

## PROFILES

## SHERIFF JOE

*Joe Arpaio is tough on prisoners and undocumented immigrants. What about crime?*

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

Joe Arpaio, the sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona, looked disappointed. Al Sharpton was supposed to come to Arizona to lead a march demanding Arpaio's resignation. But Sharpton had other plans. "He's going to Alabama this week-end instead," Arpaio told Lisa Allen, his media-relations director. They were riding in the back of the Sheriff's car, a big black Chrysler with tinted windows. "He'll never come," the Sheriff said bleakly. "Alabama— isn't that where Bull Connor was, that they're always comparing me of?" Two silent, extra-large deputies rode in the front seat. Arpaio, who is seventy-seven, thick-bodied, and restless, studied the strip malls and waste grounds streaming past. He wore a gray suit, no badge, a tie clip in the shape of a pistol. "But Shaq is coming tonight?" he asked. Allen thought he was. The occasion was the premiere of the film "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," at a mall in Tempe, where Arpaio looked forward to walking the red carpet with Shaquille O'Neal.

Arpaio is known as "America's Toughest Sheriff." He even wrote (or caused to have written) a book with that title, as well as a second one, published last year, "Joe's Law: America's Toughest Sheriff Takes On Illegal Immigration, Drugs, and Everything Else That Threatens America." When he's not taking on everything that threatens America, Arpaio pursues his passion for being in the vicinity of celebrities. He made a point of visiting Charles Barkley when Barkley was in his jail on a D.U.I. earlier this year. After it was reported that the Los Angeles County jail was having trouble with overcrowding, he offered to put Paris Hilton into his lockup after her D.U.I. (No luck.)

Tempe had been awarded the "Wolverine" premiere in an online vote. A modest outdoor stage had been thrown together, under a billboard for Hastings & Hastings, discount accident lawyers,

and the mall parking lot was mobbed. "Where's the red carpet?" Arpaio asked. It turned out to be a long, dirty, maroon rug. The crowd, craning to catch a glimpse of Hugh Jackman, seemed to be mainly teen-agers. A sunburned middle-aged couple approached Arpaio and asked for a photograph with him. He obliged—this was more like it.

The first celebrity arrived, a big guy in heavy stage makeup, with well-muscled arms and long blond hair and extremely white teeth. He bared his teeth and flexed his biceps, mugging for the cameras. I asked a gangly teen-ager in a tuxedo who he was. Clearly astounded by my ignorance, the teen-ager said, "That's Sabretooth, from 'American Gladiator!'" The actor, Hollywood Yates, later told me that his character on "American Gladiator" was, in fact, Wolf.

People who were actually in "Wolverine"—Jackman, Liev Schreiber, Will.i.am—started arriving, each bounding onto the little stage to raucous applause.

Shaquille O'Neal never showed.

I asked Hollywood Yates what he thought of Arpaio.

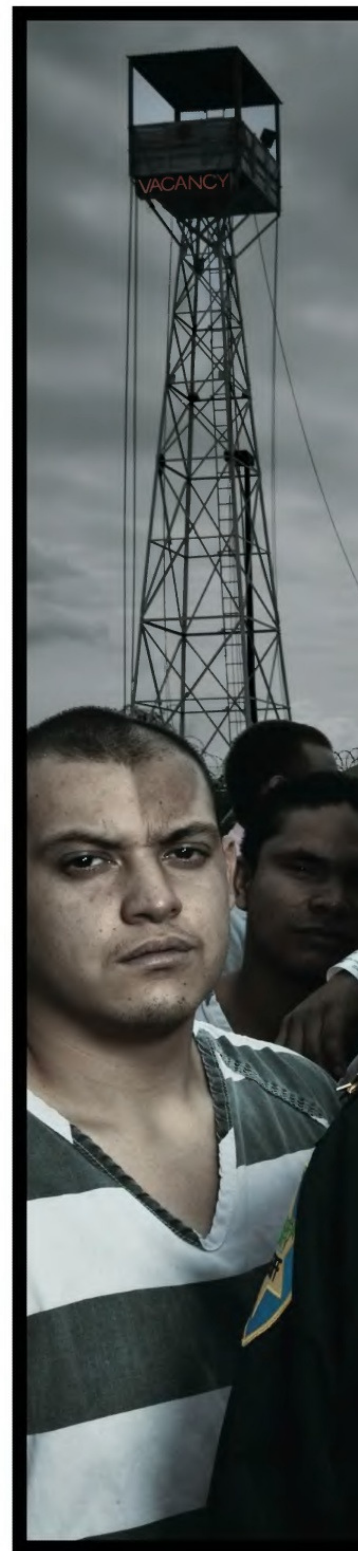
"He's awesome!"

Yates's wife, Shari, who had joined us, grimaced. She was slim, blond, in her late thirties. She wore much less makeup than her husband. "Joe is too hard-core for me," she said.

"Well, I love it," Yates said. "Those people are in jail for a reason."

Maricopa County is not a modest, out-of-the-way place. It includes Phoenix, covers more than nine thousand square miles, and has a population of nearly four million. Joe Arpaio has been sheriff there since 1993. He has four thousand employees, three thousand volunteer posse members, and an over-worked media-relations unit of five. Like

*Arpaio and inmates at the Tent City jail. Photograph by Dan Winters.*





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most sheriffs in America, he is elected. He is currently enjoying his fifth four-year term, and looking forward to winning a sixth in 2012. Maricopa sheriff's races are, in the age of Arpaio, not light-hearted affairs. Stephen Lemons, a political reporter for the weekly Phoenix *New Times*, told me with some chagrin that Barack Obama's victory in November was actually overshadowed, in his mind, by Arpaio's reelection.

Arpaio always wanted to be a cop. His parents were immigrants from Naples. "They came through Ellis Island *legally*," he says. His mother died giving birth to him in Springfield, Massachusetts. His father owned grocery stores there, and Joe was raised mostly by friends and relatives. After a hitch in the Army, he became a patrolman in Washington, D.C.—"Black neighborhood," he told me. He later worked as a federal narcotics agent in Turkey and Mexico and, finally, Arizona, where he retired. He and his wife, Ava, who have two children, ran a small travel agency in a suburb north of Phoenix. Then, in the early nineties, Joe decided to run for sheriff against an incumbent weakened by scandal. In Maricopa County, where the population has more than quadrupled

since 1970, it is not always a disadvantage to lack local roots. Arpaio wasn't eloquent, but he spoke in short, quotable bursts, and he pummelled opponents with gusto. He promised to crack down on crime and to serve only one term. He won the Republican primary, which is traditionally all one needs in Maricopa.

