



The Uncle Wisdom Papers

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A NEW YORKER COMES TO PIKE COUNTY



He first saw Barry, Illinois (population 1100) at the Apple Festival a dozen years ago.

While watching the parade, he heard a terrible scream which seemed to last forever. Glancing to the left, he saw an aluminum chair slowly collapsing, the metal shrieking as it disintegrated. A lady ended up flat on her back, her face flushed with embarrassment. Suddenly a man rushed over, looked down at her and yelled, "They sure don't make these suckers like they used to." At his urging, the very hesitant New Yorker helped lift the lady up onto her feet.

He was shocked that this man, a banker, would be so considerate and helpful. In New York, no one rushes over to help anyone. The first guy to go to a fallen person in New York is likely a personal injury lawyer prepared to sue anyone who touches the injured.

Before the New Yorker could recover from that shock, someone mentioned the next pickup truck to appear in the parade route, which ferried the Pike County Pork Queen.

Pork Queen? In New York, the words "pig" and "porker" are derogatory terms for unattractive women. No woman in her right mind would want to win a pork queen contest. But there she was. Lovely to look at. And not at all anorexic-looking like leading New York models.

As he walked along the street, all kinds of people made eye contact with him. Many said "hello" or "hi." At first he ignored them, often looking away. The police in New York advise citizens not to make eye contact on the street or on the subways. You may be assaulted by some nut who thinks you have "disrespected" him with your glance. Eventually he got used to all the friendly eye contact and even mumbled "hello" to a few.

A few days later, he became aware of something really weird. As he drove along Bainbridge Street, the driver of an oncoming pickup waved at him through the windshield. As he began to look at the drivers, and not their trucks, he noticed that everyone waved – usually by raising four fingers off the steering wheel. Slowly, he began to adapt the steering wheel wave. Every now and then, someone less friendly than most would only lift two or three fingers. But in a year, he never saw the famous one-finger New York salute which is frequently seen on the eastern roadways.

The New Yorker had a very difficult time getting used to the "early to bed, early to rise" mentality of his Barry neighbors. In New York, he arrived at the office at 10am, had lunch at 1pm, a business dinner at 6, and back to the office until 9. Or he and his wife would dine at 8 in the city.

In Pike County, the noon meal was "dinner" and the evening meal was "supper." In Barry, everyone seemed to be up at first light. Local restaurants opened at 6am (when Manhattan is deserted) and closed their doors at 7pm. It took the New Yorker three years to adjust to what he called "farmer hours."

In Pike County stores, all the clerks and salespeople went out of their way to assist – offering to guide him to the item he was interested in. In New York, it's almost possible even to find a salesperson – and those he could find were generally unhelpful.

One day at 8am, a neighbor dropped over unannounced. It was embarrassing since neither the New Yorker nor his wife had dressed yet. The "dropping over" business was hard to get used to since people who lived in New York always phoned for an appointment. They even made play dates for their little children.

In Barry, a neighbor is likely to offer you home-grown fruit or vegetables from their garden. In New York, there is no home-grown food from someone's garden, but if there were, you might be a little suspicious of it.

In Barry, he saw people watering their lawns and plants. But in New York, people water their sidewalks (to get all the goop off).

In Barry, motorists fear the deer. In New York, motorists fear the "squeegee men" who rush up to your stopped car and smear dirty water on the windshield while demanding a buck or two.

The New Yorkers say, "Go Yankees." The Barry folks are fiercely for either the Cubs or the Cardinals. The man was afraid to wear either a Cubs or Cardinals cap, not knowing whom he might offend.

In New York, friends may inquire about people in your immediate family. In Barry, when they first meet you, they want to know who you might be related to – they ask about the whole family tree in hopes of understanding who you are.

He finds it refreshing that everyone in Barry speaks English. In New York, there are whole neighborhoods where nary a word of English is spoken.

He found that he could go from Barry to Pittsfield, 35 miles away, in less time than he could travel from First Avenue to Seventh Avenue in New York.

In New York, everyone talks about Wall Street. In Pike County, it's the corn crop.

In New York, people live in apartments. In Pike County, they live in houses.

In New York, everyone either walks, takes the subways or taxis. In Pike County, it's pickups, cars, and tractors.

In Pike County, a business lunch for two costs about \$25. In NYC, it's \$100 or more.

The New Yorker has now assimilated. He owns a house in Barry and says he is happier than he would be if he were still living in New York City.

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