

THE KID WHO RAN FOR PRESIDENT



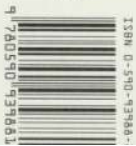
Can he win?

★ DAN GUTMAN ★

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PRESIDENT

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AN
APPLE
PAPERBACK

SCHOLASTIC

NEW YORK TORONTO LONDON AUCKLAND SYDNEY

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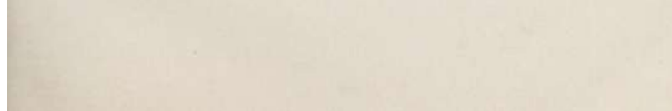
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To Mrs. Laurie Bushey's fifth-grade class at Tatem School in Haddonfield, New Jersey: Matt Bernetich, Bill Bracken, Jessica Buono, Claire Campbell, Carlie Chew, Matt Conley, Suzanne Conway, Remy Coyle, Holly Dixon, Greg Fuhrmeister, Geoff Goldberg, Chris Haines, Kevin Hee, Catherine Hunter, Lea Jesiolowski, Alex Johnson, Ashley Killian, Andrew Lamb, Liz Loudon, Brett Montgomery-Recht, Diane Mussoline, Matt Nace, Kelly O'Mara, Katherine Podgor, Sarah Robertson, Josh Rood-Ojalvo, and Drew Rosenfeld. Thanks for the help!

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VIII

THE KID WHO

* RAN FOR *

PRESIDENT

^ Prolosfue ^

"Hi! My name is Judson Moon. I'm twelve years old and Fm running for President of the YOU-nited States."

That's how I introduced myself to about a zillion people last year. I must have kissed a zillion babies, said a zillion hellos, shaken a zillion hands.

When you shake a zillion hands, you learn the fine art of handshaking. You don't hold the other person's hand too loosely, and you don't squeeze it like you're trying to show them how strong you are either. You grab the hand firmly. Look the other person straight in the eye. One pump does it.

Timing is crucial. You can't let go a millisecond too soon or a millisecond too late.

People respect a good handshake. Do it

perfectly, and nothing else you do or say much matters.

You've just about got that man or woman's vote.

I got a lot of votes. Enough to make me President of the United States? Well, you can peek at the last page of this book and find out.

That is, if you're a total weenie with the attention span of a flea.

Or, you can read this book and get the whole story. Me? I'd read the book. But hey, it's your choice. It's a free country, right?

Kiiii!l of the Hill

It was right after Election Day, 1999. Lane Brainard and I were down in his basement shooting pool when we first came up with the idea of a kid running for President.

The TV was on. A bunch of boring grown-ups in suits and ties were sitting around a table. I wasn't paying much attention, but they were jabbering something about what the Democratic Party and the Republican Party are going to have to do if they want to win the election next year, in 2000.

Ordinarily, I would grab the remote control and switch to something more interesting (to me, the Weather Channel would have been more interesting). But Lane's sort of a weird genius who wants to know everything about every-

The Kid Who Ran for President

thing. His favorite show is Meet the Press! Besides, it was his house.

Lane recently moved to Madison — that's the capital of Wisconsin, in case you don't know — with his mom. She had just split up with Lane's dad, who lives in California. Lane and I have only known each other for a little while, but we're getting to be good friends.

"The Democrats have been all messed up since they lost control of Congress in 1994," Lane explained as he chalked up his stick. "And the Republicans are entirely clueless."

He smacked the cue ball into the pack and balls scattered across the table. The eleven ball dropped in a corner pocket and Lane walked around the table looking for his next shot.

"Half the time the President doesn't know what he's doing, either," I replied. I don't know much about politics, but I can usually fake it if I have to.

"You know who should be running this country. Moon?" Lane said, lining up his next shot. "A kid."

He stroked the five ball toward the side pocket. It just missed, tapping off the bumper.

King of the Hill

Lane looked up at me with a sparkle in his eyes. "Can you imagine that. Moon? A kid running for President of the United States? Think about it. It'll be the year 2000. The new millennium. And a kid becomes the most powerful person in the world! What a mindblower!"

"That's crazy," I said. "The kid would have to be part of the political system. He'd have to know all the politicians. It takes years to make all the connections."

"You know, politicians aren't picked by a bunch of political cronies in smoke-filled rooms anymore. Moon. It's all computers, fax machines, image makers, media experts, and advertising now. They might as well be selling soap."

"Don't you have to be thirty-five years old or something like that to run for President?" I asked. I seemed to remember something from history class.

"There are ways around that," Lane replied casually.

"Yow oughta run. Lane," I said. "You're probably the smartest kid around."

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"People don't want a smart President/' he said. "They want a President who makes 'em feel good. If they wanted a smart President, Albert Einstein would have

been elected."

"You mean he wasn't!"

"Moon, you're a dunce. A lovable dunce."

"I was kidding!" I said. "I knew Einstein was never President. I swear it!"

Suddenly Lane stopped and looked at me.

"Wait a minute. Moon," he said. "Why don't you run for President?"

"Very funny. Lane. Funny like a crutch."

"No, I mean it."

He had this sort of devilish expression on his face, the kind of face you see in old horror movies when a mad scientist cooks up a secret potion or creates a monster that will help him rule the world.

"Moon, you're perfect/" Lane said, walking around the table excitedly. "People like you. You make 'em laugh. You put 'em at ease. You've got a good Presidential name — Judson Moon. President Moon. You look like an all-American boy. You're tall. You've got good hair. It's even parted on the side like a politician —"

King of the Hill

"Yeah, right/" I interrupted. "Like Americans are going to elect a guy President because they like his hair/"

"Ever notice that we've never had a bald President?" Lane pointed out.

I thought about that for a moment. "What about Lyndon Johnson? Wasn't he a little thin on top?"

"He doesn't count," Lane said. "He only became President because John E Kennedy was assassinated."

"What about Eisenhower?"

Lane backed me against his mom's washing machine and looked me in the eye. "The point is, this is America, Moon," he said excitedly. "The land of opportunity. You know what they say — this is the country where any kid can grow up to become President. Moon, that kid could be you/"

"Why do you want me to run for President so badly?"

"When I was little," he said, racking up the balls again, "we used to play this game called King of the Hill. There would be a big mountain of dirt or gravel. All the kids would scramble to the top. Then we'd push each other and try to

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knock each other down the mountain. The one kid who was still at the top at the end was the king of the hill. I was always small and skinny and the other kids always knocked me down on my face. I was never king of the hill. The President of the United States is sorta like the king of the hill. I guess if I could get you elected, it would be sorta like I was king of the hill, too." Like I said. Lane is a little weird.

A Mighty Bisi ir Can Of Worms •

On the way home from Lane's house, I walked down Jenifer Street and saw June Syers sitting on her porch. That was no big surprise, as June Syers is always sitting on her porch.

In fact, if I ever walked by her house and didnt see June Syers sitting there, I would rush to call the police because something must be terribly wrong. But there she was, as usual.

"Judson Moon!" she hollered. "You come up here this very minute and have a glass of lemonade with me or I'll tell your mamma on you."

I bounded up the steps. June Syers is an old African-American woman I've known since the days she used to baby-sit for me. She has Parkinson's disease, which makes her hands and legs shake. But her mind still works fine. It's

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a little hard to understand what she's saying sometimes, but I usually find it's worth the effort to try and figure it out.

"Judson Moon, what are you, in fifth grade now?"

"Sixth."

"Sixth grade!" she marveled. "The perfect grade! When you're in sixth grade, you know everything in the world there is to know. In fourth grade, you know nothin'. In fifth grade, you know nothin'. And then suddenly you hit sixth grade and you know it all. Nobody can tell you nothin'. Then a funny thing happens when you get older and become a grown-up."

"What's that, Mrs. Syers?"

"You don't know nothin' again," she said, breaking out in her cackling laugh. "Strangest thing."

The lemonade tasted good and I plopped down in the rocking chair next to Mrs. Syers' wheelchair.

"Who was the first President you voted for, Mrs. Syers?"

"Franklin DelllllllUlano Roosevelt!" she said, drawing out the middle name so it sounded

A Mighty Big Can of Worms

almost musical. "And you know who was the last President I voted for?"

"Who?"

"Franklin DelllllllUlano Roosevelt!" she said just as proudly.

"You haven't voted since ..."

"Since 1944. Over fifty years."

"Why not?"

"Haven't come across anybody worth votin' for since FDR," she said, shaking her head.

"Truman? Eisenhower? Kennedy? Reagan? None of them were worth voting for?"

"Not in my book. Politicians. Poll takers. When a man — or woman — comes along who really wants to lead this country and not just play politics, then I'll pull the lever for 'em. Till then, I'll sit here on this porch and watch the world go down the toilet."

I drained the glass and set it down on the railing. "Mrs. Syers," I said, sticking out my hand, "my name is Judson Moon. I'm twelve years old and I'm running for

President."

"What, of your student council or somethin'?"

"No. Of the YOU-nited States of America!"