The biggest part of the sheriff's job is running the jails, and Arpaio saw that there was political gold to be spun there. The voters had declined to finance new jail construction, and so, in 1993, Arpaio, vowing that no troublemakers would be released on his watch because of overcrowding, procured a consignment of Army-surplus tents and had them set up, surrounded by barbed wire, in an industrial area in southwest Phoenix. "I put them up next to the dump, the dog pound, the waste-disposal plant," he told me. Phoenix is an open-air blast furnace for much of the year. Temperatures inside the tents hit a hundred and thirty-five degrees. Still, the tents were a hit with the public, or at least with the conservative majority that voted. Arpaio put up more tents, until Tent City jail held twenty-five hundred inmates, and he stuck a neon "VACANCY" sign on a tall guard tower. It was visible for miles.

His popularity grew. What could he do next? Arpaio ordered small, heavily publicized deprivations. He banned cigarettes from his jails. Skin magazines. Movies. Coffee. Hot lunches. Salt and pepper—Arpaio estimated that he saved taxpayers thirty thousand dollars a year by removing salt and pepper. Meals were cut to two a day, and Arpaio got the cost down, he says, to thirty cents per meal. "It costs more to feed the dogs than it does the inmates," he told me. Jail, Arpaio likes to say, is not a spa—it's punishment. He wants inmates whose keenest wish is never to get locked up again. He limits their television, he told me, to the Weather Channel, C-SPAN, and, just to aggravate their hunger, the Food Network. For a while, he showed them Newt Gingrich speeches. "They hated him," he said cheerfully. Why the Weather Channel, a British reporter once asked. "So these morons will know how hot it's going to be while they are working on my chain gangs."

Arpaio wasn't kidding about chain gangs. Foreign television reporters couldn't get enough footage of his inmates shuffling through the desert. New ideas for the humiliation of people in custody—whom the Sheriff calls, with persuasive disgust, "criminals," although most are actually awaiting trial, not convicted of any crime—kept occurring to him. He put his inmates in black-and-white striped uniforms. The shock value of these retro prisoner outfits was powerful and complex. There was comedy, nostalgia, dehumanization, even a whiff of something annihilationalist. He created female chain gangs, "the first in the history of the world," and, eventually, juvenile chain gangs. The chain gangs' tasks include burying the indigent at the county cemetery, but mainly they serve as spectacles in Arpaio's theatre of cruelty. "I put them out there on the main streets," he told me. "So everybody sees them out there cleaning up trash, and parents say to their kids, 'Look, that's where you're going if you're not good.'" The law-and-order public loved it, and the Sheriff's fame spread. Rush Limbaugh praised him, and blurbed his book. Phil Donahue berated him.

Arpaio's one-term campaign promise had to be shelved. Opinion polls found that Sheriff Joe, as he was called, was the most popular politician in Arizona. The Democrats didn't even bother running a candidate against him in



*"I can't afford to lose my phone. I've assigned it talismanic properties."*



1996. In fact, he often says, the governorship has long been his for the taking. But he likes being sheriff—he pronounces it “shurf.” He got a tank from the Army, had the howitzer muzzle painted with flames, and “Sheriff Arpaio’s War on Drugs” emblazoned on the sides, and rode in it, with Ava, in the Fiesta Bowl Parade. He decreed that all of his inmates—there are now roughly ten thousand of them, double the number when he took office—must wear pink underwear. And pink socks and pink flip-flops. Even pink handcuffs. Pink, he explains, mock-sincerely, is a soothing color.

“I know just how far I can go,” Arpaio told me. “That’s the thing.”

His deputies, particularly his jail guards, seem to have less sense of how far they can go. Thousands of lawsuits and legal claims alleging abuse have been filed against Arpaio’s department by inmates—or, in the case of deaths in detention, by their families. A federal investigation found that deputies had used stun guns on prisoners already strapped into a “restraint chair.” The family of one man who died after being forced into the restraint chair was awarded more than six million dollars as the result of a suit filed in federal court. The family of another man killed in the restraint chair got \$8.25 million in a pre-trial settlement. (This deal was reached after the discovery of a surveillance video that showed fourteen guards beating, shocking, and suffocating the prisoner, and after the sheriff’s office was accused of discarding evidence, including the crushed larynx of the deceased.) To date, lawsuits brought against Arpaio’s office have cost Maricopa County taxpayers forty-three million dollars, according to some estimates. But the Sheriff has never acknowledged any wrongdoing in his jails, never apologized to victims or their families. In fact, many of the officers involved have been promoted.

Other jails get sued, of course. The Phoenix *New Times* found that, between 2004 and 2008, the county jails of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston, which together house more than six times as many inmates as Maricopa, were sued a total of forty-three times. During the same period, Arpaio’s department was sued over jail conditions almost twenty-two hundred times in

federal district court. Last year, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care withdrew the health accreditation of Maricopa County’s jails for failing to meet its standards, and a federal judge refused to lift a long-standing consent decree on the jails, finding that conditions remained unconstitutional for pre-trial detainees. (The consent decree mandates that the jails be monitored. But it hasn’t had much effect.)

Remarkably, Arpaio has paid almost no political price for running jails that are so patently dangerous and inadvertently expensive. Indeed, until recently there were few local or state politicians willing to criticize him publicly. Those who have, including members of the county board of supervisors, which controls his budget, tend to find themselves under investigation by the sheriff’s office. Local journalists who perturb Arpaio have also been targeted. The Phoenix *New Times* ran an investigation of Arpaio’s real-estate dealings that included Arpaio’s home address, which he argued was possibly a violation of state law. When the paper revealed that it had received an impossibly broad subpoena, demanding, among other things, the Internet records of all visitors to its Web site in the previous two and a half years, sheriff’s deputies staged late-night raids on the homes of Michael Lacey and James Larkin, executives of Village Voice Media, which owns the *New Times*. The deputies arrested both men for, they said, violating grand-jury secrecy. (The county attorney declined to prosecute, and it turned out that the subpoenas were issued unlawfully.)

Outspoken citizens also take their chances. Last December, remarks critical of Arpaio were offered during the public-comment period at a board of supervisors meeting, and four members of the audience were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct—for clapping. Their cases are pending.

