

Taking
the
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of
AMERICA

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A Vanguard Baby Boomer Examines
the American Scene

M A R T I N S T R E E T

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Taking the Pulse of America

A Vanguard Baby Boomer Examines the American Scene

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Introducing Martin Street

Since you probably have never heard of me, it seems only fair that I tell you a little bit about myself before you read my book.

Because I was born very early in the year 1946, I am one of the oldest “Baby Boomers” in existence. This, however, doesn’t seem to matter very much since very few of my fellow baby boomers match the stereotypes the press tends to assign to us.

I grew up in a small town in Western New York in the late 1940s and 1950s when small towns were generally prosperous, vibrant, and self-sufficient (no Walmarts on the outskirts of town). Most businesses were “Mom and Pop” operations and prospered by relying on fair dealings and good customer service. I earned spending money by delivering morning and sometimes evening newspapers. I also was an avid newspaper reader and loved current events.

Academically I was an average to somewhat above average student. My best sport in high school was tennis, where I won the county championship all four years. I also played trombone in our high school band and in a nearby fire department band.

I attended college at Alfred University where I majored in ceramic engineering, but I never worked a day in this field. The draft beckoned shortly after graduation, so I elected to go to Coast Guard Officer’s Candidate School (OCS) at Yorktown, Virginia in lieu of waiting to be drafted by the Army and probably being sent to Viet Nam. After OCS, I spent about two-and-a-half years at Coast Guard Group Chicago in Chicago, Illinois, where I specialized in search and rescue and port security.

Upon honorable discharge in June 1970 I accepted a position with Factory Insurance Association, completed their six month training program, and became a fire protection engineer in Bay City, Michigan and Buffalo, New York.

I returned to federal service in September 1975 and spent twenty-eight years working for the Atlantic Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, first as a fire protection engineer and later as their safety manager. I wrote two books while working for the Navy. The first was an extensive *Fire Protection Program Handbook* for Navy fire departments, and the second was a *Safety Program Handbook* for Navy and Marine Corps safety offices.

In the later stages of my federal career, I wrote two safety quick reference guides, both copyrighted. The first was the *Outdoor Hazard Quick Reference Guide*, and the second was the *Pet Care Quick Reference Guide*. Both were laminated and could be folded to pocket size. My wife and I marketed these guides for several years after I retired.

When it comes to politics, I am a Republican-leaning Independent, but I do not hesitate to vote for Democrats when it makes sense to do so. I also admit to being traditional—even old fashioned at times. My love for our country does not blind me to its faults, and I fear for the future of our children and grandchildren if some current trends continue.

The most famous person that I have met is Nelson Rockefeller.

I strongly value my Christian faith, pray daily, and attend a Presbyterian church nearly every Sunday. I also value good health, do not smoke or drink, and have a regular exercise program.

My views tend to be quite conservative and often non-politically correct. I view life as an opportunity to learn, grow, and serve others.

In summary, I try to conform to the concept of a “reasonable man”—a typical American with a “man-in-the-street” perspective. This book is the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition and represents a total of 65 years of observations of the American scene.

I care about every individual who takes the time to read *Taking the Pulse of America* and sincerely hope that you feel your time is well spent.

America the Great

Our country is the leader of the free world—a shining beacon on a hill and benefactor to many of the world’s poorest countries. America is a pioneer in innovation, and the label “Made in the USA” is a symbol of quality and a source of pride for all of us. Our democratic form of government and personal freedom is a role model for other countries to follow, and our citizens probably enjoy a higher standard of living than most other countries. We are the fortunate few who can call ourselves Americans, and our country is truly the greatest in the world!

What would the world be like without America? We have done more to advance the cause of freedom and have rendered more assistance to more foreign countries and individuals than any other country in history. We are the country that more people desire to immigrate to, and throughout our history we have welcomed new residents with open arms. Our educational system and centers of higher learning attract thousands of foreign students each year. Our medical schools produce some of the finest doctors and nurses available anywhere, and our medical expertise is second to none.

Perhaps one of the best examples of our contributions overseas is our expenditure of blood and treasure to help other countries remain free of tyranny and oppression. Our troops have fought in two World Wars, Korea, Viet Nam, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan; and our military advisers are stationed throughout the globe, providing advice and assistance. Throughout our history, our military assistance overseas has been altruistic. And Americans are some of the first on the scene in the event of floods, earthquakes, and other natural disasters, with generous contributions of money, food, water, shelter, clothing, and medicine.

