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St. Philips Episcopal Church  
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Nashville, TN 37214

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"I Watch C-SPAN Because..."

When I was a small boy, my parents owned a summer home on a large lake in Canada. Every year we would pack up the car on Memorial Day and stay at our cottage until Labor Day. It was nothing short of glorious. I spent my youthful summers wishing each day would never end.

Of course, we made friends with neighbors who owned cottages nearby. One day a neighbor of ours invited a friend of his to spend a few days with him. The man was from Czechoslovakia and had escaped from behind the Iron Curtain and emigrated to the United States. By sheer effort of will, he had worked his way through college and graduate school as an economist. And along the way, this man had taught himself to swim. One morning I woke up and noticed a speck way out in the water. At first, I thought it was a piece of seaweed or some type of flotsam, but then I noticed it was moving. Slowly it became obvious to me that it was a human being.

For close to 30 minutes I stood at the shore and observed this man swim back to the beach. It was the Czechoslovakian. Never before had anyone swam out into the water as far as he did that day. I was enthralled with his feat, and I resolved to myself that I, too, would like to be able to swim that far. And so, after he had towed off, I introduced myself to him and told him that I'd like to swim with him the next day. Much to my surprise, he laughed, and in his thick accent said to me, "Son, in order to swim that far, you have to learn one stroke at a time." As things turned out, we never went swimming together. He returned to the city and eventually became the head of one of the Federal Reserve branches in the United States.

But I always remembered the thing he said: "In order to swim that far, you have to learn one stroke at a time." In a sense, that's why I watch C-SPAN. Each session of Congress, each Sub-Committee meeting, each news conference at the National Press Club helps me to learn to swim one stroke at a time. My knowledge of how things "tick" in Washington is enlarged by viewing the various events that C-SPAN brings into my living room. Slowly, even tediously and painstakingly, I get a vision of what is involved in making decisions so that this country can swim far.

It's only through the process of gaining information - of going "one stroke at a time" - that we collectively can swim well. And C-SPAN is the one television station that shows us this process.

The end result is one of gratitude on my part. I become grateful that we, the American public, have access to the variety of points of view and the endless number of personalities who form a part of the decision-making process. Not only does such access manifest a remarkable dedication to the public's right to know, but (perhaps more importantly) it makes us individually aware of the complexity and the enormity of the decisions involved in keeping our nation above the waterline.