"You crazy! Even when you were a toddler

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you were crazy. I still remember the time you hid my glasses in the pan and I baked 'em right into the cake."

"Fm not kidding, Mrs. Syers. Fm thinking I might actually do it."

"Politics changes a person," she said, pointing her bony finger at me. "It rips your heart out and puts a stone in its place."

"Not mine."

As I bounded down her steps, she cupped her hands around her mouth and called out to me. "You're openin' a mighty big can of worms, JudsonMoon!"

3. That Jerk Arthur Kranti

I was sitting around the lunchroom at school with Lane and a bunch of kids. Everybody was talking about what they were going to do on New Year's Eve.

"Man, Fm gonna party all night," said Christopher Tadley. "It's not just New Year's. It's the turn of the century! It's the turn of the millennium! That happens once every thousand years!"

"It's just another night," Matthew Murphy said. "Besides, it's the turn of the millennium in 2001, not 2000."

"I know what I'm gonna do," I said. "I'm gonna be campaigning to be President of the United States."

Everybody busted out laughing.

"Oh yeah, I'm sure," said Eric Hager. "And

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Fm gonna fly to the moon on a unicycle blindfolded/'

"He's not kidding," Lane chimed in. "He's really going to run for President."

Somebody at the next table turned around to face us. It was Arthur Krantz, President of the Future Lawyers of America Club and just about every other dorky club in school.

If anybody looked like he was running for President, it was Arthur Krantz. He even wears a tie to school on days we don't have assembly.

When we were younger, all the kids called him "Smarty Pants Artie Krantz." Now, of course, we're much more mature. We call him "Booger Boy." I don't even want to get into the reason why

Arthur was sitting with some other nerds at what we call "The Derf Table." (That's Fred spelled backwards.) We used to be friends when I was younger. That was before I figured out what a dweeb he was. He's hated me ever since I told him I didn't want to hang around with him anymore.

"What do you know about the Presidency, Moon?" he sneered.

That Jerk Arthur Krantz

"A lot," I shot back defensively.

"Oh yeah? If the President and the Vice-President die, who becomes President?"

"That's easy," I said. "Arnold Schwarzenegger."

The kids at my table started giggling.

"Very fimny. Moon! If the President and the Vice-President die, the Speaker of the House becomes President. You should know that."

"And if the Speaker of the House dies," I said loud enough

for everyone to hear, "you go to Radio Shack and buy a new speaker."

"Oh, big joke. Moon. Tell me, Mr. President, what do you have to do before you can declare war on another country?"

"I have to call CNN so they can get a camera crew out there right away."

My table was howling. Frank was pounding the table with his fist and tears were streaming down his face. Nothing was funnier than getting Arthur Krantz all steamed up.

Arthur didn't give up. "What's the electoral college. Moon?"

"Everybody knows that. It's where you go to learn how to become an electrician."

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"Put an R in the middle of your name and it says wiiat you are. Moon — a moron!"

"Well, that doesn't necessarily disqualify me from the Presidency, does it, Booger Boy?"

"Thicko!"

"Spasmo!"

"Dappo!"

"Burger-brain!"

"Waste of oxygen!"

By that time, milk was spurting from Matthew's nostrils and Christopher had slid under the table. Arthur got up with his tray and stormed out in a huff.

"I think it would be cool to be President," said Cara Gavin when we had all regained our composure. "You take limos and helicopters everywhere you go."

"Doesn't the President have his own plane?" Matt asked.

"Yeah, Air Force One," said Lane.

"My family went to Washington last year and we took a tour of the White House," said Cara. "Did you know it has its own barbershop, a tennis court, a bowling alley, and even a movie

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That Jerk Arthur Krantz

theater? The President can watch any movie he wants, anytime he wants."

"Cosmic!" we all agreed.

"And there are six butlers and three chefs. So if the President feels like some food in the middle of the night, he just calls somebody and they bring it to him."

"Totally cosmic!"

"That's not why I want to be President," I said, standing up with my tray. "I want to be President so I can bring peace to the world, rescue the environment, and throw out the first ball at baseball games. Adios, amoebas!"

I left them all snickering and throwing napkins in my direction.

After school, Lane started putting the campaign wheels in motion.

The first thing you have to do to run for President, he found out, is to make a petition with signatures of registered voters on it. In Wisconsin, you need 2,000 signatures to get your name on the ballot.

Lane and I went out to the middle of State

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Street after school and badgered every grownup we saw until they signed the petition. It took a week to get 2,000 signatures. Lane sent the petition to the Division of Elections and didn't tell them how old I am. A week later I received a letter saying I was on the ballot in Wisconsin.

Family Values

My folks are pretty oblivious about politics and stuff like that. Let me rephrase that. My folks are just plain oblivious.

Mom is a salesperson for a carpet tile company She's spent the last twenty years trying to talk businesses into covering their floors with carpet tiles. She must be very persuasive. I see those carpet tiles everywhere. Mom enjoys her work, I suppose. I mean, why would somebody sell carpet tiles for twenty years unless they really liked it?

Dad sells boxes, those corrugated cardboard boxes you pack stuff in when you move. My grandfather sold boxes, too, and when he retired, he passed the business on to Dad.

I think my folks do pretty well. Their cars are

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always filled with hundreds of carpet tiles and cardboard boxes they have to deliver to customers.

Between the two of them, they know just about everything there is to know about carpet tiles and cardboard boxes. Fm not sure how much they know

about anything else. Mostly, they like to talk about carpet tiles and cardboard boxes, which don't interest me all that much.

When they come home from work they're both really beat. It seems like they use up all their thinking at the office so they don't have much energy for thinking at home. I was looking for a chance to break the news to them that I was running for President, and figured I would just casually slip it into the conversation around the dinner table.

The TV was on in the background. The TV is always on in our house, whether anyone's watching it or not. As she ate. Mom was reading a magazine called Progressive Floor Covering, which I guess is read by people in the carpet tile business because I never saw any regular people reading it. Dad was absorbed by the latest issue of Box World Monitor.

Family Values

"How was work today?" I asked, trying to get a conversation started.

"Fine, dear," Mom said cheerily from behind her magazine. Dad grunted.

"Mom, Dad, I've given it a lot of thought, and I decided that I'm going to run for President of the United States."

"Not until you mow the lawn you're not," Dad muttered.

"Sure. I'll mow the lawn first. Mom, if I ran for President, would you vote for me?"

"Of course, honey. You know we'd do anything for you."

"Can I borrow five hundred dollars to finance my campaign. Dad?"

"No."

"Did you ever run for anything when you were a kid. Dad?"

"Yeah, the bus."

"So it's okay with you if I run for President?"

"Sure," Dad grunted. "Whatever."

"Hey, Mom, is it okay with you if I go outside and get hit by lightning?"

"As long as nobody gets hurt, dear."

It went on like that for a while. Finally I

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cleared off my plate and went upstairs to do my homework. Their response wasn't what you'd call wildly

enthusiastic, but I did at least have their blessing.

Family values is a big issue at election time, and it was important that my family be behind me.

Abby ^

"To, stranger!"

I was mowing the lawn when Abby Goldstein called out to me. I released the bar and let the mower sputter to a stop.

"Haven't seen you around much lately/' she said.

"I've been pretty busy, Ab."

She looked a little hurt. Abby's my friend and she's a girl, so I guess you could call her my girlfriend. But that's as far as it goes, if you know what I mean.

We've known each other since we were in preschool together, and we've been almost like brother and sister growing up. Since I started hanging out with Lane Brainard lately, I've been seeing less and less of Abby.

"What's up, Judd?" she asked.

"Nothin'. Fm running for President."

"Of the student council?"

"No, of the United States."

Anybody else would think I was kidding, but Abby knew me.

"You are crazy, Judson Moon!" she said, with a big smile on her face. "Remember the time you attached your sled to Steve Halpern's mini-bike?"

"Yeah, and we knocked down Mrs. Hastings' shed!" We both broke up laughing.

"Don't you have to be a lot older to run for President?" Abby asked.

"Lane says he knows a way around that."

"I'll bet he does." Abby seemed to wrinkle her nose up every time I mentioned Lane.

"You don't like him, do you?"

She sighed. "If you don't have anything nice to say about somebody, you shouldn't say anything at all."

"He's not a bad guy, Ab," I said, "once you get to know him."

"It's okay, Judd. You're allowed to have more than one friend."

"Thanks, Ab."

Abby

"By the way, I think you'd make a wonderful President, Judson Moon/'

"You mean it?"

"Sure I mean it. Politicians are all phonies. It's so obvious that everything they do and say is just to make people vote for them. You're a real person, Judd. People can see it in your eyes when you talk."

I looked into Abby's eyes and put on my zombie face and voice. "You are under my power . . . vote for me ... I will be your leader..."

"Do you really think you can win?"

"Nah! It's just a goof. You know me."

"Remember the time you skateboarded down the center aisle of the auditorium, jumped on the stage, and hit Lindsey in the face with a pie while she was reciting the Gettysburg Address?"

"I was pretending to be John Wilkes Booth," I recalled,

laughing.

