

What Does Obama have in common with Conan, Balloon Boy Dad (and many of the rest of us)  
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Obama touched the hearts of many who invested in him emotionally. They allowed hope to surface or resurface. His administration would be an evolution away from the way things were done before. People are careful about investing their emotions, but they did and they voted him in. This one will stay true to himself and not sell out. Once in office, it was as though the whole presidential thing took Obama by surprise. "I'm in?... I'm a member of the club?" It seemed like he really appreciated being a member and wanted to please his fellow club members as much as he wanted to please everyone else.

He may have his hero, JFK's, Camelot. His intentions were (and still are) wonderful. He'll start with healthcare. He'll soften up his act a bit... for the general audience. To show everyone that he indeed could be bi-partisan. And then, in time, his true self, wanting to accomplish so many wonderful ideals, the ones he campaigned about, will emerge later on. The majority that voted for him will stand by him and be patient. He could use that power and "supervise" while everyone else did the dirty work. Healthcare will blossom and everyone, including the members of the club, will love him.

But everyone didn't put him in office. Those whom he made campaign promises to, the many who invested their hearts in him, did. When there is no return on an investment, it's called a loss. When there is no return on an emotional investment, and it is deliberate, for whatever reason, it is felt like a betrayal.

From his very first show, Conan O'Brien delivered an honest irreverence. Even after his sidekick, Andy, left him, he prevailed with the best talk show around because he kept that unspoken pact with his audience – to stay original; to stay true to himself. So his viewers invested their emotions in him and watched his show regularly. His viewership grew massively and they loved him so much that when it was announced that he would take over the tonight show, no one thought about how unfair it was to Leno who had been number one in that time slot. No one cared because Conan was the new direction; an original. He took over the Tonight Show. But, from the very beginning, it seemed like he couldn't believe he had arrived. Like he really appreciated being accepted to the "club." And in his hero, Johnny Carson's, time slot. So, maybe he should make friends with everyone; be nice. After all, they also built him a brand new studio. So, he softened himself up a bit... for the general audience. Maybe the network asked him to tone it down for the earlier time slot, but instead of saying "no" and staying true to himself, he said "yes" and his format looked like Leno's, and he performed Leno-like material. He figured that, to begin with, he'll please everyone and then his true self would, in time, emerge and this brand would be clear and he would rule late night and everyone would love him.

But everyone didn't get him to where he was. The loyal viewers who had invested in him, gave him that opportunity. They did not get a return on their investment. So, they felt a little betrayed. And his ratings became lower than Letterman's.

People all over the world invested their emotions in Balloon Boy Dad and his family. Our hearts felt for a little boy and a family who might forever grieve if a tragedy occurred. BBD didn't just pull a stunt like, let's say, the guy who goes to the top of a high rise, jumps and parachutes. That is a stunt where someone does something outside of the law to get our attention. The jumper doesn't ask us to invest our hearts. He just says "look at me." Some of us might call him an idiot; some might admire him. But we don't feel betrayed because the jumper didn't ask us to emotionally invest in him. Had BBD gone up in that balloon, allowing us to know that it was a deliberate act, we probably would have still watched and, in the end, some of us may have called him an idiot, some may have been angry, some admiring and many simply indifferent. But BBD

asked that we invest our hearts by making us think that there was an innocent little boy inside. Then came the planned surprise. That was not just a stunt. It was a betrayal, because we invested our hearts.

In our cynical theater, the players who don't deliver usually get a second chance. It seems like it's the ones who betray us with what they project to be something special that we are less forgiving of.

More of Nat Christian's writings are going up on his new website at [www.newyorktimes.com](http://www.newyorktimes.com)