

2008: *enough already!*



If you happened upon Father Old Year in Times Square while you were waiting for the ball to drop, and you noticed how particularly old and exhausted he looked, there's a good reason. For New York State 2008 was a very very very long twelve months. It was a year so epic, so shameless, so outrageously super-sized, it took an extra weekend just to get it to leave the stage.

January

The year dawned on a chilly note. In Albany, the gears of government were frozen under a glacier of political ill-will. Out in Buffalo, at the inaugural New Years Day Ice Bowl, **Tom Golisano's** Buffalo Sabres lost a hockey shootout to a mingle of Penguins in a lake-effect blizzard. As they say, never bring a Sabre to a shootout. Over in Iowa, **Hillary Clinton** and her highly-paid political staff, after a surprising loss to a little-known senator from Illinois, retreated toward New Hampshire. Like Napoleonic troops from Moscow, but in campaign buses.

If basketball is your game or Republican your party, things were a bit warmer. By mid January the Knicks and coach **Isiah Thomas** were deep in the throes of a full-throttle flame-out. Down south, **Rudy Giuliani** placed all of his eggs (and most of his campaign cash) in one bushel basket and buried it in the hot Florida sands. He brought back a nice tan.

February

With a stunning last-minute end zone catch by **Plaxico Burress** (who confused countless non-fans with a name that sounds like one of those large corporations who make things like, say, lightweight concealable firearms and whose non-specific feel-

good, patriotic TV commercials air during Meet the Press whenever there's a need to improve a badly damaged public image), the New York Giants won the Super Bowl. But they're from New Jersey, of course. Moving along. . .

Two days later, New York went to the polls with the state Democratic machine uniformly backing the favorite daughter candidate. In the state that both **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** and **Frederick Douglass** called home, only Tompkins County spoiled a Clinton sweep, going for **Barack Obama** with 52% of the vote.

On Valentines Day, with the sort of foreshadowing rarely seen beyond the pages of bad political thrillers, **Eliot Spitzer** visited Washington to testify before the Congressional Subcommittee on Capital Markets, Insurance, and Government Sponsored Enterprises. The night before, in a move that would later launch a thousand governor-in-heart-patterned-boxer-shorts editorial cartoons, he checked-in to room 871 of the Mayflower (shortened from the name Maybeyoushouldsendyourwifesomeflowers) Hotel.

March through June

March came in like a **Spitzer** and left like a **Patterson**. By the end of the month we were so dizzied by testimonials of sexual indiscretion from haggard governors at hastily assembled press conferences, we barely noticed the meltdown of Bear Stearns.

Throughout the spring it was hard not to notice the meltdown of our bank accounts as gasoline prices topped four dollars per gallon. Meanwhile, **Hillary Clinton's** (call-us-anything-but-elite) corps, "the blue-collar brigade," were bogged down in a guerrilla political conflict deploying bowling balls, symbolic guns and bibles, and shots of bourbon among the hills and hollers of Appalachia.

Congressman **Vito Fossella** of Staten Island was arrested for driving while intoxicated in May. The incident happened in Virginia near his *other* home and, as it turns out, his *other* family. In a unified display of grief, Staten Island's few remaining Republican pols proceeded to devour each other.

In June **Hillary** finally conceded the Democratic nomination to **Barack Obama** after a drawn-out negotiation involving a campaign debt bail-out, the threat of a convention floor fight, and a cabinet office to be named later.

A week after that the Empire State lost **Tim Russert**. Buried with him, upstate New York's last viable home-grown candidate for any hypothetical future US Senate seat vacancy.

As the first half of the year drew to a close, investors in a smallish financial institution in California, IndyMac, staged an old-fashioned bank run. The only connection to New York: the run was briefly blamed on New York's other senator, **Chuck Schumer**. And finally, on June 30 The State Court of Appeals overruled a case that once upon a time established **Eliot Spitzer's** reputation as the scold of Wall Street. The court's ruling allowed **Richard Grasso** to keep nearly \$190 Million dollars in compensation from his years as chief of the New York Stock Exchange. In retrospect, this would have been an excellent moment to withdraw all your life savings, and 401-K and stock holdings from any institution and invest it under your mattress.

Join us next week for the thrilling conclusion to 2008 featuring: **Governor David Patterson, Joe Bruno, Tina Fey, Dean Skelos, James Tedisco, Bernard Madoff, Malcolm Smith**, the cast of Camelot, **Michael Bloomberg, Judith Kaye**, the Seneca nation, **Tim Robbins**, the Gang of Four, and many many more!

Part II

The first six months of 2008 were crammed with portent: with a deeply unpopular leader in Washington, the prospects for the nation electing its first black or female president looked strong. Not to be outdone, New York inaugurated its first black and first legally blind chief executive without even pausing for an election.

The economy, too, was showing any number of warning signs consistent with an imminent and massive heart attack, starting with an unregulated diet of one-hundred forty dollar a barrel oil and hydrogenated sub-prime mortgages.