"The pie got all over her fake beard!"

"I couldn't help it," I said. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

"Anything can happen, you know, Judd. This is America."

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"Yeah, what would I do if I actually won the election?"

"If you were President, would we still be friends?"

"Of course," I told her. "We'll always be friends. You know that."

She tightened up her mouth as if she was going to say something but changed her mind just before the words got out.

"I better finish the lawn, Ab." I yanked the cord and the mower sprang to life. "I'll invite you to the White House," I hollered over the roar. "It's got a bowling alley, you know."

As I finished the next row and saw Abby walking away, I noticed she was dabbing her eye with her sleeve.

Secret

Lane passed me a note during social studies class: MEET ME IN THE TREEHOUSE AT 4:00. I nodded back to him and slipped the note in my desk.

Abby and I built the treehouse in the woods near my house a few years ago. It wasn't just a bunch of planks nailed to a tree. We hauled in a rug, a couch somebody had thrown away, and an old rocking chair. We even had a battery-operated TV and stereo. It was pretty cool.

Abby and I spent hours up there together. We were both hooked on the game of Life, and we'd have these marathon sessions up in the tree.

By the time I climbed the rope ladder to the top, Lane was already up there. He was busily jotting down notes on a long yellow pad.

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"I thought this would be a good place for a secret strategy meeting," he said seriously. "We've got a lot we need to talk about."

"Are you sure the tree is secure?" I whispered. "I mean, it might have a bug in it!"

Lane doesn't laugh much, and he didn't laugh at that.

"I liked the way you handled that creep Arthur Krantz in the lunchroom," Lane said. "I was afraid he was going to walk all over you. But you refused to give him a straight answer and made him look like a jerk."

"I thought that only showed how stupid I am."

"No, it hides how stupid you are," Lane said. "It's more important for you to look as if you know what you're talking about than it is for you to know what you're talking about. In a serious discussion of the issues, you're a dead

man."

"I know."

"The first thing we need to talk about is me," Lane said. "Do you want me to manage this campaign?"

"Sure I do."

Secret Campaign Strategy

"Well, ril only do it on one condition. Fm in charge. After Election Day, you're in charge. But up until that point, I call the shots. Okay?"

"Sounds fair," I said. What did I know about running for office anyway?

"That means I tell you what to do, what to wear, what to say, and when to say it. Moon. And you've got to run to win. I don't want to get started with this thing unless you're willing to stick with me until the bitter end. So we're in agreement?"

"Let's do it," I said.

To me, the whole thing was a goof. A kid running for President! That's ridiculous! But I've certainly done crazier things in my life. In any case, we shook hands on it.

"One of the first things we have to nail down," Lane said, checking off a note on his pad, "is whether you're a Republican or a Democrat."

"How should I know?" I said. "We didn't learn them yet in social studies."

"Well, there are a lot of differences between the two parties. But to put it very simply, the Democrats are in favor of a strong federal government. The Republicans are against

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putting too much power in the hands of the government."

That meant nothing to me. "What other choices do I have?" I asked.

"Those are the choices! It's a two-party system!"

"But what if I don't like either of those parties?" I complained. "Why can't I just run as me?"

"My feeling exactly," he said, pleased. "Voters are sick of the Democrats and Republicans fighting with each other and never getting anything accomplished. And if you ran as an independent we wouldn't have to bother with primaries, delegates, conventions, and all that other garbage. Let's run you as an independent!"

"Great."

"We need a slogan," Lane said, looking up as if one might be written in the sky. "Some catchy line that people will remember. Like 'Keep Cool with Coolidge,' or 'Tippecanoe and Tyler Too.' Something like 'All the way with LBJ.'"

"How about, 'Vote for me, I'll set you free,'" I volunteered.

Secret Campaign Strategy

"This is a free country. Moon. You don't want to make people feel like they're enslaved."

"How about, 'Moon for President'?"

"Boring."

"How about 'Don't be a loon, vote for Moon'?"

"Catchy but too silly"

"How about 'Shoot for the Moon'?"

"You want to encourage some crackpot to try and assassinate you?" Lane said.

"How about 'Moon: Let him orbit around you'?"

"Ugh," Lane groaned. "Hey, the moon causes the tides, right? How about 'Moon — he makes waves.'"

We both groaned at that one. Neither of us was happy with any of the slogans we were coming up with, so we agreed to put the slogan aside for the moment. Lane looked for the next item on his list.

"We're going to need to pick your running mate," he said.

"Jogging gives me shin splints," I complained.

"Your running mate is your Vice-Presidential candidate, lamebrain."

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"Well, why don't you be my running mate?"

"I'll have my hands full running your campaign. I can't be Vice-President, too."

"Oh."

"You want to pick somebody who is very different from yourself. That way, people who don't like you but do like him will vote for you anyway."

"Hmmm. What about Arthur Krantz? He's about as different from me as anybody could be."

"Booger Boy? Nobody likes that dork," Lane said.

"Besides, you and Krantz would kill each other before Election Day."

"How about a grown-up?"

"Good thinking!" Lane said. "Voters who don't want to vote for a kid might feel more comfortable if there was a grown-up on the ticket. Do you have anyone in mind?"

"My dad?"

"You can't have your dad be your Vice-President!"

I brainstormed for a few minutes, and then it hit me. "I know who would make a good running mate!" I exclaimed. "June Syers!"

Secret Campaign Strategy

"Who's June Syers?" Lane asked.

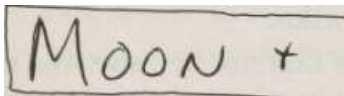
"You know, that old lady who's always sitting on her porch."

Lane started laughing, and I swear I thought he was going to collapse. He was rolling around clutching his sides and shaking. He almost fell out of the treehouse.

Then, suddenly, he stopped laughing. He sat up, said nothing for a few seconds, and announced excitedly, "I love it!"

Lane started scribbling frantically on his pad. "We already have the youth vote. The old lady will give us the African-American vote. She'll give us the senior citizen vote. She'll give us the handicapped vote! And she gives us a killer slogan, too!"

He held up the pad and showed me our first campaign banner . . .



JuAje

"You're brilliant. Moon! An absolute genius!" "It was nothing really," I said, polishing an imaginary apple. "I just like her."

We decided that I would talk with Mrs. Syers,

The Kid Who Ran for President

and Lane moved down the list to the next item he wanted to discuss.

"We've got to work on your image. Moon."

"What's wrong with my image?"

"Don't be so touchy! You don't even have an image yet. We have to give you one."

"I thought a person's image was the natural personality they give off."

"You're so naive. Moon," Lane said, shaking his head. "I've been thinking it over and one thing you definitely have to do is change your parakeet's name."

"Change Snot's name?!"

"You can't have a bird named Snot."

"That's her name!"

"It's disgusting!"

"It is Snot!"

"Why'd you name your parakeet Snot in the first place?" Lane asked.

"Well, when we first got her, she was always running around her cage."

"Yeah, so?"

"Like a nose," I explained. "She was always running. And she looks a little bit like a big nose, too."

Secret Campaign Strategy

"So you had to name her Snot? Why didn't you name her Nose or Shnozz? Even Booger would have been a better name."

"I like Snot!"

"How about Cuddles or Choo-Choo?" Lane suggested. "Something voters will find adorable."

I hated the idea of changing Snot's name. But as Lane pointed out, it would be a shame to lose votes just because my parakeet's name offended some people. So Snot became Cuddles.

"Now, our next order of business," Lane said, going down his list. "The First Babe."

"The First Babe?"

"Behind every great man stands a great woman. Moon. You've got to have a First Lady."

"That's a no-brainer. Lane. Abby Goldstein is the First Lady"

Lane took a few moments to find the right words. "Moon, I've given this a lot of thought, and I don't think Abby fits your image."

"I thought you said I don't have an image," I blurted out.

"She doesn't fit the image we want to give you."

The Kid Who Ran for President

"What's wrong with Abby?"

"Don't take this the wrong way. Moon, but it wouldn't hurt a kid running for the highest office in the country to have a real knockout with him. All those photo opportunities and everything."

I had never thought of Abby as someone who was pretty or not pretty I just thought of her as my friend.

"You think Abby's ugly?" I asked.

"I didn't say that. Moon. She's just sort of uh . . . normal. Tell me, what do you think of Chelsea Daniels?"

"You mean the girl with the long blond hair in science class? She's the most beautiful girl in the school. Doesn't she do fashion modeling or something?"

"She's the one."

"She doesn't even know who I am," I said.

"Once the word gets around that you're running for President, she'll know who you are. And it will help her modeling career to be seen with you."

"I don't know. Lane. Abby and I have been

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friends since we were babies. What will she think if some other girl is my First Babe?"

"Moon, you agreed to let me run the campaign and that you'd run to win," Lane said. "I say you get more votes with Chelsea at your side than with Abby at your side. Do me a favor and just ask Chelsea. Will you do that for me?"

"Okay," I said reluctantly.

So I had two girls to ask out. June Syers and Chelsea Daniels.