Some local politicians have begun to speak up. Phil Gordon, the mayor of Phoenix, publicly denounced Arpaio last year for abuses of power. Gordon told me in his office recently that the Sheriff has imposed “a reign of terror” on Maricopa County. But the Mayor was referring neither to the jails nor to the intimidation of

critics. He was mainly talking about a wide-ranging campaign, carried out by Arpaio in recent years, against undocumented immigrants in Maricopa County.

Arizona is a major corridor for Latin Americans sneaking into the United States, and the Phoenix area is both a stopover and a destination. Roughly half a million undocumented immigrants live in the state. Arizona is also full of retirees from the Midwest and the Northeast—Sun City is in Maricopa County—and these elderly Americans are, by and large, not completely delighted to find themselves among folk, mostly poor and brown, who don’t speak English. The state is home to an array of nativist

groups, and its legislature has passed perhaps the harshest anti-immigrant laws in the country. Arpaio, always a discerning student of conservative voter sentiment, surveyed all this a few years back and decided to transform his sheriff’s department, with a crucial assist from the Bush Administration’s Department of Homeland Security, into a sort of freelance immigration-enforcement agency.

His deputies conduct extensive raids in Latino towns and neighborhoods. They say they have investigated and arrested more than thirty thousand undocumented aliens. This campaign has landed Arpaio on Lou Dobbs’s show, on CNN, where he is treated as a conquering hero, and has drawn support from ultra-right and racist groups, including neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. It has also brought Arpaio critical attention from civil-rights organizations.

In March, the U.S. Department of Justice, at the request of members of Congress, launched an investigation into charges of discriminatory conduct by the sheriff’s office in Maricopa County. “It’s garbage,” Arpaio says—grandstanding by politically correct bureaucrats afraid to enforce the laws, Obama Democrats throwing their weight around. Certainly, it has not slowed the pace of his roundups. “Since I got my letter March 12th, we’ve locked up another hundred fifty,” he told me in April. In the world accord-



ing to Sheriff Joe, almost every problem in America these days can somehow be traced back to “illegals.”

That was presumably why Arpaio seemed so excited to hear the early news about swine flu: *it was coming from Mexico*. “We gotta get something out!” he said. He meant a press release. The Sheriff gathered eight or nine aides around a big table in his office. “Illegal Immigration Breeds Crime, Disease,” Arpaio suggested. “Can we get masks for the deputies at the tents? ICE”—Immigration and Customs Enforcement—“has masks, don’t they? We should close the border.”

The press-release team included Lisa Allen and other members of the media-relations unit; a jail administrator; a public-health specialist; and two deputies from the Sheriff’s human-smuggling unit, who had brought with them a map of Mexico. “Ninety, ninety-five per cent of the people we apprehend are from Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas,” one of the deputies said, spreading out the map. “The south.” He and his partner were the odd men out at the meeting. Everyone else was in business attire; the deputies wore bluejeans and black T-shirts and carried pistols on their hips. Both deeply tanned, with sunglasses pushed up on crewcuts, they were also the only Latinos present. People silently studied the map. Finally, Lisa Allen said, “Mexico City is where?”

Arpaio was getting impatient. Len Sherman, who co-wrote both of the Sheriff’s books, said firmly, “The story here is that Homeland Security is doing nothing about this, just like New Orleans. So we’re taking action.”

The public-health specialist said gently, “Surgical masks do nothing to combat this virus.”

Arpaio erupted. “This is my press release! I’m the sheriff! I have some knowledge! I’m not just some little old sheriff!” He told a complicated story about a Nixon-era anti-narcotics program called Operation Intercept, which he said he ran with G. Gordon Liddy, and which nearly closed the border with Mexico for ten days in 1969.

Len Sherman nodded thoughtfully. “So you’re saying that swine flu is an opportunity to solve other problems.”

“Yes!”

The meeting went on for close to an hour. The Sheriff was called away to an

## MEATLOAF

1.  
Twenty-five years ago, Kurt Schwitters,  
I tried to instruct you in baseball  
but kept getting distracted, gluing  
bits and pieces of world history  
alongside personal anecdote  
instead of explicating baseball’s  
habits. I was K.C. (for Casey)  
in stanzas of nine times nine times nine.  
Last year the Sox were ahead by twelve
2.  
in May, by four in August—collapsed  
as usual—then won the Series.  
Jennifer, who loved baseball, enjoyed  
the game on TV but fell asleep  
by the fifth inning. She died twelve years  
ago, and thus would be sixty now  
watching baseball as her hair turned white.  
I see her tending her hollyhocks,  
gazing west at Eagle Pond, walking
3.  
to the porch favoring her right knee.  
I live alone with baseball each night  
but without poems. One of my friends  
called “Baseball” *almost* poetry. No  
more vowels carrying images  
leap suddenly from my excited  
unwitting mind and purple Bic pen.  
As he aged, Auden said that methods  
of dry farming may also grow crops.
4.  
When Jennifer died I had nightmares  
that she left me for somebody else.  
I bought condoms, looking for affairs,  
as distracting as Red Sox baseball  
and even more subject to failure.  
There was love, there was comfort; always  
something was wrong, or went wrong later  
—her adultery, my neediness—  
until after years I found Lauren.
5.  
When I was named Poet Laureate,  
the kids of Danbury School painted  
baseballs on a kitchen chair for me,  
with two lines from “Casey at the Bat.”  
In fall I lost sixty pounds, and lost  
poetry. I studied only “Law

and Order." My son took from my house  
the eight-sided Mossberg .22  
my father gave me when I was twelve.

6.  
Buy two pounds of cheap fat hamburger  
so the meatloaf will be sweet, chop up  
a big onion, add leaves of basil,  
Tabasco, newspaper ads, soy sauce,  
quail eggs, driftwood, tomato ketchup,  
and library paste. Bake for ten hours  
at thirty-five degrees. When pitchers  
hit the batter's head, Kurt, it is called  
a beanball. The batter takes first base.

7.  
After snowdrifts melted in April,  
I gained pounds back, and with Lauren flew  
to Paris, eating all day: croissants  
warm, crisp, and buttery, then baguettes  
Camembert, at last bœuf bourguignon  
with bottles of red wine. Afternoons  
we spent in the Luxembourg Gardens  
or in museums: the Marmottan!  
The Pompidou! The Orangerie!

