

ANDY ROONEY



Food for thought

There's no shortage of food here in the United States so eating is often more of an excuse for a social gathering than it is for nourishment. We have so much food in this country we should be ashamed of ourselves.

We call going to a restaurant "eating out," and eating out is a favorite American pastime. We eat out several times a week in New York and I couldn't name five bad restaurants I've ever been to in the city. There are around 20,000 restaurants in New York City and just as a guess, I'd say that in 40 years I've eaten in 1,500 of them. The average check for two people in a good place with two drinks before dinner, dessert and a tip, is usually about \$100. I don't wonder where my money goes; I eat it.

There was a time years ago when I almost always chose a Chinese restaurant when we were going out. I still like Chinese food, but like most Americans, we don't eat in Chinese restaurants as much as we once did.

I do a lot of cooking and nothing has changed my cooking as much as observing how the Chinese prepare food in their restaurants. I don't know whether the average Chinese family eats as well or not.

There's no question about who the best cooks in the world are; they're French. I don't know how it happened, but here are two countries geographically up against each other with a common border, France and Germany, yet their food is nothing alike. The dishes French and German cooks prepare are as different as their languages. I don't want to anger a lot of Americans of German origin, but French food is unquestionably better.

I think it's French food that makes Paris such a favorite destination of the tourists from every other nation on the planet. On the other hand, most tourists don't go to Berlin to eat. You can tell me about good German dishes, but no matter what country you're in, including Germany, it's hard to find a good German restaurant and almost impossible to find a bad French one. Most of the best restaurants in the United States have a French chef or have been strongly influenced by French cooking. In my opinion, the French are born with some kind of genius for cooking that, for some strange reason, their neighbors, the Germans, who do so many things well, just don't have. The Spanish come closer to the French in cooking good food than do the Germans.

It's strange that in foreign countries where American tourists go, you seldom find any "American" restaurants. I think I recall there being one so-called "American" restaurant in Paris, but for some reason American food doesn't have as distinctive a character as the food of most countries. If you're in India, there's absolutely no question about the food you eat; it's Indian and it's like the food of no other country. I spent 10 days in Hong Kong years ago, and I remember thinking the Chinese food in Hong Kong wasn't as good as it was in several Chinese restaurants in New York. I go abroad with that objectionable American tourist attitude, of course.

Every nation is surprisingly resistant to changing its habits in relation to cooking the food it eats. A great many Americans cook steak over an open wood fire in their back yards in summer, but good as it is, wood fire cooking in the back yard has not caught on in other countries.

Our house in the country is on six acres of wooded land. Many of the trees surrounding my backyard barbecue grill are hickory and by saving every dead branch brought down by the wind, I grill over smoking hickory several nights a week. I wish I could invite you over to impress you with my cooking, but we don't have that many dead branches on our hickory trees.

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Suddenly, political pot is a-boiling

The economic turmoil — call it crisis, as many have — has put the presidential campaign in turmoil also.

Senator John McCain's announcement that he was suspending his campaign until Congress acts on the bailout caught the Barack Obama camp off guard. Politically, it was a smart move and was aimed at showing the public what is more important — the campaign or the financial crisis.

Then he blindsided Obama by announcing he wouldn't debate Friday if there was no resolution in Congress. As I write this, word has come down that he will attend the debate and fly back to Washington.

In another move, McCain canceled an appearance on the David Letterman show, saying he had to get back to Washington. Actually, he had to tape an interview with Katie Couric first, though.

I don't blame him for bailing on the Letterman show. Let's face it, folks, the country is in trouble and showing up to be a foil for Letterman's gag writers is hardly presidential under the circumstances. Actually, for presidential candidates to waste any time on this or similar shows is highly un-presidential. Perhaps the candidates feel they can reach more Americans in this way.

H.L. Mencken was right: No one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public.

Ever since the Kennedy-Nixon debates, the encounters have become a part of the landscape. Over the years, they have become more structured and less informative. It's more a game of seeing how the candidates handle themselves in front of the camera rather than what they actually say.

It's all body language, not ideas.

Gov. Jodi Rell isn't running this year, but her administration, which has generally been bullet-proof, must deal with the lingering embarrassment of Lisa Moody, her chief of staff.

