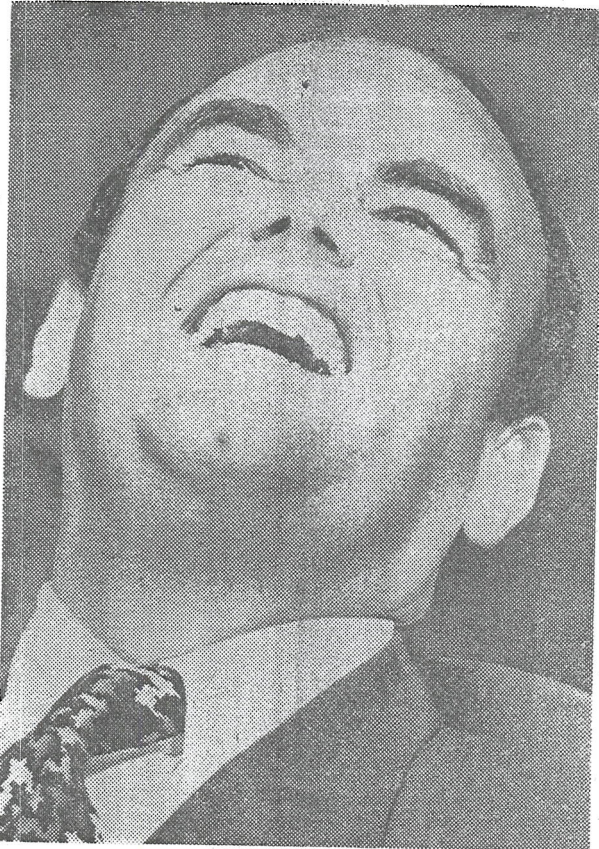


*An 11-year-old lobbyist's
suggestions to the
President's domestic advisor*

Yours Sincerely, John Ehrlichman



Kristi found "life and humor" in friend John . . .

Lynne Bundesen, formerly of Santa Fe, N.M., now works as a congressional aide in Washington, D.C.

By Lynne Bundesen
Los Angeles Times

John D. Ehrlichman isn't really the humorless martinet that some people, in certain quarters, think he is. My daughter used to correspond with him, and she sees him quite differently.

They first began exchanging letters in 1970, after we had met Ehrlichman only a few times. It was Kristi who, then 11 years old, initiated the correspondence and the letters arriving in New Mexico from Washington, D.C., were full of warmth and whimsy. (She has pretty much grown up now, gone off to school in Boston and doesn't write many letters any more.)

"Dear Mr. Ehrlichman," her first letter began. "The next time you see the President, would you give him this menu and please ask him to save the trains?" Kristi had kept her menu from a Penn Central dining car, which bore the signatures of fellow passengers who shared her enthusiasm for rail travel, and then enclosed it with the letter to Ehrlichman at the White House.

Kristi's one-child lobby was called "TOOT" — for Trip Out on Trains. Not long after her letter and menu

went off to Washington, she received an envelope with "The White House" imprinted in the upper left corner.

"Dear old railroad-riding Miss Bundesen," the salutation said. "The President has never met a little girl who went up and down bar cars before rallying signatures.

"We weren't going to do anything for the trains, but after we got your menu the President changed his mind and decided to help out. We are going to send them several hundred million dollars if the senate will let us.

"Kindest regards from the chief justice, the secretary of transportation, chairman of the civil service division, and yours sincerely, John D. Ehrlichman, assistant to the President for domestic affairs."

It was all fairly heady for an adolescent girl from a small mining town in the West, and Kristi—convinced that she was having an impact on national affairs—took her responsibilities seriously.

"Dear Mr. Ehrlichman," she wrote back. "Now that you are taking care of the trains, would you do something about burying the electrical wires underground? They obstruct the view of all the citizens."

"There were a few things I had to check with the President first," came the

reply in the elegant envelope. "The federal government's supply of holes is very low. It turns out that quite a few of the holes we would have used are now overseas. You will have to give us a little time to get them back before we can bury the wires.

"The holes we now have are being used for wells, ditches, culverts, and a certain number are allocated to the baking industry for doughnuts.

"Congress is now considering an Emergency Hole Production Act which will permit the government to create a million more holes of varying lengths. Until we see whether they pass the legislation, we are not in a position to bury the wires. Your friend, John."

It was impossible then to think of John Ehrlichman as a distant, mechanistic, foreboding figure — out of touch with America. To Kristi and to me, there was life and humor at 1600 Pennsylvania avenue.

When Kristi went off to summer camp, she advised her contact in Washington of the change of address.

