

States of the Union

A NIGHT WITH THE WINNERS

BY RICHARD J. MARGOLIS

SINCE YOU don't know Marty, our dentist, you won't understand what a terrific shock it was for us to see him on Election Night in Boston, right there in the swim of things, so to speak. And how lucky we felt, too, because a few days earlier at lunch in a cafeteria Diane had cracked a tooth on something hard that had no business being there.

That's really the whole story, as you will see. But so that you can fully appreciate it, I have to explain that Marty and Diane and I all hail from the same town, Wilton, Connecticut, a nice place to live although not much for a visitor. Marty still lives there, when he's not popping up in Boston (heh, heh). Diane and Yours Truly recently moved up here to The Greater Boston Area, which is why we voted absentee this year. It was a secret ballot, naturally, but I may as well tell you whom we voted for, in case you don't remember from my previous column on "The 49th Campaign" (NL, October 20). We're not especially proud of it, but we both voted for Jimmy Carter.

When Election Day came around we wondered what to do with ourselves. The thing was, we didn't have any need

or call to vote in Massachusetts, having already voted by mail in Connecticut, and we didn't have any place to go that night where we could watch the returns in a convivial manner. Ordinarily, back in good old Wilton, we would have spent the night with some of our Democratic friends, laughing and crying and some of us drinking. But we hadn't been in The Greater Boston Area long enough to make the acquaintance of working Democrats, and besides, all the candidates this time were so nutty, we wouldn't have known whether to laugh or cry.

Anyway, that afternoon I got busy and started calling local campaign officials for invitations. As things turned out, Diane and I were in terrific demand. Officials of all the parties were vying for our presence. When I phoned the Carter people, for instance, a press person went out of her way to tell me they were planning a big gala at the Park Plaza ballroom, which I understand is a very fancy place.

"Are my wife and I invited?" I asked.

"Definitely," she answered. "It's open to the public."

The Reagan-Bush and Anderson-Lucey committees also were hospit-

able, yet for some reason no one on either of the staffs seemed to have heard of Diane and me. That's when I pulled some strings. I found out that both groups had rented big rooms at the Sheraton—the Commonwealth Room for Reagan and the Republic Room for Anderson—and then I called Carol Nash, who just happens to be the hotel's Special Events Director.

"Can we come tonight?" I asked in a hinting manner.

"Why not?" was her enthusiastic reply.

Just to be on the safe side, socially speaking, I also telephoned a bigwig in Barry Commoner's Citizens Party. "Where are all the party faithful intending to hang out tonight?" I inquired.

"We're getting together at John Sisk's apartment in Brighton," I was told quick as a flash. "There'll be five couples around the TV. It'll be pretty crowded, but you and your wife can drop in if you want."

So we were sitting pretty. I'd wangled gilt-edged invitations from all the Major Political Parties—leaving out the Socialists, of course, who anyway did not have a telephone, just a PO drop in Cambridge.

"Which bash looks best to you?" I asked the wife.

"Why don't we just stay home," she said, "or maybe take a little walk?"

"No way," I said. Imagine turning down all those invites!

Well, to make a long story short, we went to the Reagan celebration at the Sheraton. Mind you, Reagan wasn't our favorite Presidential pin-up (heh, heh), but he looked like a winner. Besides, it was raining cats and dogs, and who wants to be with losers on a rainy night in Boston?

Looking back, I see it was the best decision I ever made. If I hadn't made it we wouldn't have run into Marty.

We parked our little Datsun in the hotel's garage and took a self-service elevator to the third floor, where all the Republican action was. The crowd in the Commonwealth Room was huddled around three television sets, with each set tuned to a different Major

Network—in color! Right off the bat I knew we'd hit the bigtime.

Over by the cash bar I nonchalantly ordered a white wine for the little woman and a scotch on the rocks for myself. I decided to strike up a conversation with the bartender. "Just between you and me and the lamppost," I said to him, "who'd you vote for?"

The bartender gave me a sort of shifty look. "Me foreigner," he said. "Me can't vote." I backed off pretty fast. Who wants to talk to aliens on Election Night?

While backing away I stepped on somebody's toe. It turned out to belong to a stout, bald-headed man named Bob Bains, who said he hailed from Bismarck, North Dakota, where he was the finance mogul of the Republican Party. This man pumped my hand as if I were the owner of the whole Sheraton chain.

