



# Beyond the Fringefan

[[#536]]

**BEYOND THE FRINGEFAN** has been dealing with a number of recalcitrant pieces of technology this month, leading to his making a lot of extended calls to tech support. He's also, as a result, spent a lot of time waiting at the N.Y. Cadre (1088 East 40th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11210 (☎(718) NY-CADRE; 🖨↔️🖨 nycadre [at] acedsl [dot] com; 🌐http://www [dot] nycadre [dot] org)) for technicians to show up and fix things, and for other technicians to fix the results of what the previous technicians did. Fortunately (or not—the judgment is left as an exercise for the reader), despite their worst efforts, his laptop is working well enough for him to put out **Beyond the Fringefan** #536, for readers of **APA-NYU** Volume 21, #7 (e-APA-NYU #212) and other ticky-tacky techies, published July 2023 as a combined production of Quick Brown Fox Press and Syscrash Consulting, both subsidiaries of **THIGAMAJIG**. Cartoon above from *Tina's Groove* by Rina Piccolo, circa 2003. All uncredited material copyright ©2023 by Marc S. Glasser. Member fwa.

**POLLISH JOKE:** On primary day, 27 June, I got up at 3 am, had breakfast, got dressed, and biked over to a polling place at a public school about two miles west of the Cadre, ready to do my part for democracy once again by being a poll worker. I arrived at 5 am sharp as specified on the work assignment card, expecting to find a bustle of setup activity, as I'd found when I arrived at my assigned location last November. Instead, I found one other person there: Grigory, the coordinator. There was also, wandering in and out, the police officer assigned to the site, a woman named Ramos.

Eleven other poll workers were assigned to the location, but none of them had arrived by 5...or 6...or 7. This was distressing, as we were supposed to have everything set up and all the desks populated by the official poll opening time of 6 am. Grigory, who'd done coordinator duty several times before, kept calling the Board of Elections for help and getting "we'll let someone know and get back to you." He also tried to call some of the missing workers (all of whom he'd telephoned the previous Thursday and gotten their confirmation that they'd be there), but none of them seemed to be answering.

Each poll worker position—information clerk, election-district (ED) table inspector, scanner inspector, accessibility clerk, *et alia*—has assigned duties, which at start of day include unlocking and powering up equipment, breaking seals on official packets of documents, logging inventories, and so on. Grigory, pacing nervously, told me that it was not legally permitted for a worker in any position to perform any duties other than the ones assigned to that position; thus he couldn't legally set up the scanners, accessible ballot marking devices, registration lookup tablets, and other machinery needed for people to

vote. Fortunately, only one person (that I saw) showed up looking to vote prior to 9 am. Grigory told him we were having “technical difficulties” and asked if he could come back in a couple of hours.

A young woman named Melissa popped in at 8 am, apologizing profusely for her tardiness; she was the accessibility clerk, and immediately got busy locating the accessible entrance (down a side alley), posting signs, and setting up a doorbell for persons with disabilities to ring for help. Grigory and I moved tables into place and plugged in a few machines to boot up (Grigory muttering the whole time about how we were “breaking the law” by doing so).

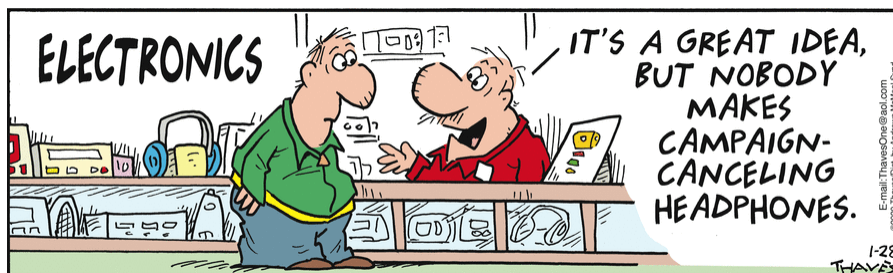
A few minutes after 9, a deputation arrived from the Board of Elections, led by one Devora, who demanded to know why the polling place was not in operation. Grigory told her that none of the assigned workers—other than me and Melissa—had shown up and so he couldn’t legally perform their duties. Devora retorted that we were legally obligated to have the poll open by 6 am, so that as coordinator it was his duty to make sure everything was set up by then even if he had to man every position single-handed. She told him that the BoE had had reports that he’d been sending voters away, a major no-no. He said that he’d asked someone to come back later, but that didn’t mean he’d “sent anyone away.” She said that was exactly what it meant. The subsequent back-and-forth between them included raised voices on both sides.