8.  
The Musée de la Vie Romantique!  
The Louvre! The d'Orsay! The Jeu de  
Paume! The Musée Maillol! The Petit  
Palais! When the great Ted Williams died,  
his son detached his head and froze it  
in a Scottsdale depository.  
In summer, enduring my dotage,  
I try making this waterless farm,  
Meatloaf, with many ingredients.

9.  
In August Lauren climbs Mt. Kearsarge,  
where I last clambered in middle age,  
while I sit in my idle body  
in the car, in the cool parking lot,  
revising these lines for Kurt Schwitters,  
counting nine syllables on fingers  
discolored by old age and felt pens,  
my stanzas like ballplayers sent down  
to Triple A, too slow for the bigs.

—Donald Hall

interview, which he conducted on speakerphone from his desk. His department's executive offices are situated, strangely, on two high floors of a bank tower in downtown Phoenix. They command a tremendous view of suburban sprawl in all directions. Outside, it was hot and hazy; inside, it was icy. The Sheriff's office is the size of a midrange convenience store, its dark wood-paneled walls crowded with memorabilia, including an illustration celebrating the 2001 World Series victory of the Arizona Diamondbacks, with Arpaio's face drawn bigger than even Randy Johnson's, as if the Sheriff had been the Series M.V.P.

The interviewer on the phone wanted to know if Arpaio thought schoolchildren should be asked about their immigration status.

"Yeah. Anything."

"Aren't you concerned about putting schools in that position?"

The Sheriff waved at Sherman, stage-whispering, "What do I say here?"

Sherman: "Drugs in schools."

"I can equate that to drug testing," Arpaio told the interviewer. "It's controversial."

Sherman, who is from New York, later told me, "He's an idiot savant. What he knows, he knows, and that's all he knows. I once saw him debate Alan Dershowitz, and I thought Dershowitz's head was going to explode."

Arpaio walked back to the press-release meeting, interrupting a recitation of facts by the public-health specialist. "Forget this medical stuff," he said. "We're talking about drop houses and human smuggling. I think we should start off with a paragraph about how I'm concerned about the illegals coming over the border. We can't say they're all Mexicans. That would be racial profiling."

Later, Arpaio said, "Can we throw 287(g) in there, give it a little credit?" He was referring to a federal program that allows state and local officers to be cross-trained by Homeland Security and work in immigration enforcement. The Maricopa County sheriff's office has had more people trained under 287(g) than any other police agency in the country. Arpaio suggested a line: "Arpaio ordered that every detainee be asked by a 287(g) officer what country they came from." Allen and Sherman wrote that down.

A deputy in the media-relations unit



checked his BlackBerry and announced, "Gordon went out at two o'clock." He meant that the Phoenix mayor had held a press conference.

"About the flu?"

"Yeah."

"That piece of shit! What did he say?"

"I don't know."

The deputies from the human-smuggling unit left with their map of Mexico. I followed them out, and we talked in a conference room. They were Detective Carlos Rangel and Sergeant Manny Madrid. They had been doing this work for two or three years, they said, and 287(g) had made a big difference. "We can now determine alienage," Madrid said.

Rangel, who grew up in the border town of Mexicali, said, "I thought it would change, that the numbers we catch would drop because people would hear Maricopa was a tough county. But it hasn't."

Madrid disagreed. He thought smuggling vans were getting harder to find. "Maybe they're changing their tactics."

Rangel said, "Plenty of people come up and thank us for our work." Madrid nodded. Then Rangel added, "But those people are a hundred per cent Caucasian. I've never had a non-Caucasian thank me."

The Sheriff took me to the tents the next day. But first he gave me the swine-flu press release that his staff had produced the night before. He has a stagy way of speaking out of the side of his mouth when he wants to share something possibly confidential. "If you got any buddies in New York, throw this to 'em," he said, handing me the press release. "I always send my stuff national."

Arpaio seems to live and die by the press release. When I met up with him in New York, before an appearance on "The Colbert Report," he was under attack back home, he told me, "for going on a comedy show when I could be testifying" at a Senate hearing on border violence that was being held in Arizona. The problem, he explained, was that the hearing, which was being held by Senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman, was taking place in Phoenix City Hall—the headquarters of his enemy Mayor Gordon. "Why would I go to Gordon's office when he's calling me a racist? I did a nice media release, saying I didn't want to disrupt the dignity of the proceedings—because there are demonstrators out there every day, demon-

strating against me. But nobody's printing my press release." He sounded almost hurt. I later heard him tell a journalism class at Arizona State University, "I used to have trust with reporters. Give them scoops. Those were the old days. It's very strange, when you give a story and it doesn't come out the right way."

The swine-flu press release didn't call for closing the U.S.-Mexico border (Maricopa County is not, incidentally, on the border) but it did note Arpaio's "unwavering fight to slow the tide of illegal immigration" and warn that the swine flu should "serve as a wake-up call." Arpaio's "instrumental part" in Operation Intercept, in 1969, also got a mention.

At the entrance to Tent City Jail is a sign: "ILLEGAL ALIENS ARE PROHIBITED FROM VISITING ANYONE IN THIS JAIL."

We swept through an outbuilding, past startled deputies, and into a dusty yard full of rows of twenty-two-man canvas tents. "I'm risking my life for you," Arpaio said—referring, I gathered, to swine flu. The sides of the tents had been rolled up in the heat. Prisoners in striped outfits lay on bunks, watching us approach. We went into the first tent. The Sheriff and one of his men hurried down the narrow passage between the bunks and out the other side. I stopped midway, and asked the inmates if they felt like talking. They did.

They were all Latinos. They came from Mexico, Honduras, California, Arizona. Some had been in the tents for nearly a year. Their families were afraid to visit them, because they didn't have papers. They were all facing deportation. The jail food was very bad, they said, and they were always hungry. A slender eighteen-year-old named José Aguilar said that he had lost fifty pounds since being locked up. He showed me a photograph of himself, taken when he was arrested, which had been laminated on a plastic I.D. bracelet, and he had certainly lost weight since then. Aguilar said that he had been in Phoenix since he was a baby, and knew no one in Mexico; his first language was English. An older guy craned his head

around to make sure no guards could hear him, then said, "Arpaio is illegal. He's not really from North America."

I asked if Arpaio had any nicknames in the tents.

"Hitler."

"Hitler."