The First Babe

I spotted Chelsea walking home from school the next day and ran to catch up with her.

"Uh, excuse me, Chelsea?" I said awkwardly from behind.

"Oh, hi! I'm sorry, I don't know your name."

She turned around to face me. Chelsea Daniels is one of those twelve-year-old girls who looks like she's about eighteen in the magazine ads. I know it's not cool to think a girl is beautiful just because she has blond hair and blue eyes, but looking at Chelsea somehow makes the muscles in your face malfunction and you forget how to talk.

"Judson," I finally choked out. "Judson Moon."

"Hi, Judson Moon," she said. I recorded in my mental memory bank that Chelsea Daniels had

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The First Babe

actually spoken my name. The words "Judson Moon" had passed through her lips.

"Can I ask you a question, Chelsea?"

"I'm kinda in a hurry ..."

"It'll only take a minute. See, I'm running for President..."

"What, of the student council?"

"No. Of the United States."

She stared at me, then laughed. "Yeah?"

"And every President has to have a First Babe. I mean First Lady."

"Yeah ... ?"

"I was wondering if you might be my First Lady"

"Is somebody camcording me or something?" she said, looking around her. "Who put you up to this?"

"Nobody" I reached into my backpack and pulled one of the petitions Lane and I had been circulating. She looked it over.

"We don't have to date each other or anything, do we?" Chelsea asked, wrinkling her nose.

"No, of course not!" I assured her. "I might ask you to attend some functions with me. Parties and stuff..."

The Kid Who Ran for President

"Parties?!" she said, brightening. "Formal parties where I would get dressed up and there would be photographers and stuff?"

"Possibly," I said.

"Cool!" she said, finally smiling at me like I deserved to be on the same planet as her. "Do you think I would look better in a blue or a pink silk dress at the inauguration?"

It was as simple as that. I had my First Babe.

ir Vice-President Syers ^

Talking June Syers into being my Vice-Presidential running mate wouldn't be as easy as talking Chelsea Daniels into being my First Lady

When I got to Mrs. Syers' stoop, she wasn't there. I was just about to call the police when she wheeled out of her apartment door onto the porch.

"Hey, Mr. President!" she yelled. "How goes the campaign?"

"Mrs. Syers! I was worried. Where were you?"

"Ain't an old lady allowed to use the bathroom?" she complained.

"I want to ask you a serious question, Mrs. Syers."

"A boy your age shouldn't even have any serious questions yet."

The Kid Who Ran for President

"Would you consider being my Vice-President?"

"You crazy, Judson Moon. You always been crazy. You were a crazy baby You're a crazy kid. And you gonna be a crazy grown-up, too."

"Maybe, but I still would like you to be my running mate."

"Judson Moon, ain't you got some homework that needs doin' Shouldn't you be out playin' ball with your friends? Why do you want to get yourself messed up with this stuff?"

"C'mon, Mrs. Syers. It'll be fun!"

"Fun? Don't you know that bein' President is just about the worst job in the world? Everybody hates you no matter what you do. You can't go anywhere. They watch your every move. You say one wrong word or do one wrong thing and everybody jumps all over you. Then in four years they kick you out on your behind. Maybe eight. What do you need that for?"

"I don't expect to win or anything," I explained. "I just think it will be a hoot to run for President. And I can't think of anyone I'd rather do it with than you, Mrs."

Syers."

Vice-President Syers

"Ain't never been a lady Vice-President. Ain't never been a black Vice-President."

"There's never been a twelve-year-old President, either/' I pointed out. "Everything that's ever been done had to be done by somebody first, didn't it?"

"Why do you want me, anyhow? Why don't you pick some pretty boy politician?"

"Because you're the only grown-up I know who isn't stupid," I admitted.

"Well, you're right about that. But I'm too old. Maybe thirty years ago ..."

"You are not too old. And thirty years ago a black candidate or a woman candidate would have been a big joke. Today, it's not even surprising."

"You don't take no for an answer, do you, Judson Moon?"

"No."

"Oh, all right. Vice-Presidents don't do nothin' more than sit on a porch anyway. And somebody's gotta keep an eye on you, Judson Moon. I been doin' it all your life. Lord

knows your momma ain't never home."

The Kid Who Ran for President

"So you'll do it?" "Fll do it. I'll do it." "Mrs. Syers, I could kiss you!" "Save it for election night, Romeo." And so I had my First Lady and my running mate.

Twenty Million Dollars? ^ No Problem. ^

"It's time to talk turkey/' Lane said as we settled into the couch in my basement for our next strategy session. He was thrilled that Chelsea agreed to be First Lady and June Syers said she'd be my running mate. But he had other things on his mind.

"We're going to need money," Lane said. "A lot of money."

"I've got about two hundred dollars in my passbook savings," I offered. I was saving that money up to buy a CD-ROM drive, and hoped Lane would tell me we wouldn't need it.

"You're kidding, right?" he said. "You think you can run for President on two hundred bucks?"

"Maybe I can borrow a little more from my folks."

The Kid Who Ran for President

"Two hundred dollars won't even buy you a good sz^zf. Moon!"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "You didn't tell me I would have to wear a suit."

"Of course you've got to wear a suit. Presidential candidates always wear suits."

"I hate suits," I complained. "I had to wear a suit for my uncle's wedding. It was awful."

"Then you've already got a suit."

"So I don't have to buy one. That's two hundred dollars we saved right there."

"Moon, we're gonna need twenty million."

"Twenty million ... dollars?" I gulped.

"That's just to get started. We'll need more as we get closer to Election Day."

"What costs so much that we need that kind of money?"

Lane ticked off all the things that cost money in an election campaign — commercial time on TV and radio, airfare, office space, staff, telephone bills, printing. Plus bumper stickers, T-shirts, balloons, banners. I guess that's why you don't see poor people running for

President.

"Hey, I've got an idea," I said enthusiastically.

Twenty Million Dollars? No Problem.

"Why don't we get a sponsor for the campaign?"

"What do you mean, a sponsor?"

"You know, like McDonald's or Nike or some other big company. They give us twenty million dollars and I could tell people to eat at McDonald's."

"Are you out of your mind. Moon? What are you going to say at your inauguration — I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and everybody should eat more Egg McMuffins?"

"Athletes endorse stuff," I said sheepishly.

"Well, politicians don't. At least not legally."

"Wasn't Herbert Hoover sponsored by that vacuum cleaner company?"

"Hoover was his name, brainless! Besides, companies aren't allowed to contribute to political campaigns. You're only allowed to take contributions of a thousand dollars or less."

"Lighten up. Lane. I was kidding about Hoover. So we need a lot of people giving a little money each, right?"

The Kid Who Ran for President

"Now you're getting it. And it's got to add up to about twenty million."

"Oh, well, I didn't want to be President so badly anyway."

"You give up too easily. Moon. I know how we can raise twenty million dollars with two phone calls."

10. rd Say It Sounds ir like a Fake ^

Lane picked up the phone and called directory assistance. "In Madison, can you give me the number for the Capital Times?" he asked sweetly. I noticed a copy of the newspaper next to him on the couch.

He jotted down the number and started to dial. As the phone was ringing, he motioned for me to go into another room and pick up an extension.

"Capital Times/' a lady answered after almost ten rings.

"Give me the news desk, please," Lane said.

"FU connect you."

"News," a gruff male voice said after the transfer was

made.

"May I speak with Pete Guerra, please?" Lane asked.

The Kid Who Ran for President

"Where's Guerra?" the guy shouted. "Guerra, phone!" He put the receiver down and I could hear the buzz of a newsroom in the background.

Finally, another guy came to the phone. "Guerra here. Whatsup?"

"Mr. Guerra," Lane said in his most grown-up voice, "I saw your article about the baby seals in the paper today and wanted to tell you that you did a terrific job."

"What are you, ten years old?" Pete Guerra didn't sound impressed by the compliment.

"I'm twelve," Lane said.

"Kid, I'm on deadline. Whaddya want?"

"I think I have a story for you, Mr. Guerra."

"What are ya' sellin'?"

"I'm not selling anything."

"Kid, everybody's selling something. You might as well learn that while you're young."

"Mr. Guerra, what would you say if I told you there was a boy my age who is running for the office of President of the United States?"

"I'd say it sounds like a fake. Sonny, if you like pranks, why don't you call Pizza Hut and tell them to deliver a pie to the house across the street from you? 'Cause I got a lot of work to do."

^ I'd Say It Sounds Like a Fake

"You'd have less work if you followed this story and won the Pulitzer Prize in journalism."

"Okay, kid," Guerra said wearily "Don't tell me, let me guess. You're runnin' for President because you think it'll get you an A in social studies, right?"

"I'm not running. The candidate is a remarkable young gentleman named Judson Moon. He's in sixth grade at the Georgia O'Keeffe Middle School right here in Madison, and he's quite serious about his candidacy. He already has two thousand signatures on a petition, which qualifies him to be on the ballot in Wisconsin next November."

"One problem, kid," Guerra said. "Ever read the Constitution? Kids aren't allowed to be President."

