

HOW I PULLED LINDSAY THROUGH

It is hot, very hot, and the lights are so harsh that you have to look down or to the side to see from this rickety stage where John Lindsay is standing and waving to all the young people. We are on the first floor of the Lindsay headquarters in the old DePinna store and it is 2:10 a.m. on election night and it is all over. Lindsay is the winner, and now only the formalities of politics remain. Everybody observes them.

Lindsay stands in front of the microphones in the middle of the stage. The stage is packed with political people. The red lights glow on the television cameras, to show they are working. Jacob Javits' shoulder bursts through a wall of people as he moves to the front of the stage, right alongside John Lindsay, and he is waving and he is looking at the red lights on the television cameras. Alex Rose is packed among people in the middle of the stage. Alex Rose begins shuffling his feet. Just shuffling them, wasting time, really, and he doesn't seem to be doing anything, but now his neck begins craning and a hand goes out and gives a slight push here, a little bit of a shove there, and the feet keep shuffling, and now here is Alex Rose, sliding right through the crowd and coming right up front. Paul O'Dwyer comes onto the stage late and he stands in the back. "Here, Paul," somebody says, "go up front." And Paul O'Dwyer says no, he wouldn't want to force himself. "I'll just stay in the background," Paul says. He lowers his head and butts a man in front of him. The man moves. O'Dwyer's head drops again and he butts the next person. Suddenly Paul O'Dwyer finds there is nobody else to butt. He raises his head and beams at the red lights on the television cameras.

Since I always feel most comfortable when I remain quietly in the background, I stand against the wall at the very back of the makeshift stage and light a quiet cigar and blow the smoke up into the lights and stare at it. In the noise and nerves of an election night, I am calm and contented. There is a very good reason for this. The serenity of accomplishment. You see, without me, without Jimmy Breslin, this night would not be. For you can forget all those explanations of why Lindsay won and why Procaccino lost. Forget the Jewish vote, forget the Mets, and forget the appearance Mario presented on television. Forget all of it, because, as I kept thinking here on



this stage, the main reason why John Lindsay is a winner is that Jimmy Breslin went out and won it for him.

It all started on a morning in September when I appeared at City Hall to award my endorsement to Lindsay. Now much importance was placed on just my mere act of endorsing the mayor. I was not handled in the usual manner: lumped in with two union shop stewards, a former state assemblyman and two present state assemblymen in a group endorsement. For Jimmy Breslin, Lindsay called a special press conference. To be exact, he called two special press conferences. The first special press conference, called for two days before this one, was canceled when I did not show up. I had been out all night drinking and was nailed to the bed in the morning.

I was in good physical shape for this second press conference. I had a night's sleep behind me and I left the house at 9:30 on a bright, warm early fall day. Sam, from the Lindy Car Service, Ridgewood, Queens, drove me over. Sam drove very well, when you consider how bad his nerves are from shyness. At City Hall, one of the girls working electric typewriters in the anteroom off the mayor's office jumped up and got me a cup of coffee the moment I came in.

"The mayor will be right down, he's in the car now," she said.

"I guess that'll be all right," I said. I meant he really could have been here himself to greet me.

I went into Lindsay's office and sat down on a couch. Jack Newfield came in. I had called him the night before and asked him to protect our interests in this matter. Jack is very good at these things. Back in the spring, he was the press officer for the Norman Mailer Campaign for Mayor, which is how I refer to it now. One day at lunch, I spoke at length about the campaign to Mary McGrory, the syndicated columnist of the *Washington Star*, and she did a very bad thing to me. She quoted me accurately. When her column appeared in the *New York Post*, Norman Mailer got mad and he fired Newfield as press officer. "This is like being banned from Auschwitz," Newfield said when he was fired. Today, Jack was quite beautiful when he walked in. His girlfriend had given him a haircut the night before and he wore a sports jacket that didn't even have a rip in it. Usually, Jack Newfield looks like Trotsky. Everybody used to say, when Jack Newfield was with Bobby Kennedy, that Jack was radicalizing Bobby. But Bobby would tell everybody, with pride. "I'm the one who got Jack Newfield to wear shoes."