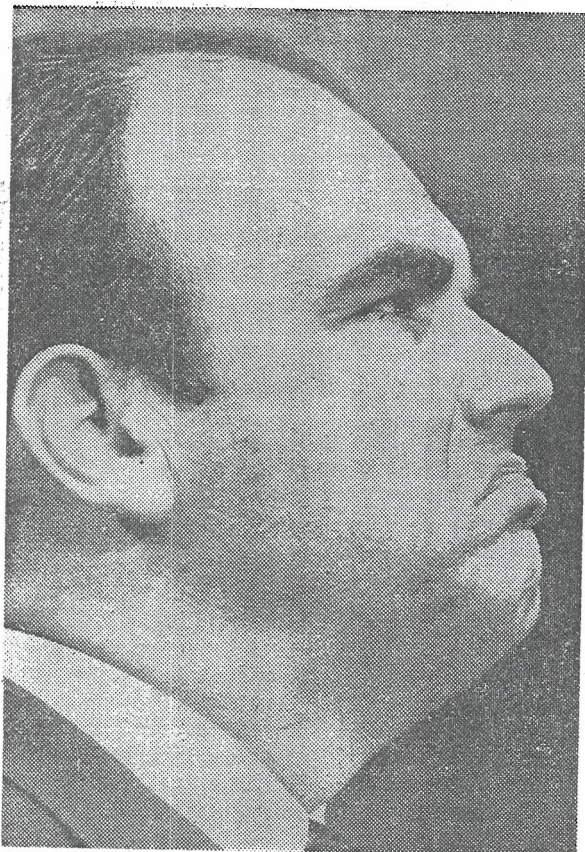
"I'm glad to see you are in camp," said the letter in her mailbox, "where you can spend your time doing more constructive things like making moccasins and horseback riding. We have gotten a little behind because of your suggestions, and I think it is a good thing you are taking two or three weeks off and not thinking about the government — and giving us a little chance to catch up."

After returning from camp, Kristi went to a citizens' meeting on saving the trains. Naturally, she took along a folder of letters from her friend John. She had her picture in the paper as the youngest member of any group lobbying there.

"You will be interested to know that the presidents of the Southern Pacific, Santa Fe, Seaboard and Delaware and Lackawanna railroads were all here in my office to talk about the railroads," her correspondent soon wrote. "I told them they had a special friend out west, and they were interested to know about you.

"Did you know I was just in Vietnam and I arranged for some holes to be sent back? Drop me a note when you have something and even when you don't. . ."

Wise for her years, Kristi



... which isn't the usual public view

wrote and offered to help with the trains. "I could come and cry," she said.

"The next time we have a railroad strike we are going to send for you and you can come up here and cry," Ehrlichman replied. "I think it is a very constructive suggestion — in fact, it is one of the best suggestions

'You don't have to do the dishes'

we have had in connection with the whole railroad situation.

"I keep going down to the mailbox to look for the present you said you sent me but it hasn't come. Did you send it by train? John."

Kristi tried to use her friend for a little influence at home. "My mother makes me do the dishes all the time" she winged off to Washington, "and so I don't have as much time to write."

"It's good for little girls to do dishes," the President's domestic adviser replied — speaking domestically. "When you don't do them they smell bad. And it keeps you in touch with the common people. My daughters do dishes."

Kristi gave that up and went back to the serious business of the country.

"I have for reply your business letter re: Railpax," said the next letter from the White House. "There is only one problem with passenger trains in New Mexico, and that is nobody rides on them."

"The Department of Transportation has reviewed carefully the train schedules and passenger loads, and if we run trains where there are too few passengers, the taxpayers have to pay for it and the question is, if this is a good use of federal monies. The administration's ba-

sic position is that only those routes exist which are needed and wanted by the people who use them."

Then he raised another of Kristi's suggestions: "I've taken up your idea of ditching the forests to prevent fires from spreading with the President, and he says it probably will not find its way into his upcoming state of the union address. I hope you will be able to sit by your TV and watch the state of the union and tell me what you think."

There were only two more letters.

Kristi was getting ready to go off to boarding school, but had time for a quick note on a Bicentennial project she had in mind for a trail system across America.

"Thank you for your Bicentennial letter about the trail," Ehrlichman wrote back. "We are still using the tracks for railroads in some places, and I'm not sure who would have a right of way if we used tracks for trails."

"Boarding schools are good," he observed in his final letter which she received when she was on the East Coast. "They keep the crime rates down and reduce congestion on the highways and railroads. They teach you manners and you don't have to do dishes. Your friend, John."

There is, more in the letters — written and implied, just as there is more to John Ehrlichman. The whole of a human being is not encompassed in a few brief moments or in the contents of ecru envelopes.

Nor is the whole of a human being encompassed in a television appearance, or a flip assessment in the press. John Ehrlichman — to Kristi — does not have a "terrifying, downward, curving smile" as William V. Shannon says in his book, "They Could Not Trust the King."

She thinks the people who portray him that way have never received a letter from him.