A fan was moving air around at one end of the tent, but the heat was ferocious, and it was not yet summer. I could hear Arpaio yelling for me to come out. He sent a guard in to get me. Outside, I found the Sheriff talking to a local TV news crew. I made the mistake of mentioning that I had interviewed, inside the tent, an inmate from Mexico City. The Sheriff sent a guard back in to fetch him. Mexico City was, in Arpaio's mind, the epicenter of swine flu. He wanted this guy on TV. And so Fidel Sánchez found himself being questioned by a bilingual newswoman about his infected home town while Sheriff Joe stood by, arms folded, staring balefully into the camera. Arpaio has a big, round head, and there is something turtle-like about his posture.

"The Sheriff, he's a dynamo," a guard murmured to me. "He can stay out here all day, go on sweeps at night, and be ready to go in the morning with a cup of coffee. Puts the rest of us to shame."

Arpaio, with his inhuman energy, had probably escorted hundreds of camera crews and reporters through his beloved tent jail. Many had been appalled, and produced unflattering stories. Plenty of others had simply served up the Toughest Sheriff shtick with relish—the British tabloid *Sun*, in a 2007 story, seemed ready to buy out Arpaio's contract and take him with them to straighten out the bad guys back home. Arpaio's main concern seems to be just that he is covered. When I first met Lisa Allen at his offices, she looked at my business card and said, "You'll probably tear us a new one, but come on in." Arpaio admits that he gets tired of being called a publicity hound, but says he simply has to get his message out—"I don't have the budget to do it myself." He does have the budget, though, to employ Allen and the rest of his unusually serious media-relations unit.

On the way back to Phoenix from the tents, the Sheriff got a call, which he put on speakerphone. Someone named Jim, who sounded like a deputy, was calling from the courthouse. He said he was observing jury selection in a case there. "Sheriff, there was a lady who said, 'Let's



put it this way. Joe's my hero.' So the next lady says, 'Joe is *not* my hero.' Then she says she's the wife of the mayor of Mesa."

"I knew it!" Arpaio said to one of his men. "I never trusted that mayor. He's pro-immigrant. He's never going to fire that chief. We gotta raid Mesa again."

There are at least twenty-five law-enforcement agencies in Maricopa County. All utilize the county jail. The sheriff's office is responsible for policing unincorporated areas as well as those smaller communities which contract for its services. In towns and cities with their own police, the sheriff's deputies must, in theory, tread lightly. Arpaio has had a number of run-ins with his fellow-lawmen, and his present obsession with illegal immigrants has made things even more tense.

Some of the disagreements are basic. For instance, Arpaio and the county attorney, Andrew Thomas, who shares his views, have settled on a novel interpretation of a state law against human smuggling. The law's target is, of course, smugglers, known as coyotes, but Arpaio and Thomas charge undocumented immigrants, the coyotes' cargo, as "co-conspirators" in their own smuggling. This is a Class 4 felony, which makes the suspects ineligible for bond, and is one reason that Arpaio's jails are so full. Maricopa is the only one of Arizona's fifteen counties that interprets the law this way, and the sheriff's office is the only agency among the twenty-five in Maricopa that does so. The others figure—and a few are vocal about it—that their limited resources are better spent fighting more serious crime.

George Gascón, the chief of police in Mesa—the man whom, Arpaio had bitterly remarked, the mayor was "never going to fire"—has stoutly opposed Arpaio. Mesa is a big town, east of Phoenix, with a population of half a million—larger than that of Cleveland. Gascón, who was an assistant police chief in Los Angeles before taking the Mesa job, three years ago, has had great success in crime reduction in Mesa, using the CompStat crime-mapping model, developed by William Bratton in New York and Los Angeles. But his first challenge in Mesa, he told me, had been to gain the trust of minority communities, particularly Latinos. "They need to believe that you're ethical and honest, that you're not the enemy," he said. In Los Angeles, he had seen what happened when



*"Our next speaker looked into the abyss and made a few notes."*

that trust was broken by corrupt officers. No one would talk to the cops, "gang members filled the power void," and crime flourished. With victims and witnesses, or with people stopped for civil violations, Gascón's officers do not inquire about immigration status. "We focus on people who are committing predatory crimes."

Gascón, a Cuban-American, is tall, silver-haired, soft-spoken. He is a member of the California bar. He declined to discuss Arpaio. He did say, however, "I'm not an open-borders man. I believe we have a problem with illegal immigration. But I want to make sure we don't throw away the Constitution in the process of solving it." Gascón made it clear from the start that Arpaio's military-style immigration sweeps were not welcome in Mesa.

That didn't stop Sheriff Joe. Last October, he sent sixty detectives and posse volunteers into Mesa after midnight. The plan was to raid the Mesa city hall and the public library, to look for undocumented janitors who, according to the sheriff's office, were suspected of identification theft. Gascón was not notified beforehand. (Arpaio claims that he did inform someone at Mesa police headquarters about the raid.) A Mesa police officer spotted a large group of heavily armed men in flak jackets gathering silently in a downtown park. Gascón, when I asked about the episode, took a deep breath. "It was a very, very dangerous scenario," he said. "In my entire law-enforcement career, I have never heard

of anything close to this." His officers managed to identify the armed men, but then had trouble getting a straight story from them. The raid eventually went forward, monitored by the Mesa police, and resulted in the arrests of three middle-aged cleaning women. (Arpaio's press release said that another thirteen suspected illegal immigrants were arrested later at their homes.) This was the context for Arpaio's remark "We gotta raid Mesa again."

Two reporters at the *East Valley Tribune*, a Maricopa County paper, did a five-part study last year of the operations of the sheriff's office. They found that, with the diversion of resources to pursuing undocumented immigrants, response times on emergency calls to the sheriff's office had increased significantly, arrest rates had dropped, and dozens of violent crimes were never investigated. The series won a Pulitzer Prize for local reporting. Arpaio rejected its findings and, four months after it was published, won reelection.

His local opponents, including church groups, the N.A.A.C.P., ACORN, and other community organizations, not to mention Mayor Gordon, of Phoenix, have asked the federal government to investigate possible civil-rights violations by Arpaio's office. Large-scale street protests, including mass marches to the jails, are mounted every few months. Al Sharpton did eventually show up in Phoenix, for



one day in mid-June. He denounced racial profiling, met privately with the Sheriff, and announced plans to stage modern-day “freedom rides” in Maricopa County. That evening, he and Arpaio appeared together on Lou Dobbs’s show.

The immediate goal of Arpaio’s opponents is to persuade the Department of Homeland Security to cancel its 287(g) contract with Maricopa County. Modest as that sounds, activists believe it would make a difference, reducing the power of sheriff’s deputies and crimping, however slightly, the culture of impunity that has flourished under Arpaio.

