



# Public Emmy No. 1

*Friday*  
**L**ife is truly amazing. I mean, amazing with a capital A. Try this on for size. When I was growing up, my Dad used to tell me of one of the most horrible examples of callousness and racism of his youth. He lived in Detroit. There was a big amusement park there whose name I never can recall. One of the events at the "amusement park" was called something like "Dunk the Negro" (or worse). In that horrific event, white people—the park was segregated, I guess—would throw a ball at a target. If they hit the target, they would trip a catch that would dunk a smiling black man into a pool of water. Then that man would get back up and be dunked again, or prepare to be dunked, sitting in his chair suspended above the tank of water.

I often thought of that kind of barbarity as the summit of human inability to see and feel other people's pain. The fact that the victim was always a black man struck me as especially vicious.

Then, several summers ago, I started to go to the fair at City Beach in Sandpoint, Idaho. There was a feature where the high school principal, or maybe it was the mayor, would get dunked when people threw a ball at a target. Every single person at that fair was white, so there was no obvious racism. The point then was to dunk some authority figure and allow the ordinary citizen to vent his anger at those in positions of power by buying a chance for a buck.

Still, I felt glad that I was not the one getting dunked. I deplore uncertainty, and I really hate the idea of being in a chair that collapses under me. It's far too suggestive of being hanged.

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Well, file that away. Today, I got up early and was picked up by a limousine—a small limousine—to be taken to the Amusement Park at Santa Monica Pier for a commercial for Clear Eyes, my dear pals. I had been faxed story boards of what would happen in the commercial, but they were so small and smudged that I really could not read what would happen.

Still, I trusted the folks from Clear Eyes. We have worked together for years on a wildly successful campaign, and they're my pals. When I got to the pier, I saw a big tank of water with a chair above it and a sign saying "Dunk the Clown." I thought that I would probably be the barker inviting people to try their luck while a poorly paid day actor got dunked.

WRONG!!!! The whole point was for me, yes, little me, to be dunked. Yes, famous, erudite, scholarly me was suspended on a bench above a tank of very warm water and the plan was for me to be dropped into it.

I was horrified. How could this be happening? Plus, the tank was warm, yes, but it was not very deep. When I fell into it, wouldn't I hit my butt with a painful thud?

I wanted to leave. I was scared. I thought it was undignified. Plus, no one had told me or warned me...probably with good reason.

Then, I had a thought. This group was clearly not dunking me because I was a Jew. They were not doing it out of malice. They were selling eye drops, nothing more or less. Plus, how much could it possibly hurt? Plus, I was getting paid, and paid fairly well—although thanks to Uncle Sam, I never get paid that well.

Maybe I was being excessively rigid. Maybe I should just roll with the punch and try to have fun with it. Maybe I should fight my own fear and excess anxiety and

get on with the show. After all, my life at this point is about serving as the pompous prof who gets the pie tossed in his face by contestants on my quiz show. Why not also get dunked if it pays for a few years of Tommy's college tuition? Well, maybe one year. But still, isn't it the husband's job to guard the house? Doesn't husband mean "house protector"? If I can pay a few months' stunningly large mortgage payments while also overcoming my fear, shouldn't I do it?

Next thing I knew I was up on the bench about to get dunked. "Wait a minute," I thought. "This is undignified. Henry Kissinger would never do this."

But then I thought that I, on the other hand, would never take money from the Chinese Communists. And you know what else I thought? Michael Milken, my nemesis, but also my inspiration for his persistence, would undoubtedly do this just to show he's a fun guy (ha-ha).

So, I nodded, the catch was tripped, and with a great thud, I was in the water. Ouch! My butt hurt. Ouch, backbone hurt. But, YEA!, I had triumphed over my fear.

So, I was dunked three more times, had myself in the tank for about five hours doing other things, and left that place feeling pretty darned good about myself. I am by nature incredibly frightened, and to do anything that gets through fear is a huge step for me.

It helped a lot that all of the people on the set were extremely nice to me—aside from the dunking—and that I do feel as if Clear Eyes is family. But it was genuine trauma at first, and I really was scared.

By the way, it helped a great, great deal that for lunch we had amazingly good barbecued shrimp. Plus it also helped that I had a very good bodyguard named Eddie who said he would rescue me if any prob-

lem arose. He was Welsh but with a Mexican accent somehow.

