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Letter remembering Ernie

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November 30, 1983

Dear Ernie:

In commemoration of this tremendous occasion, I have been asked to prepare remarks on behalf of Alison, Pamela, and myself. Alison simply has nothing very relevant to add but encloses the photo with a birthday smile. Pamela indicated that she remembers you were once planning director in portland and she feels you were fairly good at that, but since you did not promote her or anything, she has nothing else to say. My remarks follow.

I have been led to believe by usually unreliable sources that the theme of this celebration is "This is your life Ernie Bonner". That's nice. I must preface my comments by pointing out that it seems to me that making a big deal of your fifty-first birthday ranks - on the anti-climatic scale - right up there with - to cite a couple often-cited examples, with traveling from Iowa to Nebraska, taking a shower after visiting Coos Bay, or looking at playboy after making love . . . how about going to an Oregon-Oregon State football game after playing a game of solitaire. Oh well, you get the idea.

I mean fifty has to be considered a milestone of some sort, and if I recall correctly, my comment last year at this time was that if I was taking bets on you making it to fifty when I first met you thirteen years ago, I could have gotten pretty fair odds from a lot of Clevelanders. Speaking of which, it was ten years ago last week that I left Cleveland to heed your call to come to the great northwest and do comprehensive planning. Just like the joke you played on me in Cleveland when you asked me to come there to do transportation planning. Anyhow, I went west and the rest is history. Let us return to those often-forgotten (that is best) days in Cleveland - before the years that those gathered tonight knew you simply as a retired city official living the elegant life in fashionable sunnyside; indeed, even before Lynn, fresh from the throes of her masters program, swept you off your feet.

Speaking of feet, if I recall correctly, yours were exposed a great deal. Many people thought it odd that the number two person in the Cleveland Planning Department would wear shower thongs to work. But then they were sophisticated Clevelanders. I knew you were from Nebraska and that this was not unusual at all. In those days you were a self-styled liberal hippie-type new wave urban crisis oriented leftist democrat party groupie anti war crusader out to redistribute income if not wealth and correct most if not all social ills. Admittedly, this was somewhat ambitious, but then you had come from Wisconsin and we were all much younger then. There were however, some curious wrinkles in the behavioral aspects of this characteristic. Remember:

- You lived less than a block from a transit line but insisted upon driving to work each day. Presumably, this was because there was no direct transit line from Nighttown back to your residence at one o'clock in the morning.
- You portrayed a liberal viewpoint but if my memory serves me correctly, you were a little bit behind the curve in the area of women's liberation, suggesting on more than one occasion that they (women) were only good for one, maybe two, things. Thus, the hiring of Jaimie Vogan, et.al.; thank god Lynn fixed you up on that matter.
- Unlike the urbane gentleman like lifestyle you live now, with your restored red mustang, wife, and family, in those days you were an urban cowboy, I mean to describe your automobile said a lot. An overpowered green (with trim in rust) mustang convertible, i.e, no roof and no floor (great for inspecting road surfaces) which during my entire time in Cleveland was washed three times. The inside looked like Kansas during the dustbowl and there was always at least ten corncob pipes scattered here and there, and surely sufficient food and othre things that looked like food to get through a few days on the road. Ken Kesey would have approved.
- You were prone to long-winded monologues at late night parties regarding various political and anatomical considerations about Jesus Christ (not an outfielder for the Giants). Many people found this curious - we were into important things like getting Harold Hughes elected president - and when confronted with the question of whether or not JC had ever performed certain basic human acts were left with the lingering thought - who the hell cares other than Bonner?
- In short, and without any implied criticism, you smoked too much, drank too much, womanized too much, stayed up late too much, thought too much - in general - a real degenerate. God, those were the good old days weren't they. Ernie Bonner, that was your life. Remember. You would have taken my bet also, or rather as was your custom then, you probably would have just given me the money without making the wager.

We really hope you have a wonderful birthday and wish we could be there to give you some more shit, in person. But, alas, we are stuck here in San Francisco continuing to confront the tension and misery of urban life. Happy birthday and many more.

lovedougpamelaandalison