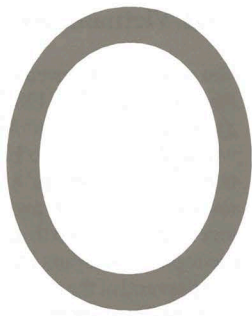


Volk: The best and worst of everything

The Best and Worst of Everything

BY PATRICIA VOLK



On a trip to Miami in the early fifties, while studying the breakfast menu at the Carillon Hotel (*Kadota Figs? Can't they spell?*), a couple approached our table.

"You look familiar," they said to my grandparents. "Are you from Brooklyn?"

"No," said my grandmother, ever so graciously. "We're from New York."

Wait a minute. People from Brooklyn weren't from New York? I never crossed a state line on the way to Coney Island. What was going on here?

"Manhattan is different," Nana explained. "It's not like the other boroughs. If you come from Manhattan, you're allowed to say you come from New York."

"Look at the mail," she continued. "You have to write 'Brooklyn, New York' to get a postcard to Brooklyn. But the post office knows 'New York, New York' is Manhattan."

From that moment on, I knew my town was special. Years later, I figured out why. What sets New York apart is that it has more of everything than everywhere else. It even has more of less. New York is the cleanest/the dirtiest, the oldest/the newest, the fastest/the slowest, the brightest and the bleakest. It's even the richest and the poorest. And sometimes it's both at once.



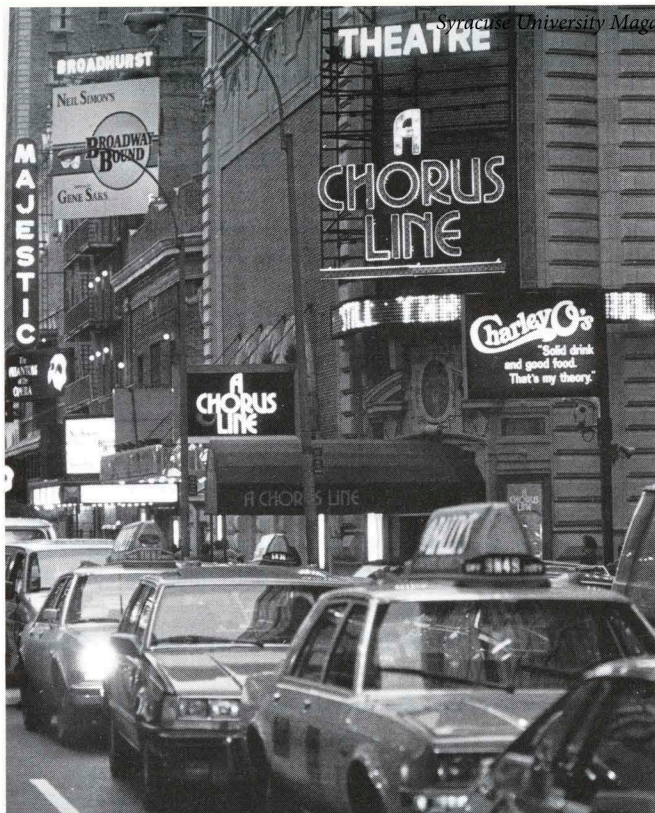
Four blocks from the zoo, in the shadow of The Plaza, a man sets up house on a park bench. He's got a ginkgo tree for a bathroom and a busted umbrella for a roof. His bench is right on Fifth Avenue, overlooking Central Park. That's prime real estate in a city where a garage space costs more than mortgage payments almost anywhere else. I pass this man every day on my way to work. He is wrapped in a Martex "Avignon" comforter, the \$175 quilted one I've been dreaming about ordering from the Bloomingdale's catalog.

Lunch? For \$35, not including wine, you get to watch a translucent sliver of fish flesh raised on Trout Chow curl and writhe in a chafing dish, pulsing as if it's breathing, next to a fetal radicchio leaf.

Or you order up and get the wrong thing.

"No, no!" you tell the delivery boy with the painted-on hair. "I ordered

STEVE SARTORI, manager of the SU Photo Center, took the New York City locale photos featured on pages 4-7. Sartori joined Photo Center in 1980 and contributes numerous photographs to Syracuse University Magazine.



tuna on rye, not a pita pocket.”

He stares. He shrugs. He scratches his head 'til his nails turn black. Then he sticks his palm in your face and says, “I don’t take pennies.”

If most people act crazy, is crazy the norm?

In New York, a flashing “DON’T WALK” sign means run. A closing subway door is perceived as a challenge. Going to the movies is a labor of love.

