

Jan. 29, 1993

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North East, PA 16428

Brian Lamb,
C-SPAN,
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Lamb,

I wanted to take this start of the year opportunity to thank you for your wonderful C-SPAN. I think I first noticed you during the 1988 primaries, thinking, how weird, politicians, live, at diners and school gyms, working without a net nor much of a script. A most bizarre, real chance to get a real, bizarre look.

In the '92 election, though, I became completely enamored of your network, watching 5-10 hours a week, calling your schedule hotline, and once even trying to call when Jerry Brown was on. Hitting a slow period of work (I'm a substitute teacher) last winter, I got an opportunity to stare down your pre-NH primary coverage, and seeing so much honest, unblinking viewing made me feel I knew the candidates much better, and it made me more confident of my choice, Jerry Brown. I volunteered for him in the Pa. primary and the NYC convention, and you should know that you were our network of choice at the Brown HQ in NYC, the only network not to talk over Brown's famous first line of that convention speech, "I'm Jerry and I'm here to speak."

I also like the way you and the others who interview guests handle callers and guests alike. While talk radio makes a contribution, it is so refreshing to have people like you who respect

callers, and are curious about what those of us out here may have to bring to the debate. And unlike the networks, while you respect the politicians and media guests, you put the callers on an equal footing with them. You put the search for the truth above egos, and are especially skillful at subtly guiding some of the more ego-driven guests toward your respectful attitude.

1992 meant a lot to me, and I thank you profusely for what you are doing for this democracy, and so I am enclosing an article I wrote mentioning C-SPAN, an end of year review published in the "Erie Times-News" Sunday magazine Dec. [REDACTED] '92. I wish there was a special Emmy or Pulitzer Prize for you!

By the way, we in the Erie, Pa. viewing area also enjoy seeing our native son Steve Sculley doing such a good job for you. Say hi to him from Erie County, PA! (And we Erie Brownies were happy that he may have pulled strings to get a "Road to the White House" show on Brown's many stops on his first visit to Erie April 15.)

Best wishes for your continued success, and calming, sane, fair eye on the wonderful spectrum of American public life.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Past, present, future collided in 1992

A year to set heads a-spinning

SOMETIMES it's as if years don't follow orderly linear patterns, marching one by one by one, but instead spiral: past, present and future buzzing around each other, reinventing each other, like generations of mad bees, or like the swirling ladder of DNA, where the persons we were, are and are going to be are forever tripping over and boosting each other.

... What about the way Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean, not of blue, but of shifting perceptions — not in 1492, but in 1992, the quincennial that was no U.S. Bicentennial?

... How about the way Harry Truman, 40 years after his presidency and 20 years after his death, hit the campaign trail? President George Bush and Democratic nominee Gov. Bill Clinton boarded trains and buses to conjure the spirit of Independence, Mo. Yet Ross Perot ("Should I stay or should I go?") spooked the party bosses, collecting the largest independent vote in 80 years.

... How about that hit movie about arrested adolescents living in a time warp of the '70s pop culture? "Wayne's World" isn't about '90s teens, though they love it. It's a tragicomedy of young adults trying to make traction in a slimed economy. (At 28 and 36, the actors playing Wayne and Garth are young Baby Boomers, living a world away from Boomers of the Year Bill Clinton and Al Gore.)

More than one candidate stumbled across these statistical "Waynes," the twenty-somethings making considerably less money than those their age 20 years ago.

"Wayne's World" says that just because you jigsaw part-time jobs on the margins of health insurance-free life, just because the economy you came to in adulthood keeps you buried in the basement ... does this mean your life is for naught? Not!

... And how about me, itching to jump up and yell to the crowd attending the grandstand show at the Erie County Fair, "Three Dog Night was my first concert! Who else saw them at the Erie County Field House in June 1975?" "What year is it?" I jotted, "What



Times Publishing Company Photo

Standing behind her candidate, Your Turn contributor [redacted] turned up in the background of a page-one newspaper photo of unsuccessful Democrat Jerry Brown on primary election day, April 28.

year isn't it?"

