

REAL ESTATE

# Room for the Dog on the Upper East Side

The Hunt

By JOYCE COHEN FEB. 11, 2016

After Emilie Gossiaux graduated from Cooper Union in 2014, she started interning at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the Upper East Side.

She lived in the East Village, close to school. She took the bus to the museum, finding it easier for her and her guide dog, London, than the crowded subway, but the trip took well over an hour.

Ms. Gossiaux's education — her whole life, really — had been interrupted in late 2010, when she was hit by a truck while on her bicycle. The accident destroyed her eyesight. She had been hearing-impaired since childhood, and had a hearing aid in one ear and a cochlear implant in the other.

She went through nearly a year of rehabilitation to learn how to deal with blindness and to live independently, then returned to New York to finish her study of art at Cooper Union, landing in the tiny East Village one-bedroom. If the elevator was broken, she had one flight of stairs to climb. In her three years there, the rent rose to \$2,900 a month.

The internship turned into a part-time job teaching classes and giving tours, so Ms. Gossiaux decided to move closer to the museum. She was happy to leave the East Village, where she had been plagued by constant sirens.

The sirens were painful because “my cochlear implant amplifies sound, especially the really high-pitched sounds,” she said.

For a studio or one-bedroom on the Upper East Side, her budget was in the low-to mid-\$2,000s a month. She wanted a laundry room in the building and few, if any, stairs — or at least stairs that were evenly spaced and neither too steep nor too narrow.

Her mother, Susan Gossiaux, who visits occasionally from her home near New Orleans, helped with the hunt. Last summer, Mrs. Gossiaux contacted Pamela Kreeger, now a saleswoman at Citi Habitats, about a listing.

Ms. Kreeger, who then worked for Miron Properties, was eager to help Ms. Gossiaux, now 26, find a suitable home. There were “things you would never think about — how heavy a door is and how many stairs are doable,” Ms. Kreeger said. “An elevator increases the price, so it was a tough match.”

Ms. Kreeger, the Gossiauxes and London visited several places on the far East Side. They didn’t even enter one studio, which was renting for \$2,350 a month. The sidewalk outside was strewn with broken glass. Ms. Gossiaux felt it indicated the building was badly maintained.

“I don’t want my dog to step in glass or garbage, because it will hurt her paws,” she said.

They skipped a \$2,225-a-month studio where construction crews were outside. Ms. Gossiaux had faced construction at her old building and didn’t want to deal with it again.

Their search party of three women and a dog seemed to overwhelm a nearby studio on East 83rd Street that was renting for \$2,250 a month. “I knew it wasn’t the perfect place,” Ms. Kreeger said, “but with their price point and the location, I wanted them to get a sense of what you can get.”

London needed at least some room to move around. “She likes to play tug of war and keep-away with her toys,” Ms. Gossiaux said.

A one-bedroom on East 88th Street was in beautiful condition, but at \$2,650 a month, above her price limit. “It was really big and it was really worth the money,” Ms. Gossiaux said. Maybe she could share the place with a friend, or use the extra space for an art studio. She and her mother rushed to apply, but were too late — by the next business day, it was gone.

A week or so later, although Ms. Gossiaux was out of town, her mother and Ms. Kreeger resumed the hunt.

The two women went to a building with several vacancies. It was clean and inviting, with a big lobby, an elevator and a laundry room.

One studio there, for \$2,400 a month, was on the ground floor, with a short metal staircase that led to a backyard. But the stairs were steep and uneven. The yard was connected to the one next door, so “if someone was barbecuing, London would invite herself to the barbecue,” Mrs. Gossiaux said.

But for \$2,200 a month, another place, on a higher floor, seemed a good fit. It was a rectangular studio of around 500 square feet, facing a back courtyard, with plenty of closets and a small, separate kitchen.

Ms. Gossiaux trusted her mother’s judgment and rented the studio from afar. With her help and that of her father, Eric Gossiaux, she moved into her new home last fall. The building’s agent charged a fee of a little more than \$2,000; Ms. Kreeger and Miron waived the broker fee.

The family was grateful. “There have been doctors who waived their fee, but to have a real estate agent do that — I just couldn’t believe it,” Mrs. Gossiaux said.

She stayed with her daughter for a few weeks to help her get settled. They affixed Braille labels to canned goods, added corner guards to the table and put tactile controls on the oven and microwave. “I have a lot more room than I did in my old apartment, and all of my friends notice the difference immediately,” Ms. Gossiaux said.

In her new neighborhood, Ms. Gossiaux is no longer tormented by sirens. With the help of a mobility instructor and a dog trainer, she and London learned the

surrounding streets, including where the buses stop and where the pavement buckles.

Ms. Gossiaux's neighbors are as nice as they were in Minneapolis, where she went for her training in adjusting to blindness. "They wanted to know who I was," she said. "I trust my neighbors. I talk to them and I have their phone numbers."

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