But Janet Napolitano, President Obama’s Secretary of Homeland Security, has a history with Arpaio. She was the U.S. Attorney for Arizona when conditions in Arpaio’s jails were first investigated by the Justice Department, in the mid-nineteen-nineties. Her performance then was memorably weak. Despite receiving a devastating federal report on brutality inside the jails, she held a friendly press conference with Arpaio in which she announced the settlement of the case against him and, according to the *Arizona Republic*, passed the time “trading compliments with the sheriff.” Later, as the state’s attorney general, she stood by as Sheriff Joe ran his jails any way he pleased. Then, when she ran for governor in 2002, Arpaio returned the favor by crossing party lines—Napolitano is a Democrat—and making a last-minute campaign commercial for her that, by all accounts, helped her eke out a victory. In 2008, in her second term as governor, Napolitano, a moderate on immigration, finally opposed Arpaio, ordering that \$1.6 million in state funds going to his office be used not for immigration sweeps but for the investigation of felonies. Arpaio was furious and later got his funding reinstated. His opponents in Maricopa County wonder privately about Napolitano’s willingness to defy him again, even from a Cabinet position. Last week, she announced a revision of the 287(g) program, intended to make local agencies more accountable. But, according to her office, ending Homeland Security’s partnership with Arpaio is not under consideration.

I met a large family west of Phoenix whom I’ll call the Ortegas. Two brothers—both husbands, fathers, and homeowners—had been arrested during a raid on a company where they worked. The

men were still in jail, awaiting trial on charges of using invented Social Security numbers. Both were undocumented immigrants from western Mexico. A third brother, who has residence papers, was able to visit them in jail. I talked to him and his wife, and to the wife and the oldest son of one of the jailed men, in a cream-colored suburban living room.

“My husband has been here in Arizona since 1992,” the wife of the jailed man said in Spanish. She wore a green T-shirt and, as she spoke, slowly wrung her hands. “He’s been working and working, paying his taxes. He doesn’t drink, gamble—nothing. Our children were born here. It’s very hard with them. We tell the little ones he’s in Mexico, taking care of his mother. But their cousins tell them he’s in jail. They don’t understand why their father, who’s a good man, is in jail. They say, ‘Is he bad? Don’t lie to me, Mama.’” She added, “We’ve paid three thousand dollars to lawyers. We had to stop making house payments, but I don’t care. We’re living off his tax return now.”

Her sister-in-law said, “Everything that’s happening here is the fault of the federal government, because they empowered Arpaio.”

The third brother cleared his throat, as if he might not agree. He was legal and had a solid job, as a farm supervisor, but most of the field hands at the farm were undocumented. He said, “Everybody’s just trying to keep their noses clean, hoping there will be an immigration reform.”

“Arpaio gets egged on by the national publicity he gets,” his wife said. To her sister-in-law, she said, “If you lose your house, you can come and sleep here on the couch.”

I asked the son of the jailed man, who was sitting with us but kept his eyes on the floor, his age. “I’m thirteen,” he said, in English. He was tall and skinny, with huge eyes and a child’s mouth. He wore a black baseball cap inscribed “Drug Free and Proud.” He spoke very softly. “Who’s going to pay the house bills? Where are we going to live? Am I still going to go to school?” Tears began rolling down his face.

“All he does is study,” his mother said to me.

There was talk about legal strategies, about what could be tried. “We’re just hoping to get in front of Immigration and get *un permiso*.”

“I’m not as strong as I want to be,” the

wife of the jailed man said. “But I’m trying to keep the faith. We’re not going to give up. *Si se puede*.”

Her sister-in-law turned to me and said, “We’re like this.” She held up her fingers, framing something the size of an ant. “*Como así*. Small. And Arpaio is a giant—*un gigante*.”

The Ortegas asked me again not to identify them. Arpaio, they said, “does retaliation.” They seemed terrified that he might show up at their door.

Russell Pearce is a state legislator from Mesa. His specialty is anti-immigrant legislation. Much of what he introduces is beyond the pale, even in Arizona. He has tried to force landlords to ascertain the immigration status of their tenants, couples to produce Social Security numbers and proof of citizenship before they can be married, and even hospitals to stop issuing birth certificates—never mind the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution—if there is a question about the immigration status of the parents. (Pearce can be outré in other areas as well. One law that he supported would have allowed concealed weapons in schools.) Yet Pearce has had some success: he helped pass a law that imposes sanctions on businesses that employ illegal immigrants—the toughest such law in the nation—and ballot measures making English the official state language and blocking access for the undocumented to day care and in-state college tuition.

“They should get nothing, nothing,” Pearce told me. “Not K-12, nothing. Disneyland learned this a long time ago. You want the people to go home? Turn out the lights. Shut down the rides.”

America, Pearce often says, has been “invaded,” and the Fifth Column that abets this invasion is, he told me, an unusual alliance of “big business, folks with thick checkbooks on K Street, the corporate oligarchy,” and “anarchists and seditionists.”