"All right," I said to Newfield, "What do you think we should say today?"

"I hate Con Edison," Jack said.

"That's good, but I don't think I can carry it off with just that," I said. "What else would you have me list as reasons for endorsing Lindsay?"

"I don't care if you endorse Lindsay, just attack Con Edison," Newfield said.

John Lindsay came walking quickly into the office. With him were a number of aides and a secretary, and we all shook hands and a girl ran in with more coffee. I immediately started to say a whole lot of bad words so everybody in the office would remember that Jimmy Breslin is very colorful.

Somebody handed me a yellow legal pad so I could write my statement out. They wanted to mimeograph it for distribution to the press. Lindsay looked at me. I was sitting with pen poised. Jack Newfield sat alongside me, talking into my ear. Lindsay walked away.

"The telephone company," Newfield was saying.

"What about it?" I said.

"They should take the top 250 executives and put them in prison," Jack said.

"No, let's get to the lead first," I said.

"All right, we're for Lindsay because of his position on Vietnam," Jack said. "And for his handling of the race problems. It didn't rain every weekend for the last four years."

Jack had just put, in a couple of sentences, the things about Lindsay that were very important to me. So I began writing this statement out. I wrote first that I was endorsing Lindsay and I was not part of any Manhattan arrangement. "I am from Queens," I wrote. "In fact, I am rather large on Fresh Pond Road." Then I wrote down things on the war. "I don't like people who get tough with other people's lives, whether in New York City or Vietnam," was one sentence Newfield and I put together.

"Gee, that's pretty good," a voice said. It was Jeff Greenfield, the mayor's speechwriter. He was leaning over the couch looking at what we were doing.

"What's pretty good?" I said.

"Nothing," he said. But these quick eyes of his kept running over the paper and he had his head cocked so he could hear Newfield and me talking.

When it was finished, I went into this big room where they had the press conference and Lindsay sat next to me and they turned on the lights and the cameras whirred and I started reading. And right away, you could see I was making a helluva indent for Lindsay. Until I showed up, all he had been bringing out were these people from Manhattan, which was the rap, and a very good one too, against him. All these guys from Manhattan look alike. Thin, bony guys. I never saw a fat guy in Manhattan in my life. Guys in Manhattan eat once and after that they go to the watercress, I guess. The higher the income, the less they eat in Manhattan. You can go through all the refrigerators in the whole 17th Congressional District and you won't find two roast beefs. You will find 11 tons of cheese. Here at the press conference, me, sitting next to this bony Lindsay, you could tell I wasn't from Manhattan. You could tell that in his time Jimmy Breslin must have had his ass on every barstool from Astoria to Rockaway Beach. So when I said that I wasn't part of any Manhattan arrangement, viewers had to nod and say, yes, he does look like any regular at McLaughlin's.

Well, I walked out of City Hall that day and went right to Longchamps across the street and just let everything go at that. Then ten days later Newfield called me up.

"Have you heard Lindsay speaking?" he asked.

"No."

"He stole our speech," Jack said.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"He goes with the war, he brings up



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tough talk about crime, he talks about Newark and Detroit; and then he goes to the institutions, like Con Edison."

"Did we patent those issues?" I said.

"No, but you ought to go and hear him," he said. "Greenfield did a beautiful job of stealing everything we said."

Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't really believe this. Until I went out with Lindsay on his last night of campaigning. It was on the Friday before the election. First he was in Brooklyn with Ethel Kennedy and then at a fund-raising party Alan King gave at the El Morocco and from there he went to a big affair at the Riverside Church with Charley Rangel. After that we went to the Bronx House on Pelham Parkway. The Bronx House was beautiful. I sat with three of Mario Procaccino's workers.

"What happened to your man?" I said. "I thought he had it locked up."

"We got found out," one of them said, holding his hands out.