Meanwhile, Lloyd and Keisha, who’d come in with Devora, took charge of getting things in motion. I followed their orders, and by 9:45 everything was in readiness for the voters who started walking in a few minutes later. A few more poll workers, apparently called in hastily from a standby list, arrived to round out the crew at the ED tables. Devora told us that Keisha was now coordinator for the site, and Grigory was now information clerk. I was reassigned from information clerk to ED inspector—the person who verifies voters’ identities, signs them in, and hands them their ballots. (Should I consider this a field promotion?)

Things went pretty smoothly after that. Some more replacement poll workers came in about 11:30, and the standbys who’d shown up a couple of hours earlier went home. To my knowledge, none of the missing ten workers originally assigned to the site were ever accounted for.

All this brouhaha was for a primary election that, for the district I was covering, concerned exactly one office, a civil court judgeship. Both the Democratic and the Republican parties had multiple candidates seeking the nomination—three Democrats and two Republicans, if I recall. The Republicans were using the recently adopted ranked-choice ballot system, but the Democrats weren’t; I haven’t been able to find out why not. There was a big sign explaining how the ranked-choice ballot worked, along with “palm cards” (about 5"×7", too big to fit in anyone’s palm) with the same information—we had to remember to put those in the folders with the Republican ballots but not the Democratic ones.

All in all, my table—one of two EDs voting at this site—handed out ballots to about 25 voters all day. There were long idle periods. I played games and read a lot on my cell phone, and drained the battery to



(Frank and Ernest by Thaves, 28 January 2020)

dangerously low levels by dinnertime. As it happened, the site was only half a dozen blocks away from Ethan’s apartment, and I was able to borrow a power bank from him that got me through the rest of the evening.

The poll closed at 9 pm, but I didn't get to leave until about 10:30 (vs. 9:30 last November), probably because as ED inspector, I had to verify and sign several more documents than I had as information clerk. I got home at 11 and conked. It took me until the weekend until I felt caught up on sleep. I have no idea whether Grigory received any further reprimands, but my paycheck from the BoE arrived 27 days later, so I guess they were satisfied with my performance. I'm watching the website for dates I can sign up for to work the polls in the general election.

**PLENTY OF BULL:** I arrived a little early for the Staten Island Ferry meeting, so I strolled around the Financial District for a bit. I saw a crowd of several dozen over at Bowling Green, so I went over to check it out. It was a fairly orderly queue, so I asked someone what they were lining up for. She said, "We're waiting to take selfies with the bull!" The big bronze bull (officially *Charging Bull*) has been there since 1989; during all the years I was working in the neighborhood, I don't remember seeing more than one or two people taking pictures. It seems to have become a tourist trap in the past decade or two. At least it's free.

The Ferry meeting was pretty successful, with a dozen and a half folks showing up. We raised our water bottles to friends who are no longer with us (the names of Abby, Vijay Bowen, and Danny Lieberman were mentioned specifically). After the usual wrangling about where to go for dinner, six of us ended up at Green Bo on Bayard Street in Chinatown and had a very pleasing if somewhat delayed meal. (We discovered by looking at the MTA bus map that a few buses got rerouted during the pandemic; hence last year's confusion when the bus we thought would stop at Chatham Square, didn't.)

A distant early warning for next year: the fourth of July 2024 will fall on a Thursday, and we expect vast crowds of tourists in lower Manhattan; hence, as in previous years when this happened, the Fourth of July Ferry Meeting will be held a week later, on July 11. Mark your calendars, if they go that far.

**SYSTEMS D MINUS (not quite a total failure, but close):** I spent much of July fighting technology and its suppliers. I kept a play-by-play log of phone calls, extended time on hold, false statements and broken promises, and days waiting for technicians who were supposed to be at the Cadre at noon and finally showed up at 8 pm, or at 11 the next morning. But when I tried incorporating it into this zine, it ran nearly eight pages, so I've edited it down a bit. If anyone would like to read the full log, let me know and I'll be happy to send the whole megillah.