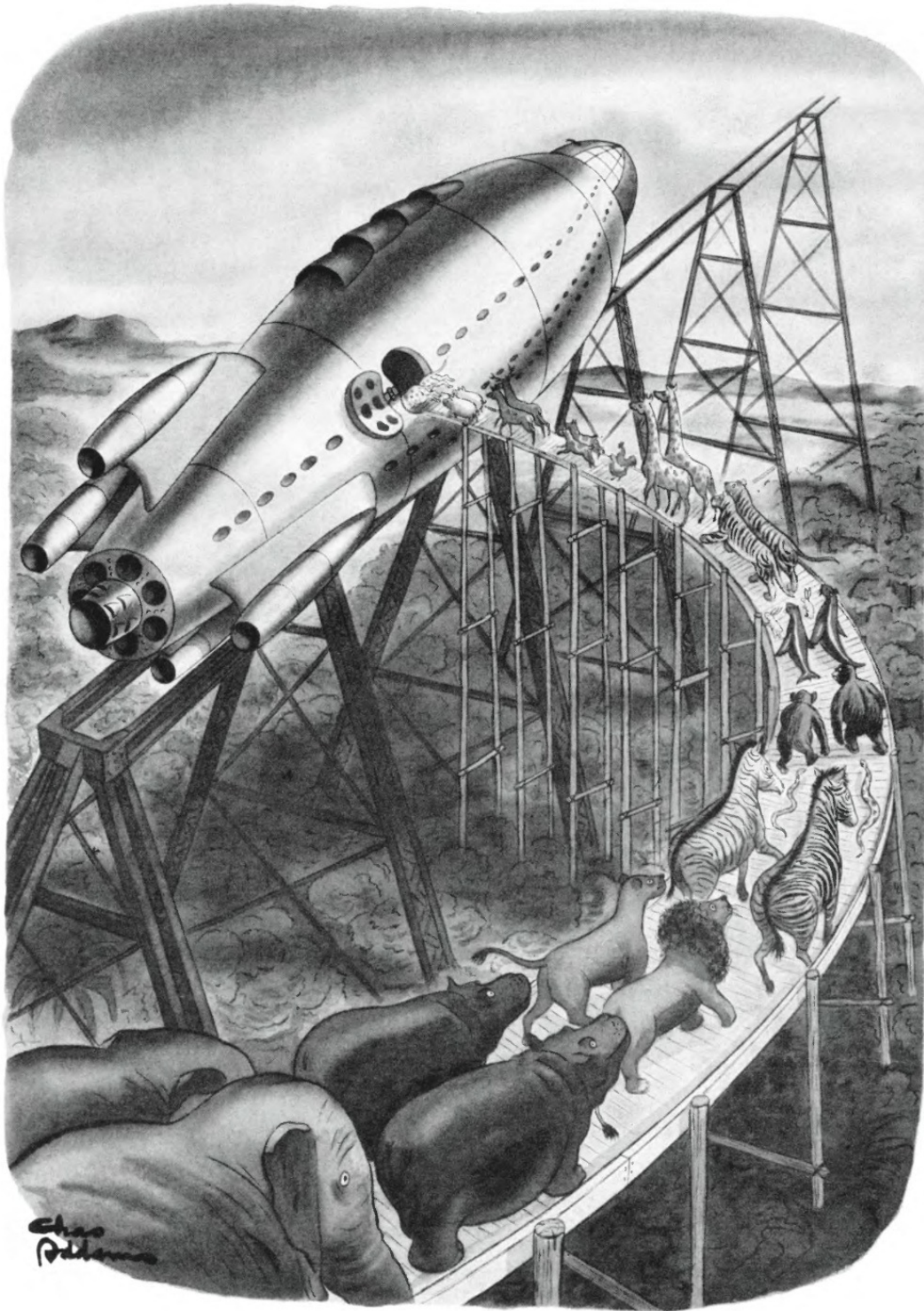
I hadn’t noticed many anarchists in Arizona.

Pearce said, “They’re huge. La Raza, the A.C.L.U.”

More self-evident is the appeal of cheap labor to employers. Whether the Arizona economy could survive without undocumented immigrants picking lettuce and cleaning hotel rooms is an open question.

In any case, Pearce and Arpaio are allies. They are heroes to the same nativist

FROM THE ARCHIVES BY CHARLES ADDAMS





groups. They even have the same painting, "The Prayer at Valley Forge," which shows George Washington kneeling in the snow next to his horse, on their respective office walls.

But Arpaio and Pearce were not always buddies. Pearce worked at the Maricopa County sheriff's office for twenty-three years, rising to chief deputy, and he reportedly clashed with Arpaio there. (Pearce still claims that the Tent City jail was his idea.) In 2004, Pearce's son, Sean, also a sheriff's deputy, was wounded by an illegal immigrant during a raid, and Sean's wife, Melissa, angry with the Sheriff, decided to attend a meeting for a group called Mothers Against Arpaio, which was seeking a special recall election. Most of the members of Mothers Against Arpaio were relatives of victims of abuse inside Maricopa County jails. (The recall effort was unsuccessful.)

There is also the awkward fact that Arpaio came late to the issue of illegal immigration. Indeed, he for many years publicly assumed the same attitude toward immigration-law enforcement that most local police chiefs do: more serious crimes deserve precedence. Arpaio was always tougher on prisoners than he was on crime, but he also immersed himself in a series of high-profile campaigns—the war on drugs, reducing cruelty to animals, driving prostitution out of Maricopa. A 2003 anti-prostitution sweep backfired when some

members of his vast volunteer posse got naked, on video, with prostitutes they were supposedly arresting. This went sufficiently far beyond the call of duty that the county attorney was unable to file charges. Arpaio, struggling to put this embarrassment behind him, and seeing the success with which other local conservative politicians were wielding the anti-immigrant club, soon picked it up himself.

Mary Rose Wilcox, who is Latina and the only Democrat on the Maricopa County board of supervisors, remembers a quite different sheriff. "Arpaio was not like this before," she told me. "He was flamboyant. But I don't know this guy." For Wilcox, the last straw came this February, when Arpaio marched more than two hundred undocumented immigrants, shackled together, to a new tent jail, parading them before news cameras. Arpaio had staged prisoner marches before. In 2005, he forced nearly seven hundred prisoners, wearing nothing but pink underwear and flip-flops, to shuffle four blocks through the Arizona heat, pink-handcuffed together, to a new jail. When they arrived, one prisoner was made to cut a pink ribbon for the cameras. This elaborate degradation, which is remembered fondly by Sheriff Joe's fans, was ostensibly in the name of security—the men were strip-searched both before and after the march. But Arpaio also told reporters, "I put them on the street so everybody could

see them." He marched another nine hundred this April.

Wilcox is a restaurant owner with an earnest, matronly air. She told me about a youth program she runs in inner-city Phoenix. "It's for fifth-grade kids who live near the ballpark but would never be able to afford to go to a Diamondbacks game," she said. "They all do community-service work, about a thousand of them, and then they get to go to a game. Sheriff's deputies always helped me with the program till two years ago. But I had to ask them to stop. The kids are just too afraid of those brown shirts. That's what their teachers told me. And I hate to say it but the Sheriff is responsible for all this fear."

We were eating chiles rellenos in Wilcox's restaurant, a modest family-run place with portraits of César Chávez and Martin Luther King, Jr., on the walls. Wilcox stopped eating. "It's like a big joke to him," she said. "He has no idea the harm he's doing—to children, families, communities."

"Be a real sheriff," the producer said. "You don't want to be a clown sheriff."

Arpaio seemed to take this advice in stride. We were in New York, and he was about to be interviewed on "The Colbert Report." "Is this the greenroom?" he asked. "These walls are blue. Are they going to powder me?"

