

district met in a local truck stop to pick their candidate. Bernie was the first of the three candidates to speak, and his talk was easily the most memorable. He sauntered to the front of the room and announced that his willingness to serve the good folks of Northwest Missouri was unsurpassed. As an example of past service, he gave an all-too-graphic description of his experience as the first officer to arrive at the scene of a convenience store murder. Perhaps his description of "brains dripping down the front of the pop cooler" was not totally appropriate for that particular audience. Bernie did not get the nomination, but his speech earned him a permanent place in our family lore.

Julie and I next saw Bernie when he was one of 19 speakers at the Holt County Farm Bureau Candidates' Night and Hog Roast held this summer in Oregon, Missouri. His speech this time was in a little better taste. Perhaps he had been in touch with Mark Helprin.

There are only 6,000 people in Holt County, just south of where I live, and 25 of them were on the August primary ballot. And quite a collection of candidates it was, too. Seven of the eight candidates for sheriff were Republicans. The revolution is secure in Holt County, if nowhere else. The lone Democratic candidate's entire speech consisted of introducing herself and explaining that she was running because she thought her party ought to be represented on the ballot, too. The candidate who bested Bernie in the primary is also a woman, guaranteeing Holt County a sheriff of the distaff persuasion. The new Republican candidate is a shoe-in, since Republican primary voters outnumbered Democrats 16 to one. The high number of candidates led to a huge turnout, and the results were delayed because polling places ran out of ballots.

One of the other Republicans running for sheriff was a newcomer to Holt County, who hailed from the West Coast in 1992. He didn't have a prayer. County offices are some of the best jobs available

in our area, and we don't give them to carpetbaggers from California. If he pays his bills and stays out of jail, maybe his kids can successfully run for county office.

There were three candidates for county collector, including one lady who had worked in the collector's office before her children were born, and now that they were reared, was ready to return. Holt Countians are sympathetic to career breaks caused by child-rearing, and the empty-nester was an easy winner.

The last five speakers were all running for assessor. The sole Democrat was quick to claim two of the Republican candidates as relatives.

All of the candidates bragged about their expertise with computers, which must be important to assessors, and one candidate remarked that he was printing all his campaign literature in his basement on his home computer. Not a campaign boast likely to be repeated by either Clinton or Dole.

One of the candidates for assessor was Margaret Salfrank. She had decided that she wanted to be Holt County assessor some five years ago, and had entered college in her fifties to prepare herself for the office. Her campaign plan was simple. She was going to knock on every door in Holt County. At the time, she had been to 1,400 houses, with only one small town to go. She must have completed her self-appointed task, because Margaret won her primary.

To poke fun at folks running for local offices can be all too easy. They tend to be unpolished in both appearance and speech. But I was much moved by those 19 candidates as Julie and I listened to their pleas for their friends' and neighbors' votes. They are honest and hard working, and used to making dollars stretch to the breaking point. I'm not sure Margaret Salfrank is what the policy wonks in Washington have in mind when they talk about devolution, but she should be. If dedication and sincerity

count, I'd as soon trust Margaret with my tax dollars as any national politician I can name.

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IN PRAISE OF NEIGHBORHOOD NARROWNESS

By George Marlin

As youths in New York City neighborhoods, we were parochial, protective of turf that was often nothing more than a stoop, or a piece of sidewalk that saw the joys of stickball, punchball, boxball, and scooters made from wooden milk crates. Indeed, much of life revolved around stickball and punchball teams, organized by parish, and the most athletic of us would boast how many sewers we could punch our Spalding rubberballs (translation: sewer manhole covers are about 75 feet apart, so a ball hit two sewer covers travels about 150 feet). Growing up in neighborhoods also meant being instilled with respect for family, education, discipline, hard work, and loyalty.

The old ethnic neighborhood is what native New Yorkers have in common. In the city of New York, Poles, Jews, Hispanics, Orientals, Irish, Italians, and Germans blend in with their cosmopolitan environment while working in Manhattan. But when they return at day's end to the neighborhoods of Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Ridgewood, Jackson Heights, Flushing, Woodside, and Bay Ridge, they return to their cultural heritage.

Regrettably, outsiders do not easily grasp the value of the ethnic neighborhood, or how its citizenry operates. Many wrongly view it as a breeding ground for racism, narrow-mindedness, and rudeness. They don't understand that neighborhoods are self-contained life centers that protect traditional virtues and repulse state domination. These densely populated areas do not add to government bureaucracy; they have the opposite effect. Their residents hound their civic and property-owners' associations, planning and school boards, and local legislators. "If you believe in no bigger than



necessary, you have got to believe in the neighborhood," writes sociologist Andrew Greeley.

