NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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On Ballot, A Bad Memory

At the time this part of my story begins I am walking into the polling place on the ground floor of PS 199 on West 70th Street in Manhattan. I am going inside to vote against somebody. Yet at the moment I get here. I am not sure which politician I am voting against.

The polling place in in the heart of the West Side. It is here, on these streets of brownstones and limestones and avenues of high-rises, with apartments renting for as much as $10,000 and more, with co-ops priced in the millions and the co-op boards coldly refusing major film stars, and even at these prices the streets teeming with people, it is here that Mark Green and Michael Bloomberg sought so many of the votes they needed to become the mayor of New York. Somehow, the glitter was absent last night and the candidates seemed unimportant when placed against the 5,000 people we had killed in the attack on the World Trade Center.



Jimmy Breslin

At first, I say to myself, I don't like Mark Green even a little bit, and I am going right in there and vote him out.

Then I'm in trouble. For the other name on the ballot is Mike Bloomberg, who is trying to buy City Hall like it's a cup of coffee. It only cost $60 million. Worse, he is spending the money so he can copy Giuliani. That's all right for these suburban lawn mowers who, from a distance, venerate Giuliani. Live on Linden Boulevard in Brooklyn and it is another world.

So I have this tormenting me as I walk into the booth.

Suddenly, the board blows up.

In the middle of the smoke and fire here was the name of a candidate for mayor, Bernard Goetz. The label over him says "Fusion Party." The emblem for it is a small four-leaf clover.

The sight of this makes me step backwards.

"You got to stay inside."

The poll inspector is standing next to me. I find I am completely outside the booth.

"I'm having a bad flashback," I say.

"You got to have them home. Here, we're voting on the mayor of New York."

I go back inside and Bernie Goetz' name still is jumping off the board at me.

Goetz came into my life on the cold December Saturday of Dec. 22, 1984. He was on the 2 train, hunching over and acting wimpy and four young black guys moved up to put the bull on him and rob him, If he had sat normally, they wouldn't have gone near him. But he made himself such a mark that they moved up on him. He pulled a gun out of his jacket and shot the four.

He was acquitted in Manhattan. He then was sued in the Bronx by one of the people he shot, Darryl Cabey. I was subpoenaed as Goetz' only defense witness. I was humiliated. I remember I was washing my hands in the men's room and I looked up to see Bernie Goetz gliding into the room, moving sideways so he wouldn't touch me or anybody else. Gliding so fast that he was only a few yards from a big frosted glass window that was wide and the bottom of it was at the knees. You could fit two Bernie Goetz's in that window, "Keep going right out the window like you should," I said to Goetz.

He did not. He has never left us. And now here he was all day yesterday, on the ballot for mayor, in an election held by a city at war.

"Seven minutes to go," one of the people running the poll said.

'Eleven minutes," somebody called.

People were coming in and being directed to their voting booths and then at nine, Rhoda Lee Baum shut the doors.

"Anybody in here now can vote. No one else is allowed in," she called.

At one booth, she had 26 people on line. At the two booths for the 24th ED, one of the women election workers at, the table, Rose Fiordalisi, said that 715 people had voted on her two machines.

Now the workers were in front of the machine behind her. The curtain was taken down and somebody turned a key and now in the spaces next to the names in small figures were totals.

This one machine had 331 votes and Mark Green had 179 votes. A glance at Bloomberg showed he had 128 or 129, somebody moved in front of it as I was looking. Green won the machine, but that didn't seem to be enough for a liberal Democrat running on the storied West Side against a Republican. If he doesn't pull away on the West Side, the figure said one thing emphatically. It would be a long night.

"What did Goetz get?" I asked the people at the machine. Rose got up and peered a the machine.

"Zero," she said:

I went to the next machine. "Goetz?"

"Zero," a guy said.

I asked Rhoda Lee Baum to look around the rest of the room. She went to her machine and let out a yelp. Then she held up a hand. "No, I had it wrong. Zero."

So I won my own little election night victory and then I go home or to some room that has figures on an election that could take us to morning.

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