Just then Lindsay began talking, and a man of about 65 began heckling Lindsay and a man of about 75 leaned over and hit the 65-year-old in the face with a coat. Both men rose and squared off in the aisle. Nobody in the audience paid attention. They were too busy watching a fat woman assault a 20-year-old guy. The guy put up his hands and slipped and ducked, but it didn't matter. The fat woman beat hell out of him and when the cop came piling through the crowd to stop her, the fat woman looked to take the cop out with a right hand. Lindsay kept talking all through this.

"I can't hear him," I complained to the Procaccino aide.

"You want to hear?" one of Mario's aides said. "We're lucky if we get out of here alive."

The last stop of the night was the Hollis Hills Jewish Center on 211th Street and Union Turnpike in Queens. The bulletin board as you came in was plastered with notes about special tutoring courses for kids getting ready to take college entrance exams. Upstairs, on the carpet, under chandeliers, sat a crowd of about 1,000. I was leaning against the edge of the stage where Lindsay was speaking. Jeff Greenfield stood alongside me. We listened while Lindsay spoke.

"Tough talk does not put an end to crime," Lindsay said.

"Pretty good line," I said quietly to Greenfield.

"Thanks," he said. "I liked it the minute I wrote it."

". . . tough talk doesn't help, either here or in Vietnam," Lindsay said.

"Gee, he used that good," I said.

"Thanks," Greenfield said.

". . . unresponsive institutions, such as Con Edison and the telephone com-

pany . . ." Lindsay was saying.

"Terrific," I said to Greenfield.

"Thanks," he said.

"Are you a descendant of thieves, or do you do this naturally?" I asked Greenfield. I walked out of there feeling very good that night. I went to Pep McGuire's on Queens Boulevard and drank until the noise of the band blew me out of the place and then Pep and I went to the Winter Garden Chinese Restaurant next door and drank in there for a couple of hours.

"How much have you done for Lindsay?" Pep asked me over one of the drinks.

"I gave him his whole basic speech."

If you look at the record, I did even more than that. The one borough that seemed a cinch to sink Lindsay, sink him badly, too, was Queens. Well, they put me into Queens. They threw me into a hallway in Lefrak City for 14 hours a day for two days and made a television commercial about what Lindsay did to help tenants in Queens when the landlords were on them like vultures. Sometimes I steal words, too. Now I don't want to go into the effect of the commercial. That is for others to say. I can only say that while we were filming it, we had this large crew of technicians and agency people and the whole thing attracted the attention of tenants. It attracted even more attention when the tenants heard who the commercial was being made for.

"What is this?" an old man asked me the first morning.

I was just about to start talking for the camera, so I just told the man quickly, "Lindsay," and got ready to talk to the camera.

"He stopped the rent from rising . . ." I began.

The old man stood in the hallway and waited while I got almost all the way through the sequence. Then he called out, "Rise? Lindsay should drop dead in front of your camera."

"Cut!" somebody behind the camera said wearily.

"Lindsay should jump off the roof here!" the old man yelled.

So the next day, when there was a good crowd around watching the agency people run me through some maneuver outside the building, and the crowd kept saying, "Who is it for?" all of us, the crew and the agency people, kept telling the people "Bromo-Seltzer commercial." You could not mention Lindsay's name. At the end of that week, my rent commercial went on the television. On election day, John Lindsay had the Lefrak City area and all the areas like it in Queens, and he had them big. I don't want to say anything more. It speaks for itself.

Now let's go to straight figures from here on. John Lindsay won Queens by

a little over 2,100 votes. Well, to tell you the truth, I was always considered a very terrific bull artist. And for six weeks I have been standing around Queens talking about Lindsay. I must have gotten 2,100 votes just with my mouth. Now, Ed Bianchi of the Young & Rubicam advertising agency, who was in charge of the rent commercial, says at least a million people saw it, it played so many times. Well, as everyone knows about Queens, it can get to be an awfully small place, and when the people from Queens hear that a guy is from Queens they like him right away. It is the same way the things work in Deshler, Ohio. So I got to figure that out of Lindsay's Queens total of 243,552, I must have influence. With my commercial that played several times a day for five straight weeks, I must have influenced about, oh, why even get into it? It becomes so clear when you look at the figures that I got Queens for John Lindsay, got it for him big, that it is not even worth talking about.