1992 opened with fireworks above Perry Square, in our first First Night festivities, the weather warm and wet, the sky dark, and when I saw a "1992" sign electrified, my eyes liquified. This year would be different. One by one, the days would show me what this moment knew.

Like more than a few others, the flash came unexpectedly, and before a television, of all places. Last February, presidential candidate Jerry Brown speaking in a gym in New Hampshire through the wires of C-SPAN transmitted to a kitchen TV changed everything, calling me to be a co-conspirator to take back my country.

OK, I said, 1-800-426-1112. Here's a couple bucks and a letter of encouragement, there's a zip to Buffalo, N.Y., to catch a debate between Brown and Clinton and others, a \$7 check for Brown's April birthday and a warning not to "spend it all in one place," a sign up with Erie volunteers, shaking the candidate's hand at Erie Airways on primary eve, a trip to the New York convention to yell, "Let Jerry Speak!" outside Madison

Square Garden, and at year's end, membership in "We the People," his grassroots organization.

The me who blundered upon the heartbreak that may be this country's present form of "democracy" isn't what my fifth cousins in Poland ought to be aiming for, found a place at last for those feelings. I was right to want more for my country, my candidate said to me this year, and right to think I might have something to contribute.

With the ascendance of talk radio, TV call-in shows, C-SPAN, a rejuvenation of the volunteer spirit, and skyrocketing voter turnout, 1992 marked a rebirth of democracy in this country. Like William Greider wrote in one of the year's best sellers, "Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy," "Eras of great reform usually begin with the emergence of new political demographics. ... In history, it is the least powerful, the outsiders, who have often been the principal agents for democratic growth."

What was old was new again, past lessons remained unlearned, and what was new

felt comfortable as old shoes.

... Here are more spiraling convulsions of '92:

■ Society's fault lines ruptured with the Los Angeles riots in response to the Rodney King beating verdict.

■ A rising tide of Neo-Nazism in Germany and prison camps in Serbia showed that while photography has developed from black and white to color in the last 50 years, there must be something about our ability to recognize common humanity that has not.

■ The timeless pain of hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes in our country and starvation in Somalia sparked the search for solace, warning and forestallment. The U.S. sent troops to disasters at home and abroad, and the United Nations had a unanimous resolution for help to Somalia, but real resolution remains splintered and distant.

■ Troll dolls, a favorite toy of my '60s childhood, came back this year. I not only bought some for my nieces, I got a few myself. Trolls are one thing you don't have to be rich as a troll to afford, a perfect '90s indulgence for anyone with a sense of paradox.

So why does the executive

branch going "boomer" give me pause? We're a monstrous big group, hatched from 1946 to '64. Those of us born near the end, the Waynes and Garths and I, those who enjoyed the '70s, had a different childhood, coming of age and young adulthood than the Clintons and Gores.

In the words of a fellow college student friend in the late '70's (what then-California Gov. Jerry Brown called an "era of limits"), those postwar babies were "excessive" and "(self) indulgent."

They wasted more opportunities than we, the younger (and pre- and post-) boomers would ever get. The least we could do is be an eternal annoyance to them. It could be worse, Boomer-in-Chief and

“What was old was new again, ... and what was new felt comfortable as old shoes.”

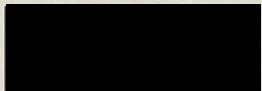
Vice Boomer. Imagine how peevish it might be to see your life reflected in the stupidest movie of the year!

So I was happy to vote against them yet again in the Elvis stamp balloting, where I went for Elvis the jumpsuited icon of the '70s, not the skinny '50s guy I wasn't around to see. This year I wouldn't be satisfied looking through others' lenses.

As 1992 rings out, two things resonate within. One, a Tom Paine quote from the Greider book: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." Two, Three Dog Night singing, "Joy to the world ... Joy to you and me."

And the persons we were, are and will be go on buzzing, reinventing, tripping over, and boosting each other.

Your Turn is a column of contributions from readers. North East resident [redacted] year-end wrapups have appeared in Sunday magazine since 1985.



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