The producer, an intense young woman, persisted. "Don't try to be funny," she said. "He will be funnier than you."

Arpaio shrugged. He wasn't familiar with Colbert's show. "I'm pretty funny," he said. From a crumpled manila envelope, he pulled two pairs of pink boxer shorts. "I brought the underwear," he said.

The producer stared. An assistant looked on helplessly. Then the producer reached for the shorts. "Thanks," she said.

"Don't you want me to take these on the show?"

"No."

Arpaio looked nonplussed. "Well, at least let me sign 'em." He autographed the shorts—one pair for Colbert ("Stay out of jail!"), one for the producer's son.

Stephen Colbert popped in and introduced himself. "I will be in character out there," he warned Arpaio. "My character is an idiot. He doesn't understand *anything*." While he spoke, the producer and the assistant chanted at Arpaio, "Set him straight! Set him straight!"



"First marriage?"

Arpaio wanted to make sure his new book would be plugged on the show. That was why he had come to New York. Colbert assured him that it would, and left to start taping.

Arpaio watched the opening monologue on a monitor, but soon grew bored. He is not accustomed to meeting people who don't know about the pink underwear. "Where's my powder?" he called out the doorway. No one replied.

Colbert's first guest got the Sheriff's attention. It was Ken Quinn, a second mate from the American container ship that was hijacked off Somalia in April. Quinn barely got to speak, between Colbert's jokes, but he had a good-natured grin and broad shoulders, and the studio audience gave him a standing ovation. Arpaio seemed jealous. "The *Republic* did a poll last week, 'Who's your hero?,' and I beat out Tillman," he said. He meant Pat Tillman, the Arizona Cardinals football star who joined the Army Rangers and was killed in Afghanistan. "I beat out all these guys. I'm not bragging. I'm just saying." (The poll, published in May, actually shows Tillman as the winner and Arpaio as a runner-up.)

Except for the ovation, Arpaio's turn with Colbert went much like Quinn's: the Sheriff hardly got a word in. He did manage to growl one stock line: "I'm an equal-opportunity law-enforcement guy—I lock everybody up." Colbert, having mentioned that Arpaio is often accused of racial profiling, kept asking the Sheriff for I.D.

As Arpaio left the studio, by an unmarked door on West Fifty-fourth Street, a bushy-haired young man waiting outside turned and bellowed, "Never come back here again! Fuck you!" Arpaio ducked into a town car, which sped away into the night. "Scumbag," he muttered. The Sheriff hadn't thought much of Colbert. He hadn't thought much of Conan O'Brien, either, he said. "I'm working on Leno. He's from my home state, Massachusetts. And my home country, Italy. I said, 'Hey, Jay, why don't you have me on your show? Afraid I'll be funnier than you?'"

**B**ack in Maricopa County, the Justice Department was pursuing the investigation requested by Congress in March. Other federal officials were also snooping around. I heard Sheriff Joe tell his jail supervisor about an awkward interview he

had just had with someone from Homeland Security. "He wouldn't even take my underwear."

"He's a bean counter," the supervisor said.

David Hendershott, Arpaio's chief deputy, seemed to be in charge of handling the Justice people. Hendershott is an enormous man, with enormous self-confidence and an office nearly as enormous as Arpaio's. He polishes the Sheriff's image at every opportunity. Not realizing, for instance, that I had already been to the Tent City jail with Arpaio, Hendershott told me, "Every time he goes to the tents, it's like a rock concert. Everybody wants his autograph. They'll have him sign toilet paper, anything."

The key question about the federal investigation, Hendershott said, was "Is it an organized conspiracy to muzzle Sheriff Joe Arpaio by using the Justice Department?" He had been doing some Internet research on the chief of the civil-rights division, he said, and decided that she must be unpopular with at least some of her staff. He brandished a thick set of printouts, and said, "D.O.J. is going to be surprised that we find the truth to be a very strong ally." Hendershott pointed at a conference table at one end of his office. "I got seven D.O.J. lawyers coming in here tomorrow. And I'm going to shove it up their ass."

He wasn't more specific about his strategy than that, but the bravado itself seemed to be the point. "You think I don't know how the feds operate?" Arpaio had asked the journalism students at Arizona State. "I don't bow down to the federal government."

**G**uadalupe is one of the small Maricopa communities that have a contract for police protection with the sheriff's office. Its population is almost entirely Latino and Native American, and one day last year Arpaio launched a major raid there, with a helicopter, paddy wagons, and scores of deputies, including helmeted officers on horseback. They stopped and demanded I.D. from pedestrians, motorists—basically every dark-skinned person they saw. (The sheriff's office calls these raids "crime suppression" sweeps, and insists that the raiders stop only people who are

violating the law.) It was standard practice, Arpaio style, complete with a press release and news crews. Indeed, it was the third such operation in less than a month. But dusty little Guadalupe is not a standard Maricopa community. It is an old town, a throwback, not given to the transience of urban sprawl. Many of its residents live in the houses they were born in; very few are foreign-born. And few appreciated the invasion by Sheriff Joe and his team.

Protesters materialized, many waving homemade placards urging Arpaio to leave. Motorists honked in support. Guadalupe's young mayor, Rebecca Jiménez, confronted Arpaio in a parking lot where he had established his mobile command center. Why, she wanted to know, did his press release say that Guadalupe town officials were alarmed about illegal aliens in their midst? They were not. Arpaio went ballistic. "He was waving his arms like a crazy man," Jiménez told me. "I had to wipe the spit off my face. He said, 'You're the one that caused all these riots!' He said he was going to come back the next day. I said we didn't want him. They did come back. But he didn't."

Arpaio chose to direct the next day's Guadalupe operation, which was more modest, from a remote command post, and Jiménez was hailed, at least in some circles, for her courage. The two-day raid netted only nine suspected illegal immigrants, but reportedly produced a high volume of traffic tickets, including charges for "improper use of horn." Jiménez noted that the raid came in the middle of an election campaign. "He used our community to get media attention," she said. "You know, Brown Town. But he got more than he bargained for."

The Guadalupe raid did have a chilling effect. It began the day before a Catholic-church confirmation ceremony—a big deal in Guadalupe—was scheduled to take place in the village plaza, and although the children had prepared for months, a number of them were afraid to come out, and missed their own confirmations.

America's toughest sheriff is, as ever, unapologetic. Over lunch in New York, he told me that he doesn't mind the effect he has. "If they're afraid to go to church, that's good." ♦