

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1992

Pamela Harriman, *Life of the Party*

In 1980, the Democrats Were Down.
But This Woman Wasn't About to Quit.

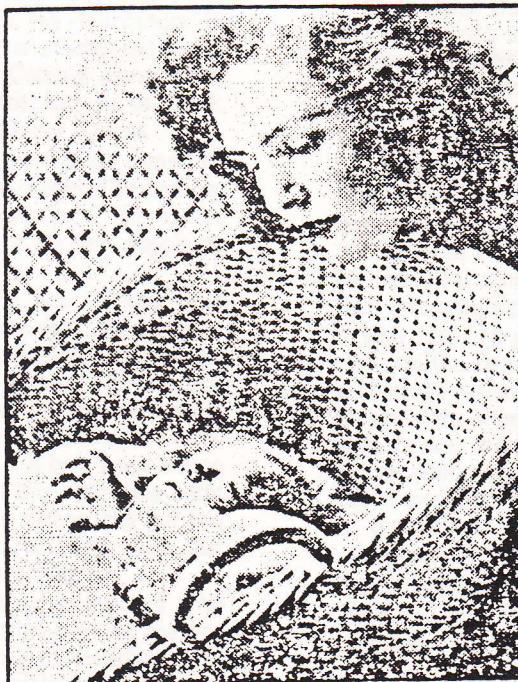
By Donnie Radcliffe
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When Pamela Harriman woke up Tuesday at her home in Georgetown the sun was shining, just as Al Gore had been saying it would if they were going to win. And later near her estate in Middleburg, where she'd been voting since Richard Nixon ran for reelection in 1972, people were actually waiting in line at the polls. She'd never seen such excitement.

That night in Little Rock, to which she'd flown in a chartered jet, she watched the returns at Tipper and Al Gore's private party packed with the most faithful and generous of the Clinton-Gore supporters from every state in the Union. Here, too, there was excitement, but it was contained. Could this really be happening? When the word came through that Kentucky had gone for Clinton—a stunning development—the crowd was uncertain whether to cheer.

Then sometime after midnight, the cheering started and didn't stop. By then the streets were filled with delirious Democrats, and Harriman, on this most amazing night, was stuck inside.

"If I'd stayed up until 4:30, I'd have gotten to see Bill at another party," she says, in a tone that made clear that a 72-year-old woman with a big bank account wasn't about to try. But perhaps of all the well-wishers and supplicants in Little Rock that night, she didn't need to. Clinton and Gore both knew very well what Pamela Harriman had done for them.



The then-Pamela Churchill and her baby, Winston, grandson of Britain's famed prime minister.

Robert Strauss, U.S. ambassador to Russia but "Mr. Democrat" throughout much of the 1970s and '80s, remembers the night right after the disastrous election of 1980 when he pooh-poohed Pamela Harriman's proposal to save the Democratic Party—an idea that later turned out to be "Democrats for the 80's." They were having dinner at her home when she started talking about setting up a political action committee "to revitalize the Democratic Party and promote alternatives to right-wing Republican rule."