I went home with a terrible headache, earache, stomach ache, but a feeling of triumph and affection for my people from Clear Eyes, probably like what Marines feel towards their drill instructors who make them do things they thought they could never do. I know this is a small thing to you but it was a big thing to me.

On the other hand, I truly still hate the idea of dunking people just because they're black. To dunk someone because he's getting paid a lot is another matter entirely.

*Saturday*

**A** call to my pal W. in Paris, Texas. He's suicidally depressed because his wife got drunk and yelled at him for being "a loser," as she put it. He's only a botanist, a distinguished teacher, and a devoted dad to his kids. "Whatever you do," he said, "don't refer to this on any messages you leave me. My wife checks my answering machine and if there's even a word that she thinks is critical of her, she's ready to kill me."

"But you're miserable all the time because your wife tortures you," I said. "I've known you fifteen years and she's been beating the hell out of you all of that time."

"Shhh," he said.

"But what's the point of staying married to someone who makes you suicidal?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's my family."

"But that part of your family is like the Gestapo."

"I know," he said and then the conversation went nowhere.

I called my longtime pal X., a lawyer in D.C. He sounded drugged, out of it, whacked.

"You shouldn't smoke dope every night," I told him. "It's wrecked your life."

"I have to," he said. "If I didn't, I would kill my wife or kill myself. She's always yelling at me, always high, always complaining that I don't make enough money, and then she takes her pills and passes out and when she wakes up, she starts yelling at me again. It's like being in prison here, and the dope is the only way I can feel even a little bit calm."

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***Most of the middle-age men I know live in something like prison conditions at home.***

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I mention this because over recent years I have noticed a phenomenon: Many of my best friends are miserably unhappy in their marriages. They often have good careers, lovely kids (or fairly lovely kids) and look thin and fit. But their wives are one-woman secret police forces, scrutinizing their every move, criticizing them, making them feel small and weak and like failures. Man after man that I call is unable to speak freely on the phone, is starving himself or taking up yoga or otherwise forcing himself to do things he does not want to do on the orders of his wife. Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains because he will get yelled at if he dares to do what he would like to do.

Many, maybe most, of the men I know in middle age live in something like prison conditions at home.

Maybe the wives also live in those conditions. Maybe they feel as if their husbands are controlling and tormenting them. In fact, probably they do.

But something is wrong. Family, which should be an encouraging, freeing kind of matrix (to use a Hillary-like word) is instead jail and maybe the Thought Police to boot.

This is a big area. Men are not supposed to be miserable because they're married. Nor are women. I think we could all use a great big huge dose of liberation in the home. I am not talking about wife swapping (God forbid) or open sex play. I am not talking about sex at all. I am saying that too much energy in marriages seems to me to go into controlling the other guy instead of encouraging him to be free and be who he is.

I know men who have simply signed away their whole personas on orders of their spouses, just thrown away who they

are to avoid raising the hackles of their spouses. There is something sick, sick, sick going on here and I plan to write about it more, which should totally solve the problem. (I feel able to do so because my wife is so totally committed to freedom that I can do almost anything, and I am the envy of my pals. She's got a big heart that way.)

To continue with this issue for a moment, friends always ask me two questions: Why do I call my wife "The Saint" and why do I have so many houses?

I call my wife "The Saint" partly because she is so smart, so beautiful, and so sympathetic to everyone who crosses her path. But also because she never bosses me around. When she comes home from work, she occasionally wants me to do this or that, but usually she just eats the dinner I make her—which I am happy to do—gets into her pajamas, and starts to read quietly or watch mysteries on TV. She is a saint for respecting my personality and Tommy's.

Why do I have so many houses? Because it's a lot easier for us to be calm and peaceful towards one another when we have "our space." If I have a house and garden I can go to with my Puppy-Wuppy all weekend while my wife reads the *New York Times*, it's a lot easier to be peaceful. Access is success, so the saying goes. But giving your spouse his or her space is an absolute necessity. Not everyone can have more than one home, but everyone can make space.

Then there's something else: Everyone I know who's really miserable in his marriage has no spiritual side. In these marriages, each spouse thinks that what he wants is the be-all and end-all of human understanding. No one thinks that maybe if he prayed over it, he would find that he was wrong and needed to apologize and act differently.

It helps a lot to believe that there are rules for human conduct beyond "Do what I want." I find that men and women who truly put God first, who try to act with a little bit of humility before Him, have happier marriages.

Rules of marriage: Give your spouse space. Accept that you can be and often are wrong. Believe that your wishes are not always the supreme authority.