*In Albany, the war of mutually assured destruction was half-over. In fact **Eliot Spitzer**'s unexpected demise in March provided an object lesson on the interdependency of frienemies. At the end of June, Senate Majority Leader **Joe Bruno**, finding nobody left to interest in the troopergate affair and little other purpose to public life resigned, packing his things and moving down the street to a lobbying firm. As he relinquished power, Bruno's district suffered devastating floods in accordance with prophecy.*

Summer

In July **Governor Paterson** pointed to a six billion dollar and growing chasm in the state budget. New Senate Majority Leader **Dean Skelos** declared capping property taxes to be his first, second and third priorities--proving that nobody is quite as blind as a politician who's head is buried in polling data.

New York's politicians took most of the summer off, leaving the rest of the state to enjoy their staycations. The Democrats went to Denver to console **Hillary Clinton** and partake of free convention food. On the other side, party chairman **Joe Mondello** herded New York's Republican delegation to Minneapolis where, in an awkward moment, he realized that he had forgotten to invite former governor **George Pataki**. Pataki crashed the party anyway, a guest of **John McCain**, with whom he had bonded over a mutual affinity for **Teddy Roosevelt**. In the very small world department, TR's great grandson was a member of the New York GOP delegation, taking a well-deserved summer vacation from his duties as managing director for Lehman Brothers. Queue ominous music.

Fall

In New York City--soon to see the first of many financial institutions crumble--where job security was fast becoming a primary concern, the **McCain** campaign delivered relief to a handful of fashion designers, department store clerks, comedy sketch writers and **Tina Fey** in the person of Alaska Governor **Sarah Palin**. Mayor **Michael Bloomberg** discovered that by calling in a few favors and suspending the term limits law, he might postpone joining the ever increasing unemployment lines. **Judith Kaye**, Chief justice of the New York State's Court of Appeals must have lacked similar clout. She would be forced into retirement by year's end.

October brought a delegation of Dutch dignitaries to New York to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of **Henry Hudson**'s exploration. With credit markets frozen and real estate values reeling, the Dutch were dismayed to find that their 1626 investment in lands **Peter Minuet** bought from the natives for twenty-four dollars in beads and trinkets was now worth about \$17.43. In Washington, **President Bush** and Congress (discovering their inner socialists) passed a \$700 Billion bailout for banks on

the brink. The bankers, in a nostalgic nod to palmier days, invested their bounty in lavish holiday bonuses.

On Election Day 57.5% of eligible New York voters rewarded Democrats with a majority of State Senate seats, and the promise of a solid lock on state government. But not so fast. A maverick quartet of senators-elect who called themselves the Three Stooges withheld their support of Senate President Pro Tem hopeful **Malcolm Smith** in hopes of extorting a laundry list of boodle and patronage. Smith agreed. Then he disagreed, but not before running away from a press conference where his newly nominated Deputy Majority Leader was forbidden from saying exactly who his Majority Leader would be.

Oh yes, the Democrats had returned.

At some point along the line (and we're not quite sure when it happened), the state's NYC-based democratic leadership stealthily moved all essential government operations to Manhattan, saving themselves time and money on the long commute. This provided abundant job opportunities for Albany area silhouette artists who's cardboard cut-outs of legislators engaged in vigorous democratic debate will adorn windows of the state capitol. 2009 prediction: look for the Assembly chamber to be repurposed as an auction house for surplus government office furniture.

Late Fall

A few days before Thanksgiving, with the nomination that launched a thousand resumes, **President-elect Obama** chose **Hillary Clinton** to be his Secretary of State. Like a pondful of frogs jumping to a better lily pad, politicians back home dove all at once for the interim appointment to the US Senate.

As **Governor Paterson's** deliberations progressed, a formula emerged through which preferential consideration for the Senate Seat would be bestowed. To wit: female, 3 points; upstater, 3 points; universally recognized, 2 points; unbelievably rich, 2 points; articulate, 1 point; a **Cuomo**, minus 2 points. Senate hopefuls with six points or fewer need not apply. As of the end of the year, **Caroline Kennedy** is favored. But, y'know, that might change.

With the year drawing to a close, **Governor Paterson** continued the drumbeat (pah-rump-pah-pum-pum) of deficits, tax increases and cuts. If he accomplished nothing else, he at least unified the state in a holiday chorus of griping, led by a choir of fat kids and fatter soft drink distributors. Very jolly. Fallen governor **Spitzer**, having retreated to the family real estate business just in time for the crash, found another job as a columnist for Slate.com. Thus begins his political rehabilitation in a profession held in even lower esteem than public service and prostitution.

Finally, while New Yorkers burrowed into the holiday season we discovered that a very friendly man, a man trusted implicitly by many wealthy people had spent the past decade building a gigantic pyramid scheme. Like the real ones in Egypt, enduring tombs, memorials of wretched excess, this one ought to stand for millennia to come.

RIP 2008.

Mark Wilson keeps tabs on things from his home in Saranac Lake, New York