An investigation by Attorney

General Dick Blumenthal's office (who else?) has concluded that Moody has violated ethical standards, if not, the law.

Moody, you may recall, was accused of hustling fundraiser tickets to state agency heads — and urging them to pressure their subordinates — for a Rell campaign dinner.

The AG's current beef involves her using state time and equipment to compile a list of possible donors, based on a roll of people involved in tourism and arts activities. This list, copied onto a disc, was then forwarded to the governor's campaign committee. Those on the list received a pitch for political contributions.

Since Moody is a political appointee, she dodged the legality issue that covers state career employees.

Whether anyone remembers this when the governor runs for re-election — if she chooses to do so — remains to be seen.

An *Associated Press*-Yahoo poll should be disturbing to the Obama campaign. It reports that efforts to win over Hillary Clinton's supporters is stuck in neutral, the same as it was in June.

The Clinton loyalists are moved by their devotion to the senator from New York and their lack of confidence in the nominee. The nomination of Sarah Palin by the GOP apparently had little effect on their decision.

Senator Joe Biden, the Dem veep candidate, has revealed some sloppiness, if not inaccuracy, in some of his recent off-the-cuff remarks.

Talking about taking action in the financial crisis, he said President Roosevelt stepped in when the stock market crashed in 1929 and took immediate action. Sorry, Joe. He wasn't president until 1932 — Herbert Hoover, a Republican, was still president at the time of the crash.

The senator also said that Roosevelt went on television to inform the nation of his course of action. Gee, Joe, I don't think anyone had a television in their living room until after World War II.

State Democrats apparently chickened out when it came to censuring Senator G.I. Joe Lieberman — the Democrat-turned-independent — for his support of Senator John McCain. He's often seen at McCain's elbow in those news photo-ops.

The state central committee chose to circulate the resolution to every local Democratic committee for their consideration. The straw that broke the camel's back was Joe's speech at the Republican Convention, praising McCain and criticizing Obama.

He says he plans to remain a Democrat despite the criticism.

He and independent Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders are key to the Democrats' control of the Senate. Lieberman even has been named chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

If the Democrats pick up two or three Senate seats as is predicted, Joe will be holding a caucus of one in the cloakroom.

The McCain decision to suspend his campaign reminds me of an action taken by George Brunjes, the Democratic candidate for mayor in 1955.

The flood had struck the center of Norwalk, destroying much property and damaging all but one bridge over the Norwalk River. The incumbent, Irving Freese, was deep in efforts to pull the town back together.

Brunjes announced that he was giving all the party's campaign funds to the American Red Cross.

The party regulars gulped, knowing they had bills to pay for advertising, fliers and the like.

The retired junior high school principal upset Freese, but Freese was back in City Hall two years later.

As is my custom during election campaigns, I present my list of political movies that are alternatives to watching the debates. They usually turn up on the movie channels at this time of the year.

I have to apologize that my list is somewhat dated since I never

JOHN P. REILLY



go the movies anymore.

Among my favorites is "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" with Jimmy Stewart. Perhaps they should show it to congressional leaders huddling in search of a financial solution.

Another oldie on my list is Brien Donlevy in "The Great McGinty" about a city politician caught up in corruption who flees the country and winds up running a bar in Latin America.

My all-time favorite is "The Last Hurrah," starring Spencer Tracy in a script based loosely on the life of James Michael Curley, the famous — or infamous — mayor of Boston.

Robert Redford did a great job as the activist drafted to be a Senate candidate in California in "The Candidate." It was a revealing insight into the operations of a political campaign, including the sordid parts. The best part of the film was Redford's comment when he learned he was actually elected — "What do I do now?"

A really old one is "The Farmer's Daughter" in which Loretta Young plays that part and wins election to Congress.

"My Fellow Americans," starring James Garner and Jack Lemmon as two ex-presidents being targeted by a mean vice president who is out to have them rubbed out (sounds like Dick Cheney), didn't get great reviews, but what the heck, it had a lot of laughs.

I'm sure there are a lot of good and newer political movies, but my list tends to be nostalgic.

One great film with heavy political implications is "The Manchurian Candidate," a chilling but enthralling movie.

I just hope as many of them as possible turn up on the movie channels in the days ahead. I'm set for election night — I have "The Last Hurrah" on DVD.