Oh, and also, don't get drunk or high.

Every marriage I know that is in really terrible shape involves at least one spouse—and almost always both—who is drunk or high almost every night. It is impossible to have a relationship based on being drunk or high. Just out of the question.

Well, more on this later.

*Sunday*

**T**oday was a breakthrough day for me as a writer and it involves the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*. It also involves why I don't really think I'll feel bad if I never write for either again. (I already have never written for the *New Yorker* so I'm halfway there.)

Since childhood, I have been reading the *New Yorker*. I loved the movie reviews, some of which I can still recall word for word after thirty years. I loved the "Letter from Paris." I really adored the stories of John Cheever. Like all writers, I wanted to have something in the *New Yorker*. I imagined that if I did, I would be all set for life. I also imagined that I would be highly paid and that money would drip off me in gobs for every word I wrote. Over the years I sent in pieces which the *New Yorker* religiously failed to publish. The only words of mine they ever ran were lavish praise of Nixon and they ran those to make fun of him and me, down at the bottom of a column as they used to do.

In time I became pals with several men who wrote for the *New Yorker*. I would send them pieces which they would say were great. Then they'd refer them to an editor and many months later I would get a rejection.

My sister, who is smarter than I am, hated the *New Yorker* for its pretentious predictability and stopped reading it long ago. I still hoped I would get something in there and be rich and famous from it.

Then, an epiphany. My dear friend M., whom I have known for more than a quarter century, who is a smart, funny writer from a famous family of writers, called me months ago to tell me he had written a funny story about his agent. "I sent it to the *New Yorker*," he said, "and they're going to run it."

"How did you do that?" I asked in a jealous stew.

"It helped that my nephew works there

and his good friend is the articles editor," he said.

Hmmm. So that's it. Well, maybe that's my excuse. But what happened afterward was difficult for my pal M. The editor demanded fact checking and a statement of authenticity even from the agent he was mocking in his piece. They kept the piece forever. They ignored his phone calls. Then, after frustrating him and blocking him and ruining his relationship with his agent, they ran it. How much did he get paid? "A dollar-forty a word," he said this afternoon.

A DOLLAR-FORTY A WORD! Are they kidding?

This from the *New Yorker*. Now, I will never feel bad again about never having written for them. Not only are they mean and the *demier cri* in PC, but they're cheap.

Now, to the *New York Times*. I have been writing off and on for them for many years. I have written for the op-ed page, for the mag, for the business section, even for the book review. In recent years, however, although I sent them pieces, they took nothing.

I didn't feel really bad, only a little puzzled. True, the *New York Times* mag is unrecognizable from what I recall of it even a decade ago. And true, the op-ed page is a disaster of predictability. But what I learned today is that the mag is run by genuinely ill people who confuse New York, read Brooklyn, solipsism with God's word.

Specifically, there is a column in the mag about ethics by a man named Cohen.

In this issue, he was asked about the ethics of owning a sport utility vehicle in New York. He answered that because they used so much gasoline, because they took up so much space, because they stood up so well in crashes—if you bought one in New York where there was a subway, you were destined for hell. (He literally said you should pack your bags to go to hell.)

Now, with respect to Mr. Cohen, there is nothing in the Ten Commandments or in the *mitzvot* about SUV's. There is nothing in the New Testament about how you are only allowed to use a certain amount of gasoline. There's no commandment to take a subway filled with strangers when you transport your kids.

Mr. Cohen of the mighty *New York*

*Times* has confused his own "I'm good because I'm little and abstemious and morally better because I'm an environmentalist" view with divine will. He totally ignores the basic idea that maybe if you can afford it, you should spend your last dime buying a vehicle that will save your life and your kids' lives in a crash. Maybe it's just as important to care for your family as to be a completely PC, "small is beautiful," crank.

Anyway, I realized from Mr. Cohen that the *Times* is off into its own little clique of sanctimonious Phariseism. It always has been, but now it's a Phariseism that is its own parody. I cannot hope to enter that little world any longer. You see, I plan to buy a Cadillac SUV as my next vehicle. I like the idea of my son and my wife and me surviving if we have a crash. And I'm not a social engineer. I figure that the price of gasoline tells all that has to be told about how much of it I should use. Good luck to you, *Times*. You still have great writing in your news stories. Maybe some day you'll realize there is life beyond PC. But I'll work on my own ideas of what's important and you work on yours.

