

## Get Out The Vote

In the early 1970's I ran unopposed for Fire Commissioner in a small town in the Catskills. I won by a landslide ... 27 to four ... but the contest was nevertheless a squeaker..

I had lived in the district for 2 years and didn't launch a campaign of ringing door bells because I was told no one else was interested. I arrived early on election night and voted for myself. Another fireman, Eddie, also voted for me. He happened to be hanging around the firehouse that evening. To be more exact, he was hanging around the beer machine, waiting for it to be unlocked when the election ended. Meanwhile, he made regular trips out to his pickup truck in the parking lot as his comments steadily became sillier.

Bill, the head commissioner, kept a watchful eye on Eddie, his gaze at the young man turning colder as the clock hands marched toward 9:00 p.m. Bill was on hand as the official observer and he couldn't vote, so I wouldn't have a landslide of three to zero. Instead, I was coasting with 2 votes when a family of four adults walked in and said they were all present to cast their write-in ballots for the father of the crew.

Eddie laughed when the group left. "Looks like you're not gonna be a commissioner," he said.

"And we're not gonna get our new pumper," said Bill, the Commissioner, who was also a fireman. "That's why that family came in. They're against spending money on the new truck."

"Oh, that's right, Dave," said Eddie, looking at me with a dawning awareness, "you're the vote on the board we were counting on."

"With you it would be three to two," said Bill.

"Well, maybe you can sweet talk the guy into the new pumper by promising to take him for a ride in it every week, and fill up his pool in the summer," I said sarcastically.

"Screw that," Eddie said, and he walked out of the meeting room into the equipment bay and hit the siren button.

"Dispatch is gonna be upset," said Bill. The radio dispatchers had a radio link to tell when the siren started to wail. There had better be a fire. The set of six huge horns pointing out in all directions sat atop the firehouse, and most of us covered our ears as they whirled up to speed and then back down. It was left over from the days before fireman had radios at home, when sirens were needed to wake up fireman a mile away in the middle of the night. After the siren cycled up and down three times and we could hear ourselves think, the county dispatcher came on the radio and asked why our siren had just gone off.

"Sorry," said Eddie into the microphone, "we hit the button by mistake. We were dusting."

Mistake or not, the siren roused enough interest among the firemen sitting at home. Many of them raced down to the firehouse, where they were encouraged to vote.

I will swear before a grand jury this story never happened. Or plead the fifth amendment.

*David Griffin*

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