"Oh yeah?" said Lane. "Well, women and African-Americans used to not be allowed to vote."

"Who are you, the kid's campaign manager?"

"As a matter of fact, I am. My name is Lane Brainard, spelled just the way it sounds. I think Moon's bid for the Presidency is a great human

The Kid Who Ran for President

interest story, Mr. Guerra. It's at least as interesting as a bunch of baby seals."

"Hey don't knock the seals," Guerra warned. "They lost their mother."

"And when Judson Moon wins this election in November, 2000, you're going to feel pretty dumb for not breaking the story when you had the chance. Because Mr. Guerra, as you and I both know, everybody's selling something. What you're selling is your reputation as a journalist. And the story of a kid running for President of the United States will be the biggest story of your career."

Man, Lane was smooth. Guerra didn't say anything for a moment or two.

"Put Moon on the phone," he finally barked.

"Mr. Moon is unavailable to speak right now. But he will give you an exclusive interview if you come to 301 Spaight Street tomorrow morning at ten. Unless, of course, you've got to cover another animal story ..."

"I'll be there," Guerra said.

"Good. You might want to bring a camera with you. It will be a nice photo opportunity."

I'd Say It Sounds Like a Fake

"Hey kid?"

"Yes?"

"I like your chutzpah."

"Thank you."

I ran into the den as soon as they hung up the phone.

"Man, you were awesome!" I told Lane. "What's chutzpah?"

"How should I know? The important thing is, he's gonna be here tomorrow."

"But there's one thing I don't understand. Lane. How is this gonna get us twenty million dollars?"

"You'll see," he said with a gleam in his eye. "You'll see."

The lemonade Party if

It was a bright sunny Saturday morning. Lane showed up at nine o'clock, \vheoUni: June Svers who was holding an

enormous basket of lemons on her lap

M\ - rolks were ahvad\ - gone tor the day; attending seminars to help them sell more carpet tiles and cardboard boxes.

**! hate suits/' I said, pulling at mv collar.

**\ou lov ^k outstanding Lane said. "Very presidential

Lane and I set up a long table at : . . c the lawTi and Mrs. Syers got to \n orK nak ng lemonade.

I dug some long sticks of wood out of the K\sement and nailed cardboard to them. Lane has nicer handwriting ttian I do so be painted

The Lemonade Party

three signs: moon & JUNE for president, help us! WE NEED \$20 million! and lemonade 25 cents.

"Twenty million dollars?" whistled Mrs. Syers. "I'm gonna need more lemons."

"It's just a symbol" Lane explained, blowing up balloons to hang on the booth. "Grown-ups get all misty-eyed when they see lemonade stands. It reminds 'em of the good old days."

"There zvere no good old days," harumphed Mrs. Syers.

"The good old days is anything that happens before you're old enough to see the world as it really is."

I li\`e on a pretty busy street. Cars started pulling over right away and soon our lemonade stand was surrounded by people.

"Hi!" I said to each person cheerfully. "My name is Judson Moon. I'm twelve years old and I'm running for President of the YOU-nited States."

"Keep smiling," Lane w^hispered in my ear. "And don't say anything that will make anybody angry. Kiss some babies."

"I'm not really into kissing," I complained. "Do I have to?"

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"Then hug people."

"Fm not very good at it," I admitted. "I never know which side I should put my head. If I put my head toward the left and if the other person puts her head toward the right, we bump heads. Can't I just punch 'em on the arm?"

We never had the chance to solve the problem. A beat-up Chevy Nova pulled up, followed by a minivan. A sloppily dressed guy got out of the Nova. He was carrying a pad in his hand and a pencil behind his ear.

"Judson Moon?" he said, sticking out his hand. "My name is Pete Guerra, with the Cap Times. I figured you wouldn't mind if I brought a few of the TV newsboys with me."

A couple of guys got out of the minivan lugging video cameras, still cameras, a tripod, tape recorder, and microphone. They took a bunch of pictures of me serving people lemonade, and then Lane ushered us off to the side so Pete Guerra could interview me.

"So why ya running for President, kid?"

"Well, I figure grown-ups have had the last one thousand years to mess up the world. Now it's our turn."

The Lemonade Party

"That's a good quote/' Guerra said, looking up from the pad he was scribbling on. "Did you think of that yourself or did your campaign manager feed it to you?"

"Lane's job is to run the campaign," I explained. "My job, as a candidate for the highest office in our nation, is to come up with good quotes."

"Ya got any pets, kid?"

"A parakeet," I replied. "Her name is Sn — Cuddles," I lied.

"Okay, let's get down to more serious business, Judson. People are going to want to know what positions you take."

"I play third base," I said. "Sometimes I'll play the outfield if the coach needs me out there."

Guerra rolled his eyes and shook his head from side to side. "No, I mean your positions on the issues. Your opinions. Like, what do you think about gun control?"

"Guns don't kill people. They usually just cause serious injuries."

"What about race?"

"I love all the races. My dream is to see the Indianapolis 500 and the Kentucky Derby someday."

The Kid Who Ran for President

"What's the first thing you plan to do when you become President?"

"Install a skateboard ramp in the Oval Office and redecorate the White House with heavy metal posters."

"When did you decide to run for President, Judson?"

"When I found out the White House had a bowling alley"

When Guerra had enough of my wisecracks, he moved over to June Syers, who was dispensing her worldview for free with every cup of lemonade.

"Mrs. Syers," asked Guerra. "How did you become Judson Moon's running mate?"

"Musta been my good looks and sparkling personality," she said.

"Does Moon have what it takes to lead the country?"

"He can't hardly do any worse than the fools who are runnin' it now, can he?" she said. Then she proceeded to give him a capsule history of the United States, which basically consisted of saying the Indians were fools, the Pilgrims were fools, the Founding Fathers were fools, the

The Lemonade Party

Union and the Confederacy were fools, and every politician except Franklin D. Roosevelt was a fool.

"And I oughta know," she concluded, " 'cause I lived through all of 'em."

As soon as Guerra and the TV guys left. Lane began tearing down our stand. Mrs. Syers counted up the money, and proudly announced that we had raised sixty-five dollars. There was a lot more lemonade we could have sold, but Lane wasn't interested.

"The idea wasn't to sell lemonade," he said. "The idea was to make news. The money will come later."

Homework First,

^ Campaigning later ^

"Turn on channel three!" Lane shouted breathlessly into the phone that night while I was eating dinner.

Dad and Mom didn't seem to be paying attention to the TV, so I switched channels.

"After these messages," the anchorman bellowed, "we'll tell you about a twelve-year-old boy who says he's running for President. Stay tuned."

"Where do they get these stupid stories?" Dad muttered from behind his newspaper.

I didn't say a word. I wanted to see the look on his face. After three commercials, the news anchor came back on.

"Well, they say that in America any youngster can grow up to be President. But at least one youngster isn't going to wait. Twelve-year-old

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Homework First, Campaigning Later

Judson Moon of Madison is throwing his baseball cap into the ring right now/

Mom and Dad actually lowered their newspapers and looked at the TV. My face filled the screen and Dad's jaw fell open. Mom dropped the glass she was holding and it shattered on the floor.

"Grown-ups have had the last one thousand years to mess up the world/ I heard myself say "Now it's our turn."

"Moon will be running as a third party candidate representing The Lemonade Party/ for the Presidency in November/" the anchorman continued. "The sixth-grader and his running mate — an elderly African-American woman named June Syers — have already collected the two thousand signatures they need to get on the ballot in Wisconsin, and they're raising money by selling lemonade at a stand in front of Judson's house. We asked Mr. Moon how he plans to get around the Constitution, which clearly states that a candidate must be thirty-five years of age to run for the Presidency."

"I'm actually thirty-six," I said to the camera

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with a smirk. "Fm just extremely young for my age."

"That's our news for tonight. Good night and may all your

news be good news."

Before Mom or Dad could say a word, the phone rang. It was my Aunt Lucy.

"Am I hallucinating!?" she shrieked. "Or did I just see you on TV?"

The instant I hung up the phone with Aunt Lucy, it rang again. It was one of my teachers. When I hung up with her, the phone rang again. Kids from school were calling. Mom's friends were calling. Total strangers were calling. Finally, Dad took the phone off the hook.

"Is this one of your pranks?" he asked. I wasn't sure if he was angry or amused.

"It's sort of a prank," I replied. "I don't expect to win or anything. You're always telling me I should get involved with extracurricular activities. Well..."

"I meant you should join the chess club or the school paper or something!" he said, his voice rising. "I didn't mean you should run for President!"

Homework First, Campaigning Later

"Why didn't you tell us, dear?" asked Mom.

"I did tell you. Mom. You just weren't listening."

"Well, I think it's cute, honey," she said, "as long as it doesn't interfere with your schoolwork. Remember, homework first, running for President second."

Dad just rolled his eyes and shook his head slowly from side to side.