HE: “All right. You save a place on line and I’ll get the tickets. Then I’ll meet you back on line, and we’ll go in together. Then I’ll get the popcorn while you get the seats. Get two on the aisle and throw my coat over the empty one. When I’ve got the popcorn, I’ll stand down front. Then wave when you see me so I can see you. Then I’ll look for two good seats, and if I can find two better ones together, I’ll wave to you. Get it?”

SHE: “Don’t I always?”

In Los Angeles, they play a game called “If you could add half an inch to your body anywhere, where would it be?” In New York they play a game called “How many people are mad at you before you get to work?”

The elevator man slams the door open. Did I ring too hard?

The bus driver, smiling, closes the Limited door in my face. He doesn’t like girls?

The next bus comes 15 minutes later and the only place left to sit is next to a woman whose fecund hip occupies half my seat. I try not to sit on her. She hisses anyway.

That’s three.

At the newsstand in the lobby, the *Times* are gone. It’s 9:05. I ask the lady where the *Times* are. She tells me they were stolen.

“I’m sick of it,” she screams. “I can’t take it anymore! How come they never steal the *Voice*?”

In the company cafeteria, the man behind the counter pounds his fist against the stainless.

“A cup on the lever means the coffee’s not ready! You don’t know that?”

No. But I’m willing to learn.

SU & NYC

Paying homage to the Capital of the World, and dozens of Syracuseans who make it tick.

Any light that shines shines brighter there. Any song that’s sung sounds better there. Any dollar invested there comes back two. That’s New York City.

Demographically speaking, however, New York is a Syracuse suburb. In the alumni community, “downtown” remains Syracuse, where the largest group of alumni lives. The second-largest group—23,000 strong—lives and works in New York City. There they run government, set style, rule the airwaves, diversify and consolidate.

Syracusans have remarkable influence and presence in New York—something we’d always known and finally set out to prove. In the following pages you’ll find dozens of Syracuseans playing important and interesting roles in the life of New York. And they represent only a sample. There are thousands whose stories would not fit here; we’ll tell them later.

In the meantime, though, the evidence is clear. Look everywhere in the Big Apple. You’ll find the Orange.

ARTS & LETTERS

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ENTERTAINMENT & SPORTS

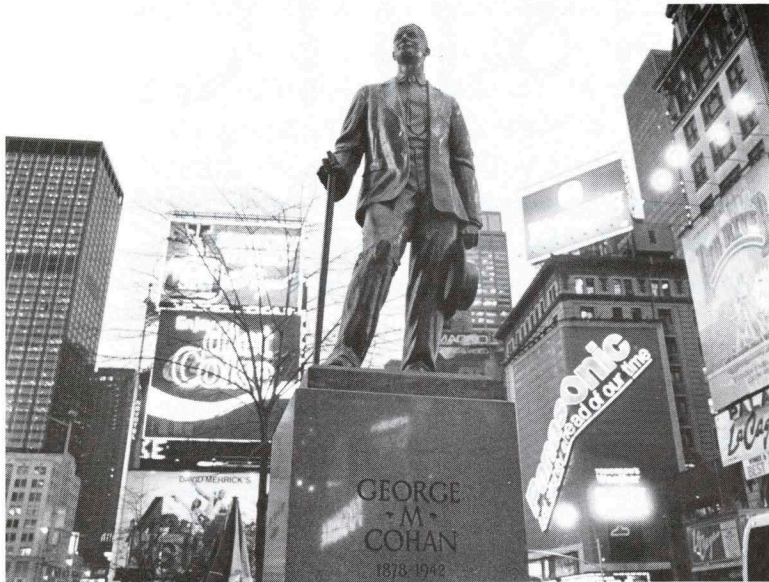
Broadway, television, celebrities, and the wide world of sports. *Page 28.*

Alumni profiles by

RENÉE GEARHART LEVY

MARY ELLEN MENGUCCI

CAROL NORTH SCHMUCKLER



The cashier looks at my tea and says, “You don’t have anything smaller than a five?”

I apologize. I tell her it’s not her fault. I explain how I usually get change at the newspaper stand, but they got ripped off.

“Is that my problem?” she says.

And in the elevator a man screams, “WHAT FLOOR IS THE MEN’S INTERNATIONAL TENNIS COUNCIL ON?” His Walkman is turned up to Deaf.

“GOD!” He rolls his eyes when he can’t hear my answer.

But where there’s misplaced hostility, there’s serendipitous kindness.

My briefcase is stolen from the office. A man calls, says he found it in a garbage can on 48th and 7th, would I like him to bring it over?

A stranger stops me on Park and says, “I don’t think you want it this way,” as he zips my dress up the back.

A cab driver snaps, “Not so fast, Miss,” and hands me the ten I forgot to wait for.

The same elevator man who was peevish yesterday holds the door while I turn the apartment upside down looking for my watch.

And on the bus, heading for work, my friend Amanda says she doesn’t know which is correct.