We will go to one other way in which I helped John Lindsay win. And I think that when I'm through telling you about it, you'll let me drop the phrase, "how I helped" and let me get right down and say, "how I won it for."

On the day that the New York Mets won the National League Pennant by defeating the Atlanta Braves, I arrived at Gracie Mansion at 11:15 a.m. to attend the game with John Lindsay, his son, Johnny, and Arthur Goldberg, the former Supreme Court Justice and Ambassador to the United Nations. I came into the house and sat down in the living room while the mayor had his lunch. His lunch was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich cut up into tiny squares and a glass of iced tea. I told you why these bastards are so thin. Lindsay seemed very happy that I was there. I knew a bit about baseball. I had written what will go down in history as the best book ever written on the Mets, *Can't Anybody Here Play This Game?* So I fitted in with the big Mets game and that was good for the mayor, and it also wouldn't hurt if I hit Arthur Goldberg with a little of my con during the nine innings. Goldberg had yet to endorse John Lindsay. And in a city where one out of every three votes is Jewish, an endorsement from Arthur Goldberg is stronger than the Atlantic Cable.

This was good, except for one thing. While John Lindsay sat there and ate this big lunch and waited for Arthur Goldberg, he didn't know what I was thinking about. He didn't know that I was thinking about the day I had a few drinks in the afternoon and got mad at Arthur Goldberg and I tried to get a hold of him on the telephone. I left a message for him. A long message,



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which his girl took down word for word.

What it was, was this. I was running in the Democratic primary for the City Council presidency and one of the others running, a guy named Low, kept making up these imbecilic things, but they were getting into the paper, particularly the *New York Times* newspaper, which had endorsed him. The *Times* newspaper had endorsed him because this Low once had worked as an office boy for Herbert Lehman. Well, that sets the stage in my mind. The Jewish Tong is against me.

"They are bastards," I said to Norman Mailer one day.

"There are so many cliques against us I don't know where to begin," he said.

Two days later, there was all this mess in the newspapers about Joe Namath and two tough guys in his place, the Bachelors III. Namath announced he was quitting. This guy Low promptly announced that he was going to ask an impartial board, consisting of Arthur Goldberg mainly, to mediate the Namath case. The *New York Times* newspaper printed the story. I thought it was the most blatant, silly thing I had ever read. Namath and I were having a drink and looking at it and Joe called up the *Times* and said, "Tell this guy Low to mind his own business. If I need a politician, I'll go to Jimmy Breslin and Norman Mailer. They're the only two who make sense to me." The *Times* would not print what Namath said. But they did print this silly thing about Low asking Goldberg to mediate.

Beautiful. Two mornings later, here is this thing in the *Times*. Goldberg says he would be glad to mediate as long as both parties agreed they want him. Low gets his name in the paper again, on a totally fraudulent news story. Well, you give me a few of those big cold beers in Gallagher's on 52nd Street, then you let me go downtown to Mutchie's and sit and look out the windows at the tugboats moving up the river and let Mutchie keep filling the glass. You let this happen and at about 3:30 in the afternoon, I'll do something.

What I did was to call Goldberg's law office. He was out of town. His secretary was not. "You tell Arthur Goldberg that Norman Mailer and I have a problem," I told her. "Tell him there is a six-day bike race in the Bronx and the bike riders claim that one team is cheating and there is going to be a riot unless we get a cool head to speak to these people. Ask Arthur Goldberg if he wants to mediate the six-day bike race dispute."

I hung up and I felt terrific. Why shouldn't I take a shot at him? What do I need with Arthur Goldberg? I'll never see the guy again anyway. Let

him get lost, I'll take my shot at him. And now here he comes into the living room at Gracie Mansion.

"Hello, Arthur," Mary Lindsay says. Arthur Goldberg kisses her.

"Arthur!" John Lindsay says. He reaches out and shakes hands with Goldberg.

"Hello," Johnny Lindsay, nine, says.

