in downtown Manhattan who stayed after 9/11, to say nothing of the gains to be made by purchases immediately following 9/11. Translation: Larry Silverstein knew that 9/11 was coming and would impact real estate value, so he advised his nephew, Leon, to buy, buy, buy. And he was so considerate that he even loaned Leon the money to do so. What an uncle!

If you go to Wikipedia/Howard Milstein, you will find he is the owner of Milford Management, that owned 200 Rector Place, and one of the major real estate holders in NYC, then there are the banks, the Milstein National Cord Blood Center, the world's largest public [cord blood bank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cord_blood_bank), and much, much more. The bio is quite an eye opener as to the breadth and number of the tentacles.