The great leaders America has produced throughout our brief history have inspired both us and the world around us. Not only are we home to the United Nations, but we are its biggest financial contributor. Our agricultural experts travel around the globe, helping developing countries, and we sponsor an extensive HIV/AIDS program in places throughout

Africa. There are very few places in the world that have not been assisted by U.S. generosity at one time or another. Our Peace Corps volunteers travel to distant lands, and we produce some of the finest athletes in the world.

Americans are, and always have been, a generous and giving people. We have many reasons to be proud of America the Great. May God continue to richly bless us.

If there is one common theme throughout this book, it is that *we are America*. We the people are the spirit of our great nation and will determine the extent of our future success. It is in all of our interests to not stand on our past accomplishments, but to pursue continuous improvement in all aspects of American life.

Let's take a look at the major topic subdivisions of *Taking the Pulse* with a quick summary of some of the reasons these topics were included.

The U.S. "Hot Button" Issues are presented to discuss controversial topics that have been in the news recently or that could appear at any time. Both you and I could be expected to be drawn into conversations where these topics come up, so it is important that we give these matters some thought. We also recognize that emotional issues such as abortion, affirmative action, and flag burning may produce very strong opinions on one side or the other—it is very important to know where we stand. After reading these sections, you also may wish to contact your elected representatives or others if you feel convinced that changes are needed.

The "Education Issues" subdivision is provided for several reasons, not the least of which is to show that our current expensive educational system is becoming less and less competitive with other advanced nations. However, it is more important than ever that our schools produce graduates who are able to excel in their chosen fields and become the leaders of tomorrow. Sadly, we know from experience and standardized test results that this is not happening very often. The U.S. education system has slipped into mediocrity while students in other countries—such as Canada, Finland, and Korea—work harder, learn more, and can compete on the world market for better jobs and compensation.

Many Americans today distrust our "Justice System," feeling that it favors the rich over us "commoners" who cannot afford the best legal representation when we need it. Our penal system, while getting convicted criminals off the street, often does either a poor or nonexistent job of rehabilitation, and inmates often are discharged without much hope of

getting any kind of employment. The “root causes” of their trouble often remain.

The “Health Issues” subdivision provides an overview of several contentious issues, focusing on today’s exorbitant health care costs—which could be a major factor in bankrupting our country! Also, the current lifestyles of millions of us are not likely to result in either good health or increased life expectancy and can cause enormous medical bills, especially near the end of our lives. Someone, usually the general public, must pay the bill for this. And health care in the United States today is so expensive that some of us simply cannot afford to pay the medical bills following a serious injury or illness.

The “Computers” subdivision is Martin Street’s “cry in the wilderness” attempt to restore us to technological sanity by not revolving our lives around high-tech gadgets (just because everyone else has them). We must maintain a realistic, sound balance between the use of technology and everything else life has to offer.

“Government Affairs” emphasizes the fact that an ever-decreasing minority of Americans are satisfied with the performance of our elected representatives. For many of us, a “throw the bums out” mentality has developed over the years. We feel that politicians, in general, are putting their interests before ours.

“Commerce/Business Matters” deals with common interactions we citizens have with American business and some ideas for improvement. Some of these sections might help you save money while helping to put fellow Americans back to work.

The “Everyday Life” subdivision is a potpourri of topics intended to capture the essence of American life in the early twenty-first century. A common theme is that our lives today bear little resemblance to those of our parents and grandparents, and that not all developments have been positive. I invite you to agree with (or at least consider) my comments and observations. Some topics also offer ideas for saving you money.

The short “Financial Affairs” subdivision reflects on our chances of living the American dream. It also shares ideas on land prices in the United States.

I base the “Military Affairs” section on my extensive experience with military organizations, and then include a short “Athletics” section to discuss some “pet peeves” that you may share.

So, in some ways, *Taking The Pulse* is an invitation to you, the reader, to examine American life in the early twenty-first century, “to take our pulse” and to decide for yourself whether we are on the right track. You may agree with me that we have opportunities for improvement in many areas and that we are probably in *urgent* need of improvement in others.

Therefore, this book is also a “call to action” for all of us to help make our nation the best, the most caring, the healthiest, and the most prosperous nation it can be—with every citizen treated fairly and provided with equal justice under the law. We should be a nation of which our founding fathers would be proud

Since changes are needed in many areas for these goals to be achieved, I offer many ideas and suggestions for improvement. Your consideration of these is invited, but I encourage you to be and stay involved with the current issues of America, working with our elected representatives and each other to address the wrongs that need to be confronted and made right. We the people cannot afford to be taken for granted. For this is our generation, *our time, and our country.*