

Let's make 2015 the Year of Understanding

By MURIEL JENSEN
Board of Contributors

Happy New Year! Jan. 1 always carries with it the excitement of new beginnings, fresh starts, resolutions unbroken — although, if those resolutions are food-related, I have been known to break them by the afternoon of the first.



Muriel Jensen

For me, New Year's Day has special significance because it's my birthday. My father had me convinced that the celebration at Times Square was in my honor until I was about 8. It was particularly important to me this year because it was the publication date of my latest book, *In My Dreams*, published by Harlequin Heartwarming.

I'm delighted to still be in the business at 70 years of age. While writing romance doesn't have the global significance of feeding the hungry or curing cancer, I like to think it helps sustain some of the women who actually work toward those solutions.

Frankly, it isn't easy to do anything at this age. Joints hurt and calories simply do *not* burn, no matter what you do. On the upside, I forget what I've forgotten, so I'm at peace there.

Wondering what other people have done at 70 and older, I Googled it. What I've discovered is truly humbling.

Benjamin Franklin helped draft the Declaration of Independence at 70, and businessman, Cornelius Vanderbilt, began buying railroads.

• At 75, cancer survivor Barbara Hillary became one of

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Writer's Notebook

the oldest people, and the first black woman, to reach the North Pole. Warren Buffett contributed \$30 billion to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and its various charitable causes.

• At 80, the actress, Jessica Tandy, became the oldest Oscar recipient for her role in *Driving Miss Daisy*, and George Burns became the second oldest actor to win the Oscar for his performance in *The Sunshine Boys*.

• At 85, Coco Chanel was still head of her fashion design firm, and Theodor Mommsen became the oldest Nobel Prize winner in Literature for his monumental work, *A History of*

Rome.

• At 90, Marc Chagall was the first living artist to exhibit at the Louvre.

• At 95, Nola Ochs became the oldest person to receive a college diploma, and choreographer Martha Graham rehearsed her troupe for their latest performance. Pablo Casals, the noted cellist, performed his *Hymn of the United Nations* before the United Nations General Assembly.

In our own community, many of our volunteers who give so much of their time and energy are seniors.

Are you starting to feel the

pressure? I am.

I've thought of myself as middle-aged for a long time, then it suddenly occurred to me that I'd have to live to be 140 to consider these my middle years. But, who knows? I'm blessed with good health, with the love of my life who came to me in my early 20s, and has sustained me ever since, three children who have become people I'm proud and happy to know, and friends who are more numerous and dear than anyone should be allowed to have. And I live in this wonderful place.

Age has taught me important lessons. I worry less than I used to because it doesn't change anything, and I enjoy every moment twice as much as I used to because that changes

everything. I understand that life isn't as much about the successes as it is about simply showing up to compete.

I've learned that failure doesn't kill you, loss hurts like the devil, but we aren't meant to be protected from everything, and getting pulverized has a tenderizing effect.

On the upside, I forget what I've forgotten, so I'm at peace there.

It's important to be kind. I think we're here to get each other through. Chances are, the man or woman standing next to you in this life has endured as much or more than you have, and just needs someone to understand,

empathize and lend a hand.

Let's make 2015 the Year of Understanding.

Astoria resident Muriel Jensen has published more than 70 books and novellas.

With Cuba, we are giving nylons for nothing

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — There's an old Cold War joke — pre-panty hose — that to defeat communism we should empty our B-52 bombers of nuclear weapons and instead drop nylons over the Soviet Union.

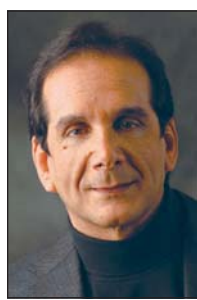
Flood the Russians with the soft consumer culture of capitalism, seduce them with Western contact and commerce, love bomb them into freedom.

We did win the Cold War, but differently. We contained, constrained, squeezed and eventually exhausted the Soviets into giving up. The dissidents inside subsequently told us how much they were sustained by our support for them and our implacable pressure on their oppressors.

The logic behind President Obama's Cuba normalization, assuming there is one, is the nylon strategy. We tried 50 years of containment and that didn't bring democracy. So let's try inundating them with American goods, visitors, culture, contact, commerce.

It's not a crazy argument. But it does have its weaknesses. Normalization has not advanced democracy in China or Vietnam. Indeed, it hasn't done so in Cuba. Except for the U.S., Cuba has had normal relations with the rest of the world for decades. Tourists, trade, investment from Canada, France, Britain, Spain, everywhere. An avalanche of nylons — and not an inch of movement in Cuba toward freedom.

In fact, one could argue that this influx of Western money has helped preserve the dictatorship, as just about all the financial transactions go through the gov-



Charles Krauthammer

ernment, which takes for itself before any trickle-down crumbs are allowed to reach the regime-indentured masses.

My view is that police-state control of every aspect of Cuban life is so thoroughly perfected that outside influences, whether confrontational or cooperative, only minimally affect the country's domestic trajectory.

So why not just lift the embargo? After all, the unsailable strategic rationale for isolating Cuba — in the Soviets' mortal global struggle with us, Cuba enlisted as a highly committed enemy beachhead 90 miles from American shores — evaporated with the collapse of the Soviet empire. A small island with no significant independent military capacities, Cuba became geopolitically irrelevant.

That's been partially reversed in the last few years as Vladimir Putin has repo-

sitioned Russia as America's leading geopolitical adversary and the Castros signed up for that coalition too. Cuba has reportedly agreed to reopen the Soviet-era Lourdes espionage facility, a massive listening post for intercepting communications. Havana and Moscow have also discussed the use of Cuban airfields for Russia's nuclear-capable long-range bombers.

This in addition to Cuba's usual hemispheric mischief, such as training and equipping the security and repression apparatus in Venezuela.

No mortal threat, I grant you. And not enough to justify forever cutting off Cuba. But it does raise the question: With the U.S. embargo already in place and the Castros hungry to have it lifted, why give them trade, investment, hard currency, prestige and worldwide legitimacy — for nothing in return?

Obama brought back nothing on democratization, a staggering betrayal of Cuba's human rights crusaders. No free speech. No free assembly. No independent political parties. No hint of free elections.

Not even the kind of 1975 Helsinki Final Act that we got from the Soviets as part of detente, granting structure and review to human rights promises. These provided us with significant leverage in supporting the dissident movements in Eastern Europe that eventually brought down communist rule.

If Obama insisted on giving away the store, why not at least do it item by item? We relax part of the embargo in return for, say, Internet access. And tie further normalization to serial relaxations of police-state repression.

Oh, what hypocrisy, say the Obama acolytes. Did we not

normalize relations with China and get no human rights quid pro quo?

True. But that was never a prospect. The entire purpose was geopolitical and the payoff was monumental: We walked away with the most significant anti-Soviet strategic realignment of the entire Cold War, formally breaking up the communist bloc and gaining China's neutrality, and occasional support, in our half-century struggle to dismantle the Soviet empire.

From Cuba, Obama didn't even get a token gesture. Not even a fig leaf such as, say, withdrawal of secret police support in Venezuela. Or extradition of American criminals now fugitive in Cuba, including a notorious cop killer. Did we even ask?

Obama seems to believe that the one-way deal was win-win. A famous victory — the Cuba issue is now behind us. A breakthrough. Indeed it is. You know how to achieve a breakthrough in tough negotiations? Give everything away. Try it. You'll have a deal by noon. Every time.

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