*Monday*

**W**ho here remembers Bob and Ray? Every morning and every night, when I am shaving or drying myself off after a shower, I listen to tapes of Bob and Ray. I particularly love Matt Neffer, Boy Spotwelder, but also Mary McGoon, and of course Tom Swift and his Amazing Atomic Fertilizer Spreader, and any of the detective stories like "Mr. Treat, Chaser of Lost Persons." I also love the imitations of Arthur Godfrey.

Bob and Ray were fixtures on CBS radio and maybe other networks as well in the fifties and into the sixties. They were monumentally sarcastic, hilarious, insightful in a subtle way about life. Their spelling bees, where one contestant gets easy answers and lots of chances and the other gets incredibly sabotaged is a perfect specimen of how life really is.

The fabulous Radio and TV Museum in Beverly Hills sells tapes of their great performances. I sometimes listen to the same Matt Neffer ten times in a day.

Nowhere, not anywhere in the media today, is there any comparably smart per-

formance that mocks the culture, but also assumes so much intelligence and so much wit on the part of the audience. Where Bob and Ray wrote and acted with diamond points, we now have acting with sledgehammers and blunt rocks. The devolution of the culture since Bob and Ray is truly terrifying. I also think of it when I listen to my Frank Sinatra discs. Here's Frank singing with such subtlety, with such restraint, about his imagination and how it can make a cloudy day sunny, make a bee think of honey—and then there's modern music talking about which girl has the biggest butt.

Truly, if a man from outer space looked at our culture today and then looked at culture in 1958, he would faint at how we have gone backwards. This is not a matter of black versus white performers either. Think of Count Basie. Think of "Crying in the Chapel" or "The Glory of Love" from the early fifties—and then think of any rap songs now. There was once a time when culture assumed gentleness on the part of the nation. Now it assumes Thug Nation—and maybe it's right. But not here in my little house, and maybe there's a clue. My son and I listen to Bob and Ray, listen to old R&B from the fifties, listen to Frank. Maybe it will make a little difference in giving him a world that isn't Thug World. God, I hope so.

Thursday

Off to New York City to attend the Emmies. We won one last weekend when we were up for best writers. Now we're up for Best Game Show and Best Host for Jimmy and me. Personally, I think I—a guy who wrote for Richard Nixon—will win about when Clinton enters the priesthood. But my wife, my son, and I headed to the airport and *whaaam*, problem one: The airport was in turmoil because the security envelope had been penetrated. We had to wait an hour to get through the metal detectors. What a world.

Then the flight, which was perfect. Great United soup, great United appetizers, great dessert, a whole box of Godivas for Tommy, and a fine movie called *Soldier* for me to watch. It was by a guy named Peoples who also co-wrote the best postwar movie, *Blade Runner*. It stars Kurt Rus-

sell, who is always great. And it could be called *Shane in Outer Space*. I loved it.

Then a very smelly driver met us and drove us into town. Wow, did he stink. Yuck.

Then a very rude young woman at the hotel tortured us until her boss gave us a decent room.

Some things do not change.

Friday

Off to the Daytime Emmies at Madison Square Garden. We left Tommy with a hugely tall German babysitter named Mischa. I almost passed out when she said her rate for sitting was \$40 an hour. It turned out I had misheard though, and it was a mere fourteen bucks per hour. Dirt cheap.

As so often happens, our driver got lost and let us out about five blocks from the entrance but never mind. We walked to the right place, passed throngs of fans calling out to their favorite soap stars—and often to little me—then went into dinner in a cavernous, hideous room like a big ugly warehouse with red carpet. I met many lovely people though, including a beautiful soap star named Kelly, who is Bill Simon's stepdaughter and is as smart as she is pretty. I also met two sweet little kids from "The Young and the Restless" who could not have been cuter.

Then off to the auditorium for the ceremony. It's huge. Filled with screaming fans. *Screaming*. I passed by Alex Trebek wearing an oddly white dinner jacket. I smiled and told him that although he was "my dreaded rival" I was a fan of his show and never missed it. "I'm not your dreaded rival," he said cryptically.

Then he politely wished me luck as I did him.

To our seats. I got very, very nervous. I actually might win this year, I thought. I do have a good show and we did just win our second Emmy for best game show writing. I started to get really nervous. All around me were beautiful soap stars and starlets beaming at me. It was hot. I was *really* nervous. *I want to win*.

