

I just read this great essay by Kurt Vonnegut, that wizened old man of letters. Here is an excerpt:

Eugene Debs, who died back in 1926, when I was only 4, ran 5 times as the Socialist Party candidate for president, winning 900,000 votes, 6 percent of the popular vote, in 1912, if you can imagine such a ballot. He had this to say while campaigning:

As long as there is a lower class, I am in it.

As long as there is a criminal element, I'm of it.

As long as there is a soul in prison, I am not free.

Doesn't anything socialistic make you want to throw up? Like great public schools or health insurance for all?

How about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes?

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. ...

And so on.

Not exactly planks in a Republican platform. Not exactly Donald Rumsfeld or Dick Cheney stuff.

You can find the whole thing here:

http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/cold_turkey/

And for those of you who: may have been beginning to think that you must have been asleep from January 20, 1981 to January 20 1989; Perhaps you didn't notice it but were really out of the country for those 8 years;

Are really having a hard time reconciling your memories with the amazingly glowing recounting of those years in the press these past several days, you may want to read this: "66 Things to Think About When Flying Into Reagan National Airport"

<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=19980302&s=corn>

Defending Baltimore Against Enemy Attack" by Charles Osgood, a review by Nic:

The popular host of CBS News Sunday Morning reflects on 1942, the year that America was reeling from the first blows of WWII. At that time he was nine years old and living in Baltimore. Here's his funny and nostalgic slice of American life

So read the capsule review of this book in the flyer from Schwartz Books. My take is a little less forgiving.

I bought the book because, while I do not watch his show every week I have watched it on occasion, and he is an affable enough guy. The title attracted me, as did the idea, of a kids eye view of the war - I thought 'Hope and Glory' what I got was 'Grumpy old man.'

It is easy enough to calculate that someone who was nine years old in 1942 is 71 today, but the vision of Charles Osgood one gets from this book is in stark contrast to the friendly, jovial gent one sees on Sunday Morning. Here is a sample of his world view:

Those debates were the kind of mental discipline that seems to have almost disappeared from the American grammar school, where the teachers are tenderly concerned with whether their students *feel* good. In a forties grammar school, as long as you didn't have scurvy, the way you felt was considerably less important than the way you thought. No mother ever said to a teacher, "You'll have to make an allowance for Lori throwing that lunchbox at you. Her Prozac

isn't blending well with her lithium right now and she's been a bit more bipolar than usual this week"

In my school, bipolar described only the earth, and we were in one of its fourth grades had to know that Peary discovered the North Pole and Amundsen discovered the other, which even the most slappy kid knew was the South.

And no mother ever said to a teacher, "Please overlook Charles never doing any homework, removing his pants, and setting a fire or two. But he does feel good about everything, so please don't subject him to the pressure that calling the police sometimes brings."

Of course such schools also forcibly separated white children from black, made all children pray to the majority god and taught that girls should be homemakers who forgo college. This is a guy that John

Ashcroft could love.

But the limitations of Osgood's book go beyond his own stilted idea of what-was-good-but-has-gone-bad. His book is thick with poorly written comparisons between then and now, like these:

Nine-year-old boys today, to whom a Victrola would mean either nothing or Victoria's Secret...

followed close on the heels by:

Everyone knows, of course, that Monte Carlo heads a crime family and the Azores are a skin disease.

Sometimes he just writes utter nonsense, apparently hoping (in vain) that the editor would patch things up:

For any boy who loved baseball as much as I did, and there was no such boy, the highlight of the year was the World Series, back in the time before it had become a wintry evening event. Alas, it appears that Hyperion was in such a rush to get this book out in time for the decennial D-Day remembrances that they chose not to edit it.

There is much not to like in this book, but there is precious little to appreciate. It is short, for instance, at 137 pages with wide margins and spacing, allowing a middling reader such as myself to knock it off in an afternoon and still have time to rant about how bad it is before the evening news comes on.

You get to learn that Charles was well prepared to dote on the pretty girl from school, even though she was (to put it kinder than he does) a little dim, rather than the intelligent ones.

Okay, I'll be fair, there are some good points. I enjoyed the far too brief sections when he actually does talk about things like saving rubber and metal for the war effort; savings stamps to purchase war bonds; the victory gardens. Surprisingly, he refrains from making the point that these days our leaders no longer call upon us to make any such sacrifice for the war effort — just as long as we shop. Such a contrast must have been too salient for him. If you must read this book, let me know — you may have my copy. I would hate to see any more purchased than are absolutely necessary.