There were two discrete problems, with two pieces of technology that I happened to have purchased one after another, about 2½ years ago. Problem one: My old cell phone's USB-C port has been getting balky lately, disconnecting and reconnecting and disconnecting again from the laptop as it lies there on my desk, and of course not charging when it's disconnected. I bought another cable, but it didn't seem to make much difference. I tried going to the T-Mobile shop where I'd bought it, but that shop seems to be out of business. (Since I chose not to pay for an extended service plan, I expect that any T-Mobile shop I might take it to would be happy to sell me a new phone but would otherwise do nothing of any help.) So I brought it to a few places that advertised that they fix phones. The first one, at Flatbush Junction, said they could fix it, but didn't have the part in stock; they sent me to another location a couple of blocks away. The guy there spent 20 minutes replacing the part, then said the new one wasn't working either and must be defective. He switched them back and told me he'd order another; could I come back in a couple of business days?



(Bizarro by Wayne and Piraro, 13 April 2021)



After checking back for a week only to be told the part still hadn't come in, I searched for another place that fixes phones, and found one on Kings Highway near my orthopedists' office that's been there for over a decade—a lifetime in this business. I left a deposit for the replacement part, waited six days for it to arrive, and let them put it in. The new port worked beautifully—the phone charged much faster than it used to—but now the microphone was misbehaving. When on a call, I could hear the other party just fine, but he/she heard my voice fade in and out to an unlistenable extent. (Oddly, this didn't happen when the phone was on speaker mode.)

So I went back and complained, and the guy told me that the microphone and the USB-C port are one integrated unit, and this one was apparently defective, so he'd have to order yet another. It took another week, but as of this writing (knock silicon), the phone has its third replacement USB-C port and microphone in a month, and all seems jake with it, at a cost of \$75 for parts and labor. This is better than the \$300 or so that replacing the phone with a similar model would cost. If I get a couple more years of use out of it, it's worth it.

Meanwhile, problem two: the headphone jack on my laptop, also 2½ years old, was likewise getting temperamental, and finally stopped giving me any sound that same first weekend after the fourth of July. (Well, with wiggling the plug and putting pressure on it, I could get intermittent response on the left channel.) I use headphones practically all the time I'm at the keyboard, so this was a significant issue for me.



(Close to Home by John McPherson, 22 February 2013)

I suddenly recalled that I *had* decided to pay for a service contract on the laptop when I'd bought it—for onsite service, even—so I called Lenovo tech support and let someone with an East Asian accent troubleshoot for a couple of hours (just the way for a geek to spend a Saturday night). When updating the BIOS and reinstalling the drivers failed to make any noticeable difference, the tech support guy promised they'd have someone at the Cadre to replace the jack within a couple of days.

There followed an ordeal that still isn't over as I type this, which so far has included three visits by two technicians, with each visit scheduled and rescheduled such that I spent six days unable to leave the house because a tech kept claiming to be on the way and arriving imminently. The first tech replaced the motherboard, found that the machine would not boot up, and pronounced the new motherboard defective, but refused to put the old one back in, claiming Lenovo's people required him to bring it back to them. Consequently, the laptop was totally nonfunctional for two and a half days until the second tech showed up with a third motherboard. He discovered that the first guy had simply neglected to connect the video interface cable to the new motherboard; when that connection was made, the machine booted up fine. Everything looked good, and he went home; but over the next couple of days, I started seeing on-screen messages about Windows not being "activated" and the new motherboard being "invalid," prompting another round of calls.

It seems that a new motherboard has to be "branded" with the serial number of the machine it lives in, or Windows isn't happy. The branding involves a few bytes of programmable read-only memory (PROM), which can be written to only with a special piece of software which the tech guy must install in person. So tech guy #2 came back, after a week's delay, with the software on a flash drive—and it didn't work.

After an afternoon of running diagnostics, he gave up and promised to talk to Lenovo's branding techs the next morning. Five days later, I'm still waiting for him to come back with a branding iron that's compatible with my laptop.

And in an unrelated story, our microwave oven, owing to a malfunctioning switch, now keeps its turntable rotating whenever its door is open. It doesn't cook anything when it does that, and it functions fine when the door is closed, so it's just a minor annoyance, hearing it turn, turn, turn. There will be a season to replace it, eventually, I guess. [LATE UPDATE: After two months of this behavior, the microwave has quit functioning completely—except that it still turns the turntable when the door is open. I guess its time to die has arrived, as has my time to buy a new one.]

Donna's still at the rehab at this writing, still mostly comfortable but still wanting to go home. (This will probably happen soon, as it's getting close to the limit on days that Medicare and our supplemental policy will pay for.) She's getting physical therapy and occupational therapy five days a week, and as of this writing has finally been allowed by the therapists to walk with a rollator—with two others walking alongside her.

