The latter part of the twentieth century produced a veritable avalanche of technological and scientific advances, spewing forth discoveries and inventions at a rate that eventually made even the most amazing developments seem almost routine.

It was, therefore, all the more shocking when, in a single year, there was not just one, but two catastrophic failures of technology. On January 28, 1986, only two days after Voyager 2 began reporting on the mysteries of Uranus to spellbound scientists back on Earth, the space shuttle Challenger exploded, claiming the lives of all on board. And on April 26, an accident at a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl killed or contaminated thousands in the Soviet Union and sent a radioactive cloud wafting over much of Europe.

It must have been something of a relief to the public to turn its attention to a far more benign encounter with technology, as Americans were presented for the first time with the opportunity to see US Senate proceedings on television. Judging by their survey responses before and after the fact, though, the prospect of watching their government in action was far more appealing than actually doing so.

Possibly more satisfying was the celebration that summer of the centennial of the Statue of Liberty. It offered a chance to feel proud and patriotic, to honor the generations of immigrants who had helped build the modern nation, and to appreciate the reassuringly enduring quality of a decidedly low-tech symbol that had stood the test of time.

— Lisa Ferraro Parmelee
Now let me read you some statements about the Statue of Liberty celebration. For each, tell me if you agree or disagree...

...It gives you a real up feeling to hear, see and participate in all the patriotic talk and fanfare.


...As a nation founded by immigrants from many countries, it is right to have a national celebration to honor them.

Source: Survey by The Associated Press/Media General, April 3-11, 1986.

Do you happen to own a video cassette recorder with which you can tape shows that appear on TV, or not?


100 Years Beside the Golden Door

Source: Surveys by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman/Time, April 15-17, 1986.

This country has many symbols which are important to it. Which one or two of these best represent America to you?

Source: Survey by the Associated Press/Media General, April 3-11, 1986.

Boomers in Their Prime

Compared to your parents, would you say that you personally place more emphasis, about the same emphasis, or less emphasis on...?

Source: Surveys by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman/Time, April 15-17, 1986.

Do you personally think you would watch the televised coverage of the US Senate if it were available to you, or not?

Source: Survey by the Associated Press/Media General, April 3-11, 1986.