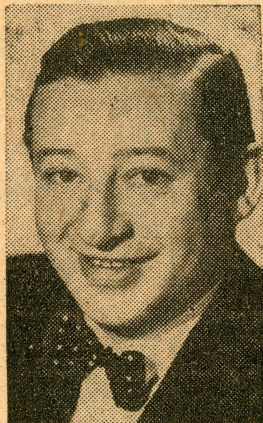


PITCHING HORSESHOES

By Billy Rose

They say it's pretty hard for an out-of-towner to get to know his neighbors in New York and, generally speaking, I guess it's true enough. But on the other hand. . . .

When Sam Johnson, of Pomeroy, Ohio, retired after a quarter century in the wholesale produce business, he decided to spend the rest of this life in New York where, as he put it, "A man can send out for turkey sandwiches at midnight."



Billy Rose

"I hear it's a hard place to make friends," said his wife.

"That's just talk," said Sam. "People are the same all over the world."

The following month, the Johnsons were in residence in a snazzy apartment on Central Park South, and were being looked after by a doorman, an elevator boy, a cook and a maid. And, a few weeks later they had succeeded in striking up a more-than-nodding acquaintance with exactly four New Yorkers—the doorman, the elevator boy, the cook and the maid.

"Looks like the only way we'll ever meet anybody," said Sam one night, "is to do what we do back home—go right up and ring their doorbells."

The bell across the hall belonged to a couple named Morrison, and when Sam introduced himself they invited him in for a drink, after which he never heard from them again. And the reception was equally cordial at other

apartments—and the ensuing silence just as silent.

The nearest thing to a rebuff was at the apartment of a Mr. Swazey on the sixth floor. As Sam was about to ring the bell, the door opened and a shortish gent in evening clothes walked out.

"My name's Johnson," Sam began, "and since we're neighbors I thought it might be a good idea if—"

"Pardon me," said the man, "but I'm late for the theater."

A few weeks later, the building was thrown into something of a panic by a succession of neatly executed robberies. And it was obvious to the detective who investigated that (a) the burglar was familiar with the habits of the tenants, since he always picked a time when the occupants were out, (b) he was a person whose presence in the house wouldn't attract attention, and (c) it might not be a bad idea to check up on the new tenant who went around ringing doorbells.

One evening the detective called on the Johnsons.

"I understand you've been ringing bells and getting yourself invited into a lot of apartments," he said.

"I've got enough money without robbing my neighbors," said Sam.

"Take it easy," grinned the detective. "I checked with the chief of police of Pomeroy and he threatened to march his whole force on New York if I even dared question you. When I told him the tenants suspicioned you were the crook, he made me promise to straighten you out with them. They're all meeting me in the superintendent's apartment at nine tonight and I'd like for you to be there."

When the Johnsons showed up, the detective introduced them around, and a tall, white-haired gentleman named Swazey was especially nice to them.

"I don't get it," said Sam to the detective

a minute later. "I never forgot a face and the man I met coming out of Swazey's apartment last week was a little fellow. There he is—the one sitting in the corner."

"That's Albert Cushing," said the detective. "He's got an apartment on the second floor."

"All the same," said Sam, "I saw him coming out of Swazey's apartment."

"I'll look into it," said the detective.

A week later, the police picked up Albert Cushing, alias a lot of other names, in a Brooklyn pawn shop, together with enough stolen property to make conviction automatic. And when word got around that the Johnsons had supplied the crucial tip, their doorbell finally got a workout. Neighbors crowded in to thank Sam and hoist a friendly glass.

"Looks like we finally made the grade," he told his wife that night.

Well, obviously the way for me to finish this story would be to tell you that a wave of friendliness swept the apartment house, and that ever since, the tenants have been borrowing cups of sugar from each other. But New Yorkers would know it was a phony ending—that a single cops-and-robbers incident doesn't figure to change anything in the big gray town.

"I vow to go back to Pomeroy," said Sam's wife one night after a long two-handed session of gin-rummy. "We've been in this town almost six months without getting to know a soul."

"Any way you want it," said Sam, "but I can't say that I regret a minute of the time I spent here. At least I've gotten to know one person a lot better than I ever did."

As I was saying in the opening paragraph, it's pretty hard for an out-of-towner to get to know folks in New York. That is, unless one of the folks happens to be his wife.

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Man: This is not me. Regards Ed