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Jacksonville, FL 32217

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Even if you had not dangled the promise of two free tickets to Washington, I would have gotten around to writing you one day to sing the praises of C-SPAN, television's clear-glass window on history.

In its uniquely passive and laid-back way, C-SPAN has, among other things: Brought into our home the House trial and outster of a Congressman on Abscam charges, prosecuted by Charles Bennett, one of my city's two Representatives.

° Provided complete coverage of the National Transportation Safety Board investigation into the crash of Air Florida Flight 90 into the Potomac. Covered the appearances of major national and world figures before the National Press Club and other Washington-based organizations. It was then-presidential candidate Ronald Reagan's appearance before B'nai B'rith that was televised by C-SPAN that may have cost Jimmy Carter a sizable portion of the Jewish vote in 1980.

° Allowed politicians to do their own explaining, in full, without cutting away to a "journalist" posted beside a White House driveway or on a sidewalk across from the Capitol who tells us what it all means and what "remains to be seen." You may have been the first television network with a call-in program, before CNN was born and long before PBS introduced its "Late Night."

C-SPAN has televised some incredibly boring soliloquies on the House floor, but it also has shown the committee system at its best, on topics ranging from the Federal Reserve to exit polling.

As a newspaper copy editor, I have followed your visits to newsrooms with special interest, enjoying not only your interviews with reporters and editors but also the explanations of how material is edited and printed. Newspaper and magazine chains of command the sophistication of computer systems vary widely.

As a Floridian, I have been less interested in the meetings of Great Lakes governors and of some party caucuses. On the other hand, your coverage of cable industry meetings may bore some viewers, but it interests me. That is your virtue. Like climbing Mount Everest, you bring your cameras and microphones to meetings because the meetings are there. You don't inject your own value judgments in choosing them. How refreshingly objective! Your faithful viewers know just to hang in there, and something pertinent to them is bound to come along.

If you don't re-use your old tapes, your library certainly will be a treasure for historians someday, if it isn't already. I shouldn't end this letter without thanking Area Cablevision here for carrying C-SPAN (although it pre-empts your programs occasionally for something local). I look forward to many more years of first-class public affairs programming, and I congratulate you on rounding out your first five.