



## MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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### JERRY BROWN, SWING VOTERS AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

I dined last week with former California Governor Jerry Brown, the Jesse Ventura of the 1970's and 80's, who told me that he is having a great time living and working in Oakland. The last time I talked up close and personal with him was when he was running a state larger than most countries and the conversation had not changed.

As a white Mayor presiding over a small city comprised of a disproportionate number of poor and working class African-Americans, he loves to watch his colleague across the bay, the dapper African-American political savant Mayor Willy Brown, sweat bricks shepherding San Franciscans in the city of e-Yuppies. What a country, the Bay Area.

Mayor Brown, who is still very much the Granola-Pol, bemoaned the state of American electoral politics, reminding me that national campaigns care little about people like me because I have clear political views and I don't write huge checks to a political party. When your feet are on the ground, you don't swing, and with a wallet firmly in pocket, White House slumber parties are not in your schedule book.

The Presidential candidates stopped talking to most of us several days after the primary election. Having already won the hearts of the faithful, their message had switched to trailer talk, aimed at people in places you left for good or regularly fly over. With the notable exception of Clairemont, San Diego's hotbed of independents who never seem to make up their minds, California was a done deal by last summer. The hot button issues leave most of us cold.

Mayor Brown claims that the appeal to 15 percent of the country considered swing voters is killing democratic electoral politics, leaving local politics the last chance for Democracy in America. And indeed, Jerry Brown seems happier doing that than running for President or maybe even being Governor. Local politics is the hard-core quality of life stuff, like keeping the parks, natural and human-made, beautiful and usable, the ocean clean and the streets free of

potholes. And, keeping the trash collected and the cops paid.

I told him that as many as twenty percent of Carmel Valley and Del Mar Heights voters failed to vote all the way down their ballots in the last election, voting for President and Senator, but leaving out San Diego City Council representatives and the Mayor. Political Consultant Bob Glaser tells me that our area was better than most other parts of the city where the drop-off rate is closer to 50 percent.

That twenty percent could have changed the face of this fall's election. Consider that Denise Ducheny won her first election to the State Assembly by 28 votes, Juan Vargas to the City Council by less than 100 and Dick Murphy squeaked through the primary in the city-wide Mayor's race by less than 150 votes.

Ten days from now, voters will be electing five people to the San Diego City Council, four council members and a Mayor, and three to the Del Mar City Council. These people will have control over such things as housing densities, traffic flow and public safety on everyone's block.

While its hard to whip up voter ecstasy over pothole repair, who will manage the region's growth over the next eight years should be grabbing everyone's attention—including whether our area will take a battering from a proposed 24 hour airport at Miramar.

As the quintessential political maverick, Mayor Brown has the same intensity of purpose that he had when I ate dinner with him at Lucy's El Adobe Restaurant in LA 25 years ago. And although his ideas seem 1960's quaint, born of a Seminarian's idealism, I wondered at a guy who had run three times for President, served two terms as Governor of the country's greatest state and now presided over a desperate small city with such enthusiasm.

And, that's because Jerry Brown figured out what everyone should know—making neighborhoods work is where the political rubber meets the asphalt. Local politics might not be the stuff of Nobel Peace Prizes, like Bosnia or Northern Ireland, but this is home and the issues are every bit as rough and the politics just as tough.