True, many of New York's neighborhoods began to decline after World War II. The G.I. Bill, federal housing, and interstate road programs permitted children and grandchildren of immigrants to receive an education, become upwardly mobile, and move to suburbia. But because of the anti-immigration laws there were no new immigrants to replace them, and a deep urban rot set in.

In recent years, however, new immigrants have begun to revitalize many of New York's neighborhoods. Studies demonstrate that these new immigrants have strengthened the quality of urban areas. They have re-populated communities, schools, and transit systems. They have rebuilt deserted homes, reintroduced neighborhood shops and ethnic restaurants. These are "new people of every color and ethnicity, most of them ambitious and exhibiting an ethic of work that shrinks the hallowed Protestant ethic to apathy," notes sociologist Louis Winnick.

Yes, these neighborhoods daily confirm Michael Novak's 1972 observation that "a politics based on family and neighborhoods is far stronger socially and psychologically than a politics based on bureaucracy."

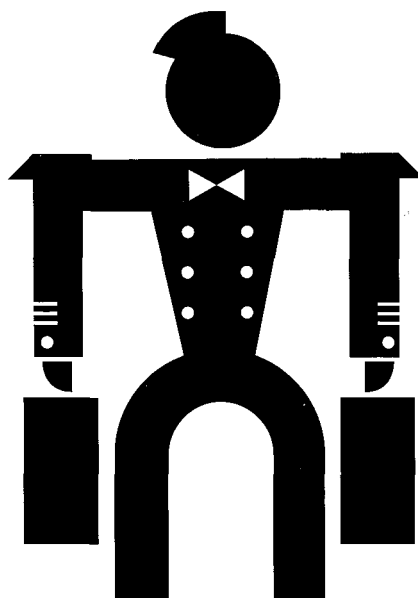
George J. Marlin, a lifelong resident of the city of New York, is executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

COMMUNAL LIFE WITH THE DOORMAN

By Evan Gahr

A "doorman building" has considerable cachet in New York City, but folks elsewhere probably don't understand the allure. Why do New Yorkers gladly pay extra to have some guy downstairs who knows all their business, expects a hefty tip every Christmas, and is painfully obsequious?

Other cities have residential buildings with clerks or even guards who sit behind a desk in the lobby. But a "doorman"—always standing and dressed like a servant—is rare outside of New York, where



I'M PROBABLY
THE ONLY RESIDENT OF
A DOORMAN BUILDING IN
NEW YORK CITY
WHO FINDS IT INTOLERABLE.

residents pay 30 percent higher rents for the "privilege" of 24-hour-yenta service. Certainly, doormen provide an added measure of security. But the appeal extends beyond safety. A doorman building, no matter how shabby inside or out, confers prestige on residents. They aren't like the peasants who inhabit non-doorman buildings. It's also perfect for folks who wish to live out their fantasies of being feudal barons. When some guy in a servant's uniform—cap; special polyester pants, usually white-trimmed; a matching jacket; and, sometimes, white gloves—is at your beck and call, a man's home really is his castle.

Nevertheless, I'm probably the only resident of a doorman building in New York City who finds it intolerable. I moved into one this January because I liked the location—and because, in a quirk due largely to New York's rent control laws, it cost as little as a fifth-floor walk-up.

I certainly got more than I bargained for. My building usually has two door-

men per shift. One stands at the door, the other behind the lobby's desk. There's also the building superintendent's wife, who mills about the lobby in her lovely house dress. They didn't know quite how to handle my unorthodox requests. Disliking formality, I asked the doormen to stop calling me "Mr. Gahr."

"Evan" was just fine. Sure enough, they called me Evan—more than I wanted. "Good morning, Evan. Have a good day, Evan, and I hope to see you tomorrow, Evan."

But push really came to shove over my building's revolving door entrance. No sooner was I inside the revolving door when the doorman ran to push it from the other side. When I asked to do it myself, the guy looked utterly baffled, as if I said, "When my friends from Jupiter get here, tell them to double park their spaceship outside."

My request raised fundamental questions about his doormanhood. On the one hand, he is supposed to follow my wishes. On the other hand, his job is to push the door. Now it does take considerable talent to push a revolving door without tripping the person inside. You have to wonder: did he master this unusual skill in doorman school, where revolving door technique is taught along with obsequiousness?

In any event, the doorman initially let me push the door myself, but he soon lapsed into his old habit. It was too hard to wave him off every time he scurried to push the door for me. So I just decided to let him do it.

Trying to have any privacy with a doorman is also a losing battle. He knows when you come home and with whom. Your love life is on open display. Romance isn't the only thing that doormen know all too well. Because doormen ring up every visitor and delivery on the house phone, they even know your favorite restaurants.

In short, people can debate whether God is omniscient, but doormen definitely are. And strangely enough, in New York City more people are firm believers in doormen than in the Almighty.

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