"What's a North Dakotan doing in Boston on a night like this?" I asked.

"Business," he responded.

I told Mr. Bains I'd enjoyed our little chat and that it was very educational to meet different politicians from around the country. Then I went to see what everybody was clapping and cheering for. The reason turned out to be that Reagan had already won the election. It was official: Walter Cronkite had said so.

The room was filling up now, but it didn't seem noisy. The thing I noticed about these Republicans was their manners. Here they were winning big yet being real quiet about it. They all just had little smiles on their faces. Nobody was giggling or shouting, and there wasn't any hugging or back-slapping either. I'm not one to keep my thoughts to myself, so I asked an elderly gentleman smoking a cigar why the people weren't being more hysterical with joy.

He took the cigar out of his mouth and stared at me. "Whoopee," he muttered.

My wife had "disappeared into the madding crowd," as they say. I couldn't look for her too well because I kept bumping into people and overhearing their conversations. Two women were

arguing over who was more appealing, Ronald Reagan or John Wayne. In another part of the room a man wearing a sweater of painted elephants was saying he hadn't enjoyed himself so much since the 1972 election. The woman he was talking to said, "Shh—we're not supposed to mention that man's name."

"I know," said the fellow, "but I'll tell you one thing, honey: If Mr. 1972 was still in the White House there wouldn't be no hostages still in Iran."

I sat down at a big round table full of stale drinks with cigarette butts floating on top, and surveyed the scene. You'd have to call it magnificent: A big hotel room full of swirling victors. To give you an idea of the color, there were red fire extinguishers on the wall and the bartender was wearing a silky red jacket. I felt that all America was represented here—young and old, males and females, Republicans and my wife and me. One of the women present was actually on crutches, and I think I might have seen one or two blacks. A real cross-section.

Somebody tugged at my sleeve. I looked up to behold a short, gray-haired man wearing a gray topcoat that was buttoned to the throat.

"You Jewish?" he asked. "I don't happen to be myself, but I'm admiring of you people, especially tonight because it was the Jews that put Reagan over in Brookline, make no mistake about it." We shook hands heartily and then he went away. But I'll always remember his kind words and the way he made me feel accepted in Christian Republican circles at the Sheraton.

I GUESS right about here I ought to confess that I didn't hang around the whole time with Republicans. For a little while I snuck downstairs to the second floor and peeked into the room where Anderson's supporters were assembled. Quite a difference! For one thing, the chandeliers on the ceilings down there were much bigger and more glittery. For another, the Anderson people seemed a lot younger and more cheerful than the Reagan people. And the Anderson drinks were free—a big point in their favor.

But as I said, I had cast my lot that night with the Reagan folks, even though the Anderson crowd seemed to be celebrating in a happier style. So I hid myself back upstairs. By this time a huge mob had gathered around the three Major Networks. Jimmy Carter was on the screen conceding, and I kept straining to get a look at him. But somebody was in my way, and the back of his head looked familiar.

I tapped the gentleman on the shoulder. "Pardon me," I said, "would you mind moving over a little bit?"

The gentleman in question turned around. Then he grinned. It was none other than Marty, our dentist from Wilton, Connecticut.

"Marty!" I exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"There's a dental convention at this hotel," he said, "so I thought I'd look in to see what I could see. And I voted for Reagan."

You could have knocked me over with a piece of dental floss (heh, heh). If there were a last person in the world I'd expected to see that night, it was Marty Sachs. I was about to tell him just that when my wife appeared and interrupted my train of thought.

"Marty!" she shouted. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to see you, baby," said Marty, and he kissed her, right there in the midst of all those Republicans while Carter was conceding.

"I told you four years ago I would never lie to you," said the President of the United States.

"I have a broken tooth," said my wife to Marty.

"Let me see," Marty said.

"I love the American people," President Carter said.

"I don't think it's serious," said Marty, peering into my wife's mouth.

"Thank you," said Diane.

"Thank you," said the President.

"Don't mention it," said Marty.

Well, that's all there is, there is no more, except to say that it was a night to remember. I'm going to write Ronald Reagan and tell him about it. He seems the sort of guy who'd appreciate a good yarn.