Then, bang, we won Best Game Show and I ran up on stage and smiled as our handsome executive producer Andrew Golder thanked everyone. Wow. Big stuff. We might even win Best Game

Show Host. It is a long shot but maybe.... And then, bang, we won Best Game Show Host, Jimmy and I. I screamed. I jumped up and down. I kissed my wife. I thanked everyone, most of all Al Burton who invented the show and Andrew who honed it to diamond brilliance. I cannot believe I won. I love it a lot. A real lot. From Nixon speechwriter to Emmy winner. God is so good to me. I AM HAPPY.

Want to know the best part? When we came back to the hotel room, Tommy said "Congratulations" and shook my hand like a little man. Then he came with me to my bathroom, gargled just like I do, brushed his teeth in rhythm as I brushed mine, and said, "What'll we do to celebrate, Daddy?"

"My boy," I said, "I am already in heaven just being here brushing my teeth next to you."

THERE IS NO WAY TO DESCRIBE HOW GOOD IT FEELS TO HAVE YOUR SON IMITATE YOU. Especially when the Emmy is in the closet. ☼

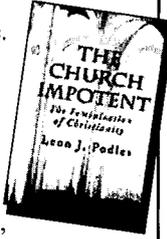
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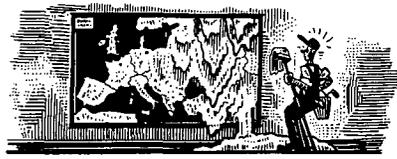
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# West of the War

**Croatia feels like Europe, but to Europe it's elsewhere.**

**“W**e don't really consider it a Balkan country,” insists a German fellow-tourist and professor of Slavic languages. “It was part of Austria-Hungary, you know.”

Having no desire to join in the inevitable debate about Central versus Eastern Europe (a debate I would necessarily lose, if not lose track of entirely, if forced to continue in the Hamburger's native tongue), I quickly change the subject from culture and politics to scenery. “Did you manage to see the old city this morning?”

“Beautiful. The Venetians called it Ragusa, you know. Of course Dubrovnik and the whole of the Dalmatian coast remain somewhat Italian in character. The north, more Alpine. Zagreb certainly attempts to emulate Vienna—with some success.” The professor smiles mischievously, unwilling to abandon his theme.

Croatia may be more “European” than the rest of the Balkans, but it cannot escape the effects of regional conflict, even when the country itself is at peace. The Kosovo war is making the transition to post-Communism even more difficult than it would have been. During the Easter holiday, half of reservations, most by Austrian and German vacationers, were canceled in Croatia; out of 30,000 tourists expected in Dubrovnik, 400 arrived. Prospects for the normally busy summer season are equally dismal. According to a recent study by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, the NATO action in Yugoslavia could also

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diminish investors' confidence, further slowing economic reforms.

In a country that earns most of its livelihood through tourism, the summer cancellations have been particularly destructive to the fledgling market economy. Dubrovnik, the twelfth-century walled city famed for its Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque churches, synagogues, monasteries, palaces, and fountains (as well as pristine pebble beaches), managed to recover from massive shelling by Serb forces earlier in the decade. But the current neighboring conflict may be driving just as many visitors from the summer resort. “It's an image problem mostly,” insists a tour guide to the nearby island of Korcula, the reputed birthplace of Marco Polo. “We're seen as part of the Balkans. That word secures our fate more than a thousand years of history and culture ever can.”

At the outset of the NATO action against Yugoslavia, Lloyds of London, the British insurer, declared Croatia part of a war zone, a pronouncement which increased insurance costs for companies and individuals doing business in the country. While Greece and Italy were able to nullify similar decisions, Croatia lacked the diplomatic leverage of the two

NATO countries. Lloyds later reconsidered and decided that only Dubrovnik, 30 miles from the Montenegrin port city of Bar, would be considered part of the Balkan war zone.

“It doesn't help when cruise ships now instead go to the Italian side [of the Adriatic],” protests a Dubrovnik hotel receptionist. “How is this fair when part of Italy is actually closer to the bombing than Croatia is?”

**S**uch heavy-handedness toward Croatia on the part of Western countries, compounded with an official unemployment rate of 17.6 percent, adds to



A bastion of civilization: 15th-century artillery on Korcula.

the pessimism experienced here by a generation of people who thought the end of Communism would initiate a natural transition to prosperity. “Our generation remembers how it was before Tito finally died,” declares a physician in her late twenties. “We just assumed things would change more rapidly after independence was won, that anyone willing and able to work would have the opportunity. Now you have to have connections just to get a job digging ditches in the countryside.”