

# Nobody I know

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [June 21, 2000](#) issue

For my sister Mildred's 50th wedding anniversary, our clan is gathering in Fort Wayne this summer. Happily influenced by my siblings, from whom I keep learning, I dedicate this column to my sister and brother-in-law by detailing for others what our family calls "Mildred's law."

Of course, this requires some background. My lead is from a recent issue of *Sports Illustrated* in which Steve Rushin wrote about pro-wrestling fans. He describes them as weird and wild. Then he asks: "Who exactly are pro-wrestling fans? They're certainly legion: Three of the top 10-rated programs on cable television are wrestling shows, and WWF superstars . . . have two of the top 10 books on the *New York Times* best-seller list. Of course Celine Dion has sold 100 million albums, and I don't know a soul who owns one of them. Wrestling poses a similar paradox."

Here's where Mildred's law comes in. I first heard it uttered during a family reunion at a once-quiet resort we used to have almost to ourselves during the off-season. One year we found it jammed. How could we have a quiet dinner, enjoy the pool, play miniature golf, and all that? Suddenly our problem was solved: row upon row of buses came to take our fellow resorters away—down to the river, where the casinos were anchored. Left behind, we started musing about how none of us knew anyone who went to casinos. Then my sister casually asserted her law: "Always remember, dear brothers, that there are more of them than there are of us."

"Us" represents a rather ordinary middle-class tribe. None of us could name casino-goers. I've lived in Chicago 48 years, many of them one long block from the owner of two race tracks, and I once served a church only six miles from another. But I don't know anyone who admits to playing the horses.

If you are a member of an ordinary congregation, not a megachurch, you probably cannot name a member of any such giant place. If you are in one, you probably can name few who are not. Do you know anyone who has read any of the "Left Behind" books coauthored by Tim LaHaye which have sold millions of copies? Can you name anyone who is a Jehovah's Witness? Can you name a Pentecostal—I don't mean a

fashionable charismatic, but a down-home Pentecostal? How about an NRA member? (I'm ready for the 1,000 attack letters from clerics-who-are-hunters who don't worry about attack rifles on the streets. *There are more of them . . .*)

Maybe people like me are just blind, in denial, unobservant or naïve. I once told a head physician at a large hospital that while cocaine sales—in the scores of billions of dollars—dwarf the amount of money spent on books, I knew no snorters. “Yes you do, and some of them are on the staff of our hospitals. You just don't know that you know them,” he said.

Yes. Maybe those wrestling fans, casino-goers, gamblers, etc., are all around me, and I'm living in a duckblind. And maybe we are not so much a multiracial or multiethnic as a multitasted society. I'll try to ponder Mildred's law and test it further. But for now, I'll just play my new Celine Dion record.