“Is it ‘I feel bad,’” she says, “or ‘I feel badly?’”

“Well, if you say ‘I feel badly,’ it means when I touch you I don’t do it right,” I say.

“Yeah,” she says, “but ‘I feel bad’ sounds wrong.”

“It’s one of those tricky words,” I tell her, “like *swam* and *swum*, *hanged* and *hung*, or *a whole nother*. Stay away from it.”

“Well, I really think it’s ‘I feel bad,’” Amanda says. “Only everytime I say it somebody corrects me.”

“As a matter of fact, it is ‘bad,’” the straphanger next to us joins in. “A feeling is intransitive,” he continues. “It

just sits there. It doesn’t do anything. It’s not an action verb. It’s an emotion verb.”

We size him up. He’s early forties, clean, and wearing a camel-hair topcoat. The *Wall Street Journal* is folded under his arm.

“Exactly how do you know that?” Amanda says.

“I minored in English lit at Yale, where I was pre-law. After school, I taught remedial English for two years on the Navajo reservation in Kayente, Arizona. I’m a partner now at Anderson Russell Kill & Olick.”

“Well, all right then,” we say. “Thanks.”

“Anytime.”

New York is where people live who cherish what is hardest to attain. Some wind up like turkeys in cold rain. They tuck their heads into their own feathers for warmth, then suffocate to death. Others thrive on the absurd. Writers, for example. What other town has typewriter repairmen who make house calls seven days a week?

Ever try getting a hot pastrami sandwich at 3 a.m. in Bogalusa? Where



Sometimes living in New York feels like going against nature. It's like bending down in an "up" elevator or swallowing a belch. It gets so quirky, you wait for the line in your life that says, "And then she woke up."

Up from Florida for a visit, my ex-New Yorker sister doffs her Rent-A-Mink and prepares to jog around the reservoir with me.

"How can you stand it," she says, as we walk toward the park. She looks at me with eyes I know better than my own, eyes the color of the inside of black olives. "It's so dirty! It's so cold!"

We head for Engineer's Gate.

"How can you stand living on top of someone," she says. "How can you stand living in a box?"

"Watch it!" I say, slamming into her with my elbow. It's too late. She scrapes her shoe against the curb.

"Who is that guy?" she says, pointing to a man in sweats across the street. "I know that guy."

"That's Ralph Lauren," I say.

"No. The one next to him."

"Him? Oh, that's Robert Redford."

She stares for a moment, thoughtful.

"Come to Florida," she says. "We've got Don Johnson."

And that's the thing about New York. That's how you know it's the best place to live. If it weren't, why else would everyone compare where they live to it.



else do they have so many well-lighted emergency rooms for when you're sharpening your pencil and the meat cleaver slips—Wow! So that's what the inside of a thumb looks like!—the meat cleaver you bought in Chinatown so you could properly chop bok bok choy for your night school extension course, "Loving Your Wok"?

What other city has so many medical centers where you can wait for the doctor while you listen to your blood splat against the linoleum and catch head lice from the man with the mashed forehead who keeps falling over into your lap and saying, "Are we there yet?" Then it's your turn, and the doctor who sews up your finger just happens to be the foremost hand surgeon, no *thumb* surgeon, no *thumb plastic* surgeon, in the world.

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And then, early one Sunday, you find yourself in the Vermeer room at the Met, utterly alone. You turn a corner and the sun warms you in places you forgot you had. You see a show off-Off Broadway, a show so small, so touching, so perfect, it changes your life.

Through some bureaucratic snafu, the people who repair the sidewalk on Madison and 62nd mix glitter in their cement, and at night with the street lights ricocheting off it, you feel like you're walking on the Milky Way.

And then there's that tree. The one on the northwest corner of Madison and 84th. The one that defies logic by growing through a sidewalk grate, slicing itself up and then joining into a trunk again. You see that tree and you suddenly feel blessed. It's like that brief moment in life when your Wite-Out is perfect—not too thick, not too thin.

PATRICIA VOLK, whose great-grandfather introduced New York to pastrami, lays claim to the city on other counts as well.

A fifth-generation New Yorker, Volk was born and bred in Babe Ruth's building on Riverside Drive. Fans of the *Times* may recognize her name; last fall she was guest author of the widely read "Hers" column. She has also guest-written William Safire's column in the *Times Magazine*, and has written for *The New Yorker* and *New York*.

Volk's first novel, *White Light*, was published by Atheneum in September. It is the story of a 35-year-old New York woman's search for self. Her collection, *The Yellow Banana*, won the Word Beat Press Fiction Book Award in 1984.

Volk holds an honors degree from SU, in fine arts. She has studied also at Adelphi University, Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris, the New School for Social Research, and Columbia University.



LARRY SILLEN