

Sonia
HOLLIMON

Unseasonably early

It's beginning to sound a lot like Christmas

What do Barry Manilow, Andy Williams and the Beach Boys all have in common? They're at my house. Singing. Yes, singing their little hearts out, which is what they'll be doing from now until Christmas. And it won't just be them — Kenny G, Take Six, Kenny and Dolly — they'll all be there.



Christmas at my aunt's

house starts somewhere between the end of midterms and Halloween. This year, she's early. Last Sunday, she started putting up the Thanksgiving decorations while playing "An Andy Williams Christmas — live in concert" She was at the concert. Which leads me to wonder why she needed the CD as well. Perhaps I can paint a more vivid picture for you:

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Imagine a peaceful fall afternoon, the smell of crisp leaves wafting in on the fall air, the bright sun beaming down on autumn's colors in all their glory. Suddenly, Barry Manilow breaks into 'Holly Jolly Christmas' in all its big-band glory. And you thought Halloween was scary.”

thought Halloween was scary.

Bunny, my aunt, is one of those people who should have been a cheerleader in high school because she's fun, peppy and just plain cute. She has three kids in college, one in junior high and one in elementary school. That's five kids — and she still gets carded when we go out. It's humiliating because after the waiter has carded her, he's so embarrassed, he looks at me and thinks, "Well, this chic looks even older than the first one — why bother?"

Bunny isn't my aunt's real name — her real name is so long and hard to pronounce, my family just must have given up on it years ago. In my family, we believe that people grow up to become what their names mean. Aunt Bunny is just that — a cute, although not furry, little person. The only thing not funny about Aunt Bunny is the fact that she thinks Barry Manilow is a babe.

Yeah, we're praying for her, too. She claims that she has to start playing Christmas albums so early

because even if she played four every day until Christmas, she won't have gone through them all. It's true. She has at least 100 Christmas albums: the entire Beach Boys Christmas collection, plus quite a few people I didn't even know had made Christmas albums. People who shouldn't have made Christmas albums.

I suppose that my aunt's childlike wonder at holiday time and her enthusiasm concerning life in general are part of what keeps her looking so young. A life of laughter and love couldn't possibly hurt any of us, so I'll put that on my list of New Year's resolutions. I do not, however, want anyone to start calling me anything nauseating like "Honey" or "Candy."

There's a lesson here for all of us, however. This holiday season, while the turkey is roasting in the oven, or you're sitting around watching "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas," take some time to do something maybe you think you're too old to do. Jump in the leaves with your folks, or have a potato-sack race. Or do what we have to do every Christmas. Do "The Bunny Hop."

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Winner takes all

Electoral College defeats democratic process

Tomorrow we vote for the last president of this century. And hopefully you'll be heading to the local polling place to make your voice heard. I will. It's just a shame that when it's all said and done, our vote won't count as much as we think it does. All thanks to the Electoral College.



We might be misled into believing that the Electoral College doesn't really play a big role in the presidential elections, but actually it's the reason why your vote is weakened. It's not a symbolic institution, but a real threat to how we determine who sits in the Oval Office. The Electoral College is inequitable to those who are running for president, and it shifts the focus of those candidates away from "the People" to 270 electoral votes — two reasons enough to dismantle this anachronism.

According to the Office of the Federal Register, the "Electoral College was established by the founding fathers as a compromise between election of the president by Congress and election by popular vote." Today's college consists of 538 electors, and each state's allotment of electors is equal to the number of House members the state is entitled plus two Senators (Nebraska has 5 votes). A majority of 270 is required to win the presidency — and it's a winner-takes-all system.

Our predecessors had the wisdom to recognize that the populace was not always informed of national issues, nor was there an effective means of disseminating such

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information. This is no longer true in modern America, and the Electoral College, along with voter disenchantment and apathy, is now primed for creating a catastrophe.

The Scenario (in 2000 or 2004): A third party is now part of the political system. The third-party candidate might be an "outsider" or a member of the established parties. Regardless, the polls, which do play a role in today's political arena, indicate that the three are running neck-and-neck.

Candidate one is leading with 38 percent, candidate two with 32 percent and candidate three with 25 percent. On Election Day, the remaining undecideds will either not vote or split their votes evenly among the three. Obviously no one candidate has a majority of the popular vote. But candidate one wins because she has the requisite 270 electoral votes. In essence, candidate one was not the choice of 62 percent of those who voted. That's not a mandate of the people.

Not only that, but checking the distribution of the electoral votes, one would only need to win 11 of the most populous states to become president. The 1990 Census indicates that the 11 most populous states have a total population of 140 million. If 70 million of them were registered voters, it's possible that 26 million votes (under a three-candidate

system) is all one needs to become president. That's not a mandate of the people.

With this winner-take-all system, it's even worse if examined on the state level. If President Clinton wins 51 percent of the popular vote Tuesday in California, he gets all 54 electoral votes — even if former Sen. Bob Dole has 49 percent of the popular vote. That means 49 percent of voting Californians didn't have a voice. If Clinton wins 51 percent of the popular vote in each state (of the 11 most populous), he's president again — even if Dole clears 49 percent. That's not a mandate of the people.

Why, I'd only need to win a slight majority of California, Texas, New York and Ohio, and I'd be halfway to the White House. Simply inequitable.

What's worse, and a lot of people are astonishingly unaware of this, if there is no majority winner of the electoral votes, then it's up to the House of Representatives to choose. So rather than a country deciding who sits in the Oval Office, it's 435 members of the House. That's not a mandate of the people.

Abolish the Electoral College to prevent this from happening. Or if that's too much of a leap, then the country needs to use a progressive system like those in Nebraska or Maine. In Nebraska, two electors are chosen for the statewide popular

winner, but the rest are selected by the popular vote in each congressional district. So it's possible to split the vote here.

Lastly, the Electoral College doesn't favor small states like Nebraska because it shifts the candidates' focus. When was the last time a candidate really campaigned here (besides a quick stopover)? Or in South Dakota? Or in Wyoming? Why don't they? Truthfully, our vote doesn't "count." Five electoral votes doesn't mean much in a 538 vote pot. But 800,000 votes would mean a lot to a close popular vote (which occurs more often than not).

A candidate doesn't need to devote four days to Nebraska, but I want to hear what they have to say about their vision for our country.

In this election, Dole campaigned for almost a week in California, because of the state's 54 electoral votes. Granted, in a popular-vote system, he'd still be there trying to get as many votes as possible. But, in a close race, those Californians would have a voice, instead of being left out in the cold.

Proponents of the Electoral College say it's just a symbolic event. I agree, it's a symbolic event in December when the electors arrive to place their state's vote. But on Nov. 5th this year, and on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November every four years, the Electoral College plays a deleterious role.

Remember, we should be voting for the president of the United States, not the president of the states that provided the 270 needed electoral votes.

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