John P. Reilly is editor emeritus of The Hour.

Empowering parents as partners in their children's education

By **RODOLFO JOSE ROSADO** and **LAUREN ROSATO**

Welcome to the Norwalk Education Foundation's inaugural collaboration with *The Hour*. In the months ahead, we will share with our parents and the community what's happening in education in Norwalk, as well as particular issues and ideas about educating and inspiring our youth.

NEF is particularly suited to this task as an independent, non-profit organization that since 1998 has worked to improve education for Norwalk schoolchildren by providing programs and funds for innovative classroom instruction, teacher and technology training, and a variety of learning opportunities within and outside of school. Some of these programs include Power Hour, an after-school literacy program in 11 elementary schools. Our Classroom Innovation Grants allow teachers to develop creative projects that enhance classroom lessons through hands-on, innovative educational approaches. NEF also helps teachers and students learn and master elements of emerging technology by training more than 200 teachers each year, helping 4,800 students in their immediate classrooms.

As we enter the new 2008-2009 academic year, we would like to

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emphasize that all of us, as part of this community, need to be partners in promoting our children's education. This is at the foundation of our children's success. Children need our committed support in order to succeed.

Formal school services are important, but they represent only the most basic part of education. Schools, teachers and other educational staff do the lion's share of providing information and opportunities to learn. However, learning in general should be promoted by parents and others in a child's life as a basic life-long process.

Parents especially must be active participants, communicating the importance of learning to their children. Here are some specific recommendations for parents:

1. Develop an active partnership with your children's teachers. Attend parent-teacher meetings and maintain an ongoing communication. Positive parent-teacher relationships can help motivate children by letting them know that all of the significant people in their lives view education as important.
2. Make efforts to participate in classroom-related activities. Although balancing family, work

and other parts of our busy lives is difficult, it is important to make efforts to support school activities. This can range in time commitment from volunteering to chaperoning school trips, or sending snacks for special occasions.

3. Participate in overall school-related activities. Join the PTO, go to school-sponsored functions, read local newspapers to keep abreast of important education news. By doing so, you can contribute your ideas and opinions to those in the school, in community forums and at Board of Education meetings. Parents are in the best positions to get information about the quality of their children's experiences in school. Let's promote the best parts of the schools, while we also address those elements that need to evolve.

4. Most importantly, make sure your children understand that learning and growth are important. Check their homework, read to them, and ask about their day at school. Youth should also appreciate learning experiences outside of the classroom. When possible, accompany your children to Norwalk's local museums and community activities.

For those parents who struggle with homework help, speak to the teachers for advice or contact

Campaign does best amid stress High hopes

from C6

stands still, he sinks. However, McCain has found that when stresses are applied to the race, it changes character and becomes more favorable. When Russia invaded Georgia or when Sen. Barack Obama gave his ill-conceived Berlin address, McCain jumped in the polls.

And when outside events haven't occurred, McCain has tried to create stresses. That's why he challenged Obama to a series of 10 town-hall meetings. And it's a big part of why he picked Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin to be his running mate.

What makes McCain's campaign particularly canny is that he has tried to stir the pot even when confronted with events that should be very bad for him. When Hurricane Gustav threatened to overshadow the Republican convention, McCain simply scrapped the first day of the show.

Today the credit market is hanging by a thread and taxpayers may be on the hook for a \$700 billion bailout. All while the executives who drove Lehman Bros. into the ground are poised to share \$2.5 billion in bonus money.

These developments should, by conventional political standards, seal the election for Obama. Yet

McCain took the initiative and shook things up again by suspending his campaign.

As a tactical matter, it's irrelevant whether or not this gambit works. If it does, the bounce will be short-lived and McCain will have to prod the system before November.

If it backfires, it hardly matters: The natural state of the race is quicksand for Republicans.

McCain's only chance is to keep his feet moving.

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from C6

pointing and overdue regulations followed that scandal, too. So did a drying up of home buying opportunities, which is the exact opposite of the program's hopes. A similar post-disaster dance of blame is shaping up in Washington now.

Public-private partnerships can work, if you remember the lessons of past intentions. First, we need regulations and oversight that remembers the sneaky side of human nature, including the inevitable temptation to make an easy buck off of someone else's good intentions.

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