13. A Star Is Born

In the morning, I got up early and rushed outside to get the paper. There I was on the front page, with this big smile on my face, pouring some lady a cup of lemonade. There was an article to go with the photo:

MOON MISSION: 12-year-old (I on Quest for White House

By Peter Guerra

While other boys his age are flipping baseball cards and dyeing their hair purple, Judson Moon has other things on his mind — like running for President of the United States.

The 12-year-old from Madison says he is disillusioned with the Republicans and Democrats and has decided to mount a campaign as a third party candidate in November's election.

"Grown-ups have had a thousand years to mess up the world," claims Moon. "Now it's our turn."

A Star Is Born

The young man, outfitted in a suit and tie, was raising money on Saturday by selling lemonade in front of his house for 25 cents a cup. He will have to sell 180 million cups to raise \$20 million, the figure he says he needs to mount a national campaign.

Moon's running mate and fellow lemonade saleswoman is Mrs. June Syers, a retired nurse who used to baby-sit for the candidate.

"We're a perfect team," Moon says. "I'm young and she's old. I'm white and she's black. I'm dumb and she's smart."

Watch out. Democrats! Stand back. Republicans! Here comes The Lemonade Party!

Word gets around fast. When I walked into school on Monday morning, it was like I was from another planet. Everywhere I went, everybody was looking at me, pointing, and whispering. I'd walk toward a crowd of kids and they'd part to let me through.

Pretty weird!

Abby wished me good luck. Several of the teachers gave me the thumbs-up sign. Even Chelsea came over to me.

"You weren't kidding about running for President, were you?" she said, a lot friendlier than she was when we met.

The Kid Who Ran for President

"No, I wasn't/" I replied. "You weren't kidding about being First Lady, were you?"

"Actually I was/" she said. "But now that I know you're really doing this, you can count on me."

Arthur Krantz made a face when he saw me, and I made the same face right back at him. As every politician knows, you can't please everybody.

At first I didn't like all the attention, but by lunchtime I had changed my mind and decided that it was kinda cool. I could definitely get used to being a celebrity.

I was signing an autograph for some third-grader at my locker when Principal Berlin came over to me. I had never met the man, as it's always been my policy to stay away from principals as much as possible. But he stuck out his hand and congratulated me.

"Mr. Moon," he said, clapping me on the back. "You are a credit to O'Keeffe School. I wish all the students had your ambition. Listen, Judson, I was wondering if you would address the

A Star Is Born

school at the assembly tomorrow morning. You can kick

off your campaign right here at O'Keeffe."

"Fm ... speechless/" I stammered.

"Well, I hope you won't be tomorrow!" he chortled. With that, he turned on his heel and ambled down the hall.

I grabbed Lane in the cafeteria.

"I'm in big trouble!" I told him. "Berlin wants me to give a speech at assembly tomorrow!"

"Great!" was Lane's reaction.

"But the only time I ever spoke in front of a group, it was my parents. And they weren't even listening! What am I gonna do?"

"Don't worry!" Lane said reassuringly. "You think politicians make up their own speeches? I'll write a dynamite speech for you. All you have to do is read it."

"But I'm not even a good reader!" I complained.

"Relax! This is perfect. It's a small school setting. A friendly crowd. This will give you the opportunity to get used to making speeches. Judd, everything is going to be okay."

The Kid Who Ran for President

That was easy for him to say. He didn't have to stand up on the stage all by himself with three hundred and fifty kids staring at him.

I had started this whole running for President thing as a joke. But like all jokes, it was getting less funny the more I heard it.

Give the People What They Want

JUDSON MOON FOR PRESIDENT read the huge banner strung across the stage. It looked like every American flag in the school had been moved into the auditorium. I peeked from behind the curtain and saw my classmates sitting out there, buzzing with excitement. The school band was playing "Hail to the Chief." The podium looked like a lonely place to be.

Lane straightened my tie for me and handed me some sheets of paper.

"What does it say?" I asked.

"It's a pretty standard political speech," he replied. "You know, the flag, patriotism. Stuff like that."

"Fm scared. Lane. What am I doing here?"

"Starting the adventure of a lifetime," he said with a smile. "You'll be great. Can you feel the

The Kid Who Ran for President

energy out there? Feed off it! Throw their energy right back at them!"

I didn't have any time to read Lane's speech. Principal Berlin got up onstage. He held his hand up and made the V-sign with his fingers, which in our school means everybody has to stop talking right away.

"Students," the principal said when everybody calmed down, "I have been at O'Keeffe School for eighteen years. In that time I have met many remarkable young men and women. But never in my years here have I run across a student with the ambition of this young man. I asked him here today to give his first public speech and kick off his campaign. I hope he will be an example to you all. Let's give a big hand for the next President of the United States, our own . . . Judson Moon!"

Lane gave me a little shove and I walked to the podium.

The applause was deafening. I've heard applause before, of course. But never for me. When the applause is for you, it somehow sounds different. You hear the hands clapping with your ears, but it just washes over you. You

Give the People What They Want

can't tell how loud it is or how long it goes on. You go into a sort of trance state.

Finally, the kids hushed themselves. The whole school was staring at me. I fumbled for the papers Lane had given me. It took all my concentration to read the words. It didn't matter what they said. I just didn't want to make any dumb mistakes.

"Fellow students," I began, "we are making history today. Never, in the two-hundred-and-twenty-three-year history of the United States of America, has a child — one of us — run for the office of President. That's what I am doing, and I come here today to ask for your support."

Some kids started cheering and hooting. A chant of "MOON! MOON! MOON! MOON!" swept across the auditorium. The teachers did their best to shush the kids. I waited until everybody calmed down before continuing.

"I'm sure you're aware of the problems our country faces today. Crime. Environmental disaster. Unemployment. Racism. Inflation. Too much homework..."

That got a laugh.

"Let me ask you this," I continued. "Who is

The Kid Who Ran for President

responsible for these problems? Is it Congress?

Foreigners? Rich people? Poor people? Black people? White people? Women? Men? No, there is one group who is totally to blame for all the problems in our country today, and I'll tell you who that group is."

I paused for a moment to find my place on the page.

"Grown-ups!" I shouted.

The kids went nuts. A cheer went up. Kids were stomping their feet. The teachers began to look around at each other nervously.

"That's who's responsible for the problems of our country. Tell me, who's responsible for housing discrimination, sex discrimination, and race discrimination?"

"Grown-ups!" they screamed.

"Who ripped a hole in the ozone layer, cut down the rain forests, made our water unsafe to drink, and our air unsafe to breathe?"

"Grown-ups!" they screamed even louder.

"Who brought on the health care crisis?"

"Grown-ups!"

"Who caused every war in the history of this planet?"

Give the People What They Want

"Grown-ups'/'

"That's right! Kids had nothing to do with any of these problems. Tell me this—are grown-ups going to solve all these problems they created?"

"No!" the whole school shouted.

"That's right," I said, more confidently. "In the next millennium, it's gonna be up to us to solve the problems created in the last millennium. And the way I look at it, the first step is for a kid to run for President in 2000. And win!"

They were in the palm of my hand now. I could feel it. Every student was silent and staring at me, even the eighth-grade jerks who never shut up for anything. I felt like I could tell them that the earth was really flat and they'd agree with me.

I spotted Chelsea in the front row. She was looking at me in awe.

"Now, we all know that none of us can vote yet," I continued. "The grown-ups made sure of that, didn't they? What I want each of you to do is convince your parents to vote for me. You may have to beg them. You may have to put a little pressure on them. But if you want to solve these problems I've been talking about, do

whatever

The Kid Who Ran for President

you can to get your moms and dads to vote for me. Because if they vote for another grown-up, we'll only have the same old problems grownups have caused over the last two hundred and twenty-three years/'

"MOON! MOON! MOON! MOON! MOON! MOON!" they chanted. It took a while before I could continue.

"My fellow students, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, 'What's in it for me?' Well, I'll tell you what's in it for you. In appreciation for your support, my first official act as President of the United States will be to abolish homework, now and forever!"

A huge roar of approval went up across the auditorium. Clapping. Screaming. Foot stomping. The whole room was shaking. It felt like a football game. The teachers were flipping out.

I felt an exhilarating surge of power I had never experienced before. They were cheering because of me. They were whipped up because of what I was saying. It was a rush.

"If your parents vote for me," I bellowed into the microphone, "homework will go the way of the horse and buggy."

Give the People What They Want

Fists were pumping in the air.

"Homework will become a quaint reminder of what life was like back in the twentieth century!"

Kids were jumping up and down on their seats.

"In the new millennium, the only place you'll see homework will be in museums!"

It was pandemonium. I paused to allow them to calm down a little. I didn't want to incite a riot or anything.

I noticed a boy standing in the middle of the auditorium, raising his hand and shouting insistently, "Excuse me!" Peering at him, I could see it was that jerk Arthur Krantz.

"Yes, Mr. Krantz," I called out. "You have a comment?"

"First of all, the President of the United States has no power to abolish homework. None. Zero. Second, we need homework. Doing homework is how students reinforce what we learn at school! Homework is a good thing."