"Hello," Jimmy Breslin, 39, says.

"Hello," Arthur Goldberg says.

Lights pop in his eyes. His eyebrow furrows. Now his fingers snap. Now he knows why he had a feeling of irritation when he saw me.

"Say, I was away and I got a phone call from you about some six-day bike race and I want to tell you about things like that . . . you see," his hands are working and he is talking very crisply.

The mayor of the city of New York is choking to death on a square of peanut butter and jelly while he waits for the great New York phrase to come out of Jimmy Breslin—"You could go and—yourself!"—and with that great phrase could go an election, a lifestyle, friends and ambitions. Well, John was wrong. I stood there with this little smile and I waved my hand and I said, "Oh, that was when I was out one day. Those things happen. More important, who's going to pitch for Atlanta today?"

We flew to Shea Stadium by helicopter and police rushed us through the crowd and to our box seats. My detective escort brushed John Hay Whitney aside so I could have a clear aisle in front of me as I made my way to the box seat. In the box, Mayor Lindsay sat in the front two seats with son. Arthur Goldberg and I sat behind them. So Arthur Goldberg and I talked for nine innings and I was subtle and probed delicately and was terrific.

"It wouldn't be so nice to be in this town and watch 2,000 years of heritage go out the window by the mere act of Jewish people voting a candidate like Procaccino into office, would it?" I said carefully in the second inning. Arthur Goldberg watched the game closely.

In the third inning I said, "Has our education in New York gotten so bad that now even the Jewish people are dopey and they'll vote for Procaccino?" Arthur Goldberg watched the game very closely.

In between these little forays, I kept tapping the mayor on the back. He knows, or he knew that day, less about the sport of baseball than any man in the city. So I'd be saying, "Clap," or "Seventh inning stretch, stand up."

After the game, we were hustled into the Mets' dressing room. We were the first people in, and Arthur Goldberg, the former Supreme Court Justice, the former Ambassador to the United Nations, stood in dignity along the wall of the Mets' dressing room. Alongside

Goldberg was the mayor of the City of New York. They stood together. Out in the middle of the room, in front of a television camera, going maybe into every home, saloon, office and store in the city, was the New York Mets baseball team pouring champagne over each other's heads.

"Look out," somebody said, "don't splash the gray-haired guy. That's Goldberg."

"Mayor's with him," a voice said.

"Yeh, geez, look out for them."

And John Lindsay stood along the wall smiling at the antics and the camera was on the players and of these little moments are success and failure in life made.

"Get the guy with them," one of them said.

"Which one?"

"The one that's all messed up anyway."

Well, I started to dodge. I didn't intend to go home after the game, and no rat baseball player was going to louse me up. In ducking, I bumped into Lindsay and he went forward into the milling baseball players. Tom Seaver poured champagne over Lindsay's head, and the camera hit on it and, in a few little moments, in every saloon and home in the city, this tall, sometimes haughty, sometimes too remote person named John Vliet Lindsay turned into a human guy celebrating a pennant with our team the Mets.

I went out after the game that night and I had more than a few drinks, particularly when I saw the first pages of the morning papers. Lindsay with champagne foaming out of his scalp.

So this is what I had in my mind while I stood on this rickety stage in the DePinna store and watched John Lindsay wave to the young and the politicians fight for position. I saw Alex Rose, he's so smart. A genius, they say he is. I sneered at Alex Rose. Dick Aurelio was in the middle of the crowd. Mr. Cool, they called him throughout the campaign. He was the man who knew what he was doing and where he was going at all times. *Aurelio*, I said to myself. *Who would you want, Aurelio or Breslin?* Just then there was shoving and pushing and in the commotion John Lindsay started moving off the stage. The young, in their maxi coats and corduroy, screamed in high-pitched tones. The older clapped and roared. Photographers shouted. Commentators chirped. Through it all, as John Lindsay left the stage at the DePinna store after winning his reelection, through it all there came one yell, which he may or may not have heard, but which I repeat here.

"John Lindsay, you'd be paying rent without Jimmy Breslin!"