We got her to Dr. D.R., the endocrinologist, who called for a bone density scan to verify whether she has osteoporosis and how badly. Typically, when we tried to schedule the scan, we were given a date six weeks away. Well, that'll still be before her next appointment with Dr. B.S., the neurosurgeon, who's the one we're hoping will pronounce her neck healed enough that she can stop wearing the rigid collar, which she regards as a medieval torture device.

Seymour the handyman from next door, with help from his brother, has now completed the sanding and refinishing of the floor in Donna's bedroom, as well as the repainting that we decided to do while we had all the furniture out anyhow. The job was prolonged when they determined that the plaster on the ceiling and one wall, very likely 120 years old, was crumbling and needed to be knocked out and replaced with sheetrock. But it's all done now and awaiting appreciative ooh and aahs from Donna when she gets home.

### Fringe Reception: Comments on APA-NYU, Volume 21, #6 (e-APA-NYU #211)

LOS ANGELES TIMES CROSSWORD vs. NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD (Chas Belov): Have you checked whether the *Examiner* puts its crosswords (and the solutions) up online? That might help if you can't track down a copy on a given day. /\*/ When I was still commuting to work, I'd pick up the free paper *amNY* at the box at the subway station, more to do the KenKen than anything else. Those were pretty simple 6×6 grids, and I seldom failed to complete one. I don't think I've done one since I retired. /\*/ And I do the Jumble if a copy of the *Daily News* happens to fall into my lap, but that's pretty seldom these days too. Like you, I often solve the punny "final answer" first and then work backward. /\*/ I'm curious that you complete or nearly complete the *New York Times* Sunday puzzle pretty consistently, but not so the *Los Angeles Times* and *Newsday* puzzles (which are supposedly not as difficult). Not quite curious

enough, though, to make the effort to obtain the latter two and see how I do. I generally complete



(Real Life Adventures by Wise and Aldrich, 26 July 2014)

the Sunday *New York Times* puzzle, but seldom at one sitting. /\*/ It's good that you're getting to taper off at work pretty much the way you'd like. May it continue to go so smoothly. /\*/ (¢APA-NEWS) The Alan Parsons Project was a familiar name to me for a long time without my actually being able to name any of the band's songs. A couple of years ago I heard "Eye in the Sky" and "Time" on YouTube and said "Oh, *that's* what the Alan Parsons Project sounds like." I've listened to more of their material since then and found it pleasing but not all that memorable. (But then I've heard a lot of music in the past decade or two that I found pleasing but not all that memorable. I figure it's part of being a geezer.)



(Off the Mark by Mark Parisi, 17 April 2019)

/\*/ "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*" is easy to hate or at least dislike; it's long and has an unvarying verse melody without a chorus or bridge to break it up. Yet Lightfoot felt it was his finest work. I think I'd prefer to remember him by "Did She Mention My Name" or "Canadian Railroad Trilogy" from his early folkie days, or almost anything from the *Sit Down Young Stranger/If You Could Read My Mind* album. /\*/ (¢me) I haven't made it yet to Xi'an or some other place to try Chinese burgers, but I'm still planning to do so Real Soon Now.

JAMISON, TAKE e-LETTER (Mark L. Blackman):

Have you considered contacting Lynda Baquero at channel 4, or some similar consumer advocate in the media, with your tales of landlord woe? It sounds like something up their alley. /\*/ I hadn't heard of this new FLASH movie. Wikipedia describes it as "one of the biggest box-office bombs of all time." Sounds like fun; it ought to show up on HBO Max any day now. /\*/ (¢APA-NEWS) Lightfoot (along with dozens of others) performed "Me and Bobby McGee," but didn't write it; it was a Kris Kristofferson song. /\*/ (¢me) My mother, born 1921, was a premie. She told me she was wrapped in cotton wool and kept in an incubator for weeks. (I presume she had no direct memory of this and was retelling me what her parents had told her.) /\*/ The security guards at Ditmas Park usually tell visitors to unmask before they get photographed, but sometimes they forget (or are otherwise occupied when I get there). They kind of know me by now.

That's about it for now. Be careful to stay hydrated as the Dog Days approach, and maybe keep a pack of Milk-Bones handy. I'll be by the phone waiting for word from Lenovo.

>Portions of the preceding are angry at the *New York Times* puzzle editors  
 and have had cross words with them.<