I glanced over to Lane at the side of the stage for some advice. He was mouthing some words to me, but I couldn't make them out. I was never

The Kid Who Ran for President

any good at reading lips. But watching him gave me an idea.

"READ MY LIPS, BOOGER BOY!" I bellowed. "NO ... MORE ... HOMEWORK!"

"NO MORE HOMEWORK! NO MORE HOMEWORK! NO MORE HOMEWORK!" chanted the school as one. The kids around Krantz told him to shut up and sit down.

"You're just making empty promises to get votes!" Krantz shouted at me. "Your candidacy is a joke! Your running mate is a grown-up, you hypocrite! You don't know anything about anything. You're going to make all kids look bad!"

A group of boys jumped on Krantz and started punching him. Some teachers rushed over to pull the boys off him. Krantz was taken out of the auditorium holding his hand over his eye.

I glanced at my speech and saw I was almost at the bottom.

"Fellow students, our grandparents had their chance to save America. They blew it! Our parents had their chance to save America. They

Give the People What They Want

blew it! Now it's a new millennium and our generation is going to get our chance. Let's not blow it! The time has come to pass the torch to a new generation. Ask not what your parents can do for you. Ask what you can do for yourselves! Kids are the only hope for America. Thank you."

"NO MORE HOMEWORK!" the kids chanted as I left the podium. "NO MORE HOMEWORK!"

As I came off the stage. Principal Berlin looked at me like I was an insect. The teachers looked like they were in shock.

The kids, of course, looked thrilled. The dumbest guys seemed particularly happy, slapping me on the back and saying stuff like, "Awesome, dude."

"Looks as if you've got the kids' vote," Lane said, giving me a hug.

"Don't you think that went a little too far. Lane?" I asked. "Krantz was right, you know. I can't promise to get rid of homework! That's crazy!"

"It's the first rule of politics, Judd. Give the people what they want."

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Lane led me over to a guy waiting backstage. "Judson," he said, "I want to introduce you to Steve Bloom. He's with the AP."

"Pleased to meet you/' I said as I shook the guy's hand. "My mom does her grocery shopping at your store."

"Not the A&P, Judd," Lane said, chuckling. "The A-P Associated Press."

"Which paper is that?" I asked.

"All of them," Bloom replied. "When I write a story, the AP sells it to hundreds of newspapers. Sometimes thousands."

"Wow!" I marveled. "And they haven't been caught?"

He thought that was funny.

"When Ann Landers writes her advice column, she doesn't write a different article for every newspaper in America," Bloom explained. "She writes it once and they run it in a thousand papers or so. That's called syndication."

"Are you going to write an article about me that's going to be in a thousand papers?" I asked.

"Maybe more."

I gulped. Lane was beaming from ear to ear.

Give the People What They Want

He was taking this run for President seriously. He must have taken the clipping that appeared in the Capital Times and sent it to the Associated Press.

One day I was a fairly anonymous kid who liked to ride his bike and go fishing. The next day, virtually every man, woman, and child in America would know my name.

15. America Is Callinsi

The instant I opened my eyes the next morning, I knew my life would never be the same.

The phone rang at 5:30. A lady asked if I was Judson Moon. When I told her I was, she said, "Judson, Fm Cory Kaydic with The Today Show. Could I talk with you live on the air this morning?"

"Very funny," I said groggily, and hung up the phone. It was too early for practical jokes.

But as soon as the receiver hit the cradle, the phone rang again.

"Judson Moon?" a woman's voice asked. "The boy who's running for President?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Rebecca Gardner, talent coordinator with America Is Calling

The Tonight Show. Would you be available to appear on our program tomorrow night?"

"I don't know/" I mumbled. "I have a lot of homework this week."

"We'll charter a flight for you," she offered. "First class hotel. Limousine. Would you like to visit Disneyland while you're here? I can arrange that."

"Can you call me back in five minutes?" I asked.

I hung up the phone and it rang again.

"Judson, this is Cory Kaydic again. Listen, I'm sorry I woke you up. But it's a morning show and we have to get going pretty early ..."

"Call back in five minutes!" I snapped at her.

I wanted to get Lane on the phone, but every time I put down the receiver, the phone would ring again.

Somebody from People magazine called saying they wanted to put me on the cover. The National Enquirer

wanted to buy the rights to my life story Finally I was able to speed-dial Lane.

"You gotta get over here!" I practically shouted into the phone. "America is calling!"

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"The Associated Press story must have hit the papers," he said. "I'll be right over. Let me handle everything."

I hung up the phone and it rang again. It was Mrs. Syers. She complained that Entertainment Tonight had woken her up at five o'clock in the morning begging to interview her.

I took the phone off the hook while waiting for Lane to bike over to my house. Mom and Dad rushed out to work before I had the chance to ask them if I could stay home from school. Lane wheeled into the driveway right after my folks pulled out of it.

The phone rang about a second after we put the receiver back on the cradle.

"Moon campaign headquarters," Lane answered matter-of-factly.

Everybody who was anybody was trying to get through. Nightline wanted me and Mrs. Syers on the show. MTV wanted to follow me around for a day with their cameras.

Some Japanese TV station was willing to fly an entire camera crew to America to interview me. Cory Kay die called again.

America Is Calling

Lane cut a deal with a big New York publisher for my life story. He told Pepsi I don't do commercial endorsements. Watching Lane work the phone was like watching a master potter mold a vase out of clay.

When the smoke had cleared, Mrs. Syers and I were scheduled to appear on The Today Show, The Tonight Show, The Late Show, The Late Late Show, and Good Morning America. I would be on the cover of People, Sports Illustrated for Kids, Time, and Boy's Life.

Hard Copy wanted me to go on their show, but only if I didn't appear on any other TV shows. Lane told them to buzz off. He turned down requests from the TV shows, magazines, and newspapers he never heard of.

"Why did you turn down Meet the Press?" I asked Lane. "T thought that was your favorite show."

"You're not ready to meet the press," he replied.

In the middle of all this, I managed to get through to school and tell them I wouldn't be coming in. I told the secretary I had a funny

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feeling in the pit of my stomach, which was absolutely true. She had read the papers, and said she thought everybody would understand.

By ten o'clock, reporters started gathering out on the front lawn, setting up cameras and satellite hookups. Some guy was trying to interview me with a bullhorn. I pulled the shades down. It was like *The Night of the Living Dead*, when the zombies are trying to claw their way into the house.

We decided to let just one reporter in — Pete Guerra, the guy who came out to the lemonade stand and wrote the first story about my run for the Presidency.

"The power of the press," muttered Guerra after pushing his way through the mob of reporters and through the front door. "You're gonna have to reseed your lawn. Moon. Reporters are worse than animals."

Pete sat down on the living room couch and asked a few questions. When he was finished, he asked me if I would mind a little friendly advice. I told him I would appreciate any tips he might have.

America Is Calling

"You kids are new at this," he said. "Lots of people want you. Moon. But there's something you should know.

Nobody out there is your friend. Everybody wants a piece of you. To sell newspapers or magazines. To improve their TV or radio ratings. To make money All I'm sayin' is, be careful. Don't trust anybody. America chews up celebrities and spits 'em out. I hate to see a nice kid like you get burned."

I thanked Pete for the advice. It was obvious that he was more than just a reporter. I could count on him as a friend.

As Pete pushed his way out the door and through the throng of reporters and cameramen on the front lawn, I spotted Gus, our mailman. Lane and I ushered him inside.

"They say dogs with rabies are dangerous!" Gus said, handing me a thick stack of letters. "Some guy just offered me fifty bucks to give you a note."

"What did you tell him, Gus?"

"I told him he could get it here a lot cheaper if he'd just put a stamp on it."

Usually the mail is a bunch of catalogs and coupons and other junk. But the pile of mail Gus

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handed me was a bunch of letters in regular size envelopes with my name and address written on them by

hand. I pulled out one envelope and ripped it open.

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A check for \$34.25 fluttered to the ground. I ripped open another envelope. It was from a kid in Arkansas who put up a lemonade stand. \$52.50 in bills and change tumbled out.

Lane and I put all the envelopes on the floor and started furiously ripping them open. There were about fifty of them. Some were simply addressed "judson moon, madison, Wisconsin."

America Is Calling

Some of the letters were from kids who put up lemonade stands. Other kids had car washes, bake sales, or yard sales. Kids were actually selling their own toys to raise money for me!

With each letter was a check or a bunch of bills. The largest contribution was \$103.

We counted up all the money and it came to \$2,568.75. We felt like we had won the lottery

"You're a genius," I told Lane.

"And you/" Lane said, clapping a hand on my back, "are becoming America's hero."

The Customer Is ^ Always Risfht ^

In the next few days, Americans must have guzzled a lot of lemonade. Poor Gus showed up at the door with an enormous sackful of envelopes. He looked like Santa Claus. Money and gifts poured in from all over the country.

Deep in the pile was a card that said I had a package waiting for me at the post office, and that I should come get it right away. I went over there to pick it up and the package was a dog — a little cocker spaniel I named Chester. I always wanted a dog, so at least something came out of running for President.

Lane took care of all the details. He opened a bank account and carefully recorded each donation. He rented office space and coordinated volunteers to run it. An artist was hired to draw a picture of the moon with a photo of

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The Customer Is Always Right

my face in the middle of it. The logo was used on our bumper stickers, T-shirts, buttons, and flyers.

The campaign was picking up speed, and Chelsea was

acting more and more friendly to me at school. She came up to me at my locker one day and said she had something important she wanted to talk about.

"I've been reading up on the First Ladies," she said, "and they always have something they're crusading for. Y'know — keeping America beautiful, reading, women's rights, and stuff."

"Is there some cause you want to crusade for?" I asked her.

"Well, I was thinking, do you know how many silkworms die to make a silk blouse?"

"I have no idea, Chelsea."

"Lots!" she exclaimed.

"So you want people to boycott silk clothes?" It seemed like a weird cause to me.

"No!" she exclaimed, horrified. "I love silk clothes! I want to lead a crusade in favor of better conditions for those poor silkworms."

At first I thought she was putting me on, but the vacant look in her eyes told me she was

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absolutely serious. For all I know, silkworms are an endangered species.

"I say go for it, Chelsea," I said. "If you believe in a cause, you have to fight for it."

Mom and Dad could no longer pretend I was just fooling around. When Dad knocked on my bedroom door one night at bedtime and asked if we could have a little talk, I was surprised. The last time we had a man-to-man, I had just run over his vegetable garden with the snowblower.

Dad sat down on my bed and fiddled with the globe on my night table.

"I don't know much about politics, Judd," he said. "All I know is cardboard boxes. But somehow, I figure they're pretty much the same."

This I wanted to hear.

"When I sell a customer a pallet of boxes, I want those boxes to be strong. That's the main thing. If the boxes are weak and fall apart, that customer will never buy a box from me again."

"The President has to be strong too, right. Dad?"

The Customer Is Always Right

"Right. But it's not good enough to just be strong. A box

has to have other good qualities. It has to hold lots of stuff. It has to stack easily. It can't weigh too much. You have to be able to put it together quickly. And it has to be labeled clearly so people know exactly what's inside it."

"A President has to be a lot like a box, right. Dad?"

"In a way, yes."

For just about the first time in my life. Dad and I were communicating ... in an odd sort of way.

"Dad?" I asked. "What would you do if your customers really liked a box, but you knew perfectly well that the box was poor quality?"

"Simple," he replied instantly. "I'd sell him the box."

"Even though you know it's not right?"

"The customer is always right, Judd," he said. "That's the first rule of selling. You've got to give the customers what they want."

"But what if the customers are stuck with a piece of garbage?"

"That's their problem," he explained as he got

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up from the bed. "They get what they pay for. Maybe next time they'll use a little sense and pick a better box."

"Thanks, Dad," I said. He flipped off my light and I thought about that before falling asleep.

let the Kid Run!

It says it right there in the Constitution . . .

"No Person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President; neither shall any Person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained the Age of thirty five Years, and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States."

After the Associated Press article appeared, lots of newspapers ran follow-up stories that included that passage from the Constitution. They said my candidacy was nothing more than a big joke, because by law no twelve-year-old could be President of the United States.

But Lane didn't think it was a joke.

"The Constitution can be changed, y'know,"

n

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he said as we settled in for our next strategy session at the treehouse, which we had renamed Tranquility Base.

"Yeah, right/" I scoffed. "We'll just go to Washington, sneak in there with some Wite-Out and get rid of the part that says the President has to be thirty-five years old."

"No, Moon. Haven't you heard of constitutional amendments?"

"Sure I have," I said, not very sure what they were. "The Bill of Rights and stuff."

"The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the Constitution," Lane explained. "There have been twenty-six altogether."

"They changed the Constitution twenty-six times!?"

"Yeah. See, the guys who wrote the Constitution knew the world was gonna change. They figured that if the Constitution couldn't be changed with it, the people of the future might weird out and have another revolution. So the Fifteenth Amendment gave people the right to vote regardless of race. The Nineteenth gave women the right to vote, and the

Let the Kid Run!

Twenty-sixth gave eighteen-year-olds the right to vote/'

"How do you know so much. Lane?"

"I read. I study I learn. You should try it sometime. Moon."

"So how do you change the Constitution?"

Lane pulled out our history textbook and leafed through it until he found the passage in the Constitution he was looking for.

"Listen to this. Moon," he read. "The Congress, whenever two-thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose Amendments to this Constitution."

He ran his finger down a few lines until he came to the key words. "Oh, here it is ... 'when ratified by the Legislatures of three-fourths of the several States,' So two-thirds of the Congress has to propose the amendment, and then the legislatures of three-fourths of the states have to vote in favor of it."

It didn't seem very likely that could ever happen, but the next day a very interesting article appeared in the editorial page of The New York Times. ...

The Kid Who Ran for President

LETTHEKIDRDN!

By Louis Bixby

The recent Presidential candidacy of young Judson Moon of Madison, Wisconsin, has been treated like a national joke in the press. Everyone knows the President of the United States must be 35 years old, so why doesn't this little boy go back to his lemonade stand and leave this important political stuff to us grown-ups?

I have one thing to say about that — let the kid run!

It is time for someone to propose a constitutional amendment to eliminate all age restrictions on running for political office.

This is a free country, last time I looked. All of us have the right to assemble, say or publish anything we want, choose our religion, and enjoy all the other unalienable rights granted in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Shouldn't we all have the right to run for political office?

Why is a 35-year-old man — or woman — qualified to be President but a 34-year-old is not? Perhaps the best person to run the country is 30 years old, or even 20 years old.

Who knows? Maybe the best person to lead us into the new millennium is twelve years old. Probably not. But shouldn't that young person have the right to try?

The right to run for office should not be withheld due to sex,

Let the Kid Run!

race, or age. Judson Moon should have the right to run for President if he wants to. If the kid gets trounced, as he most certainly will, it will be a valuable life lesson for him. And perhaps for us all.

The media had sort of lost interest in the Moon & June campaign after the first wave of publicity, but this was like a match had been dropped into a pool of gasoline. The next day you couldn't turn on the radio without hearing people arguing about the "lemonade stand amendment/' as they were calling it.

Some callers would chant "LET THE KID RUN! LET THE KID RUN!" and hang up. Others would say how children don't have the maturity, intelligence, or experience to handle a position of responsibility.

"I've got a twelve-year-old son," one lady commented, "and he can't even drink soup without dribbling it all over his shirt!"

"Thank God that lady's kid ain't runnin' for President!" another caller cracked.

The newspaper columnists jumped into the debate. Celebrities were asked to take a stand on the issue. Picket lines formed outside state

The Kid Who Ran for President

capitals with people marching around holding LET THE KID RUN! signs.

USA Today took a poll and found that 64% of all Americans and 99% of all kids felt there should be a constitutional amendment eliminating all age restrictions on running for political office. Congress debated the issue on C-SPAN, and the nation was glued to the tube like we had landed an astronaut on Mars or something.

The children of America decided it was up to them to get this amendment passed. At first they protested peacefully at home and at school. Then things started to get ugly.

All across America, kids refused to clean up their rooms unless their parents supported the lemonade stand amendment. They stopped putting their clothes in the hamper. They swallowed their food without chewing it well first.

They refused to bundle up when they went outside. They went swimming immediately after eating. Some of them even ate while they were swimming — the ultimate act of defiance.

Newspapers reported that vegetable sales were way down at supermarkets. Kids were simply refusing to eat them.

Let the Kid Run!

Lane loved it. He seemed to really enjoy the fact that America was doing something in response to us.

Me, I didn't even care anymore. To tell you the truth, I was getting sick of running for President. I was beginning to feel like I was only doing it to please Lane. Running for President wasn't a goof anymore, and it wasn't fun anymore, either.

I couldn't go anywhere without being followed. Reporters were permanently camped out in the lot across the street from my house. Every time our front door would open, they'd rush over, waving their cameras and notebooks and microphones.

My parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were being hassled for interviews. Mrs. Syers couldn't sit on her porch anymore without holding a press conference. Everybody I ever knew was being asked to describe what I was like.

One day, as a joke, I opened up the front door, poked my head out, and screamed at the reporters across the street, "Give me liberty or give me death!"

The next day headlines appeared in all the papers — "moon can't take the pressure!" and

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"moon is looney!" and "judson put on suicide watch!" It was crazy.

In the end, public opinion convinced the Senate and House of Representatives that the issue had to be brought up for a vote. On January 3, 2000, the legislatures of forty-two states ratified Amendment XXVII to the Constitution ...

"The right of citizens of the United States to run for elected office in any primary or other election shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of age/'

Whether I wanted to or not, I was officially in the race for President of the United States.

^ Pols and Polls

Naturally, I was not the only person running for President of the United States. President George White was hoping to be reelected for a second term, of course. He's a Republican from Ohio, an older guy with big jowly cheeks that wiggle when he talks.

President White was an okay President, I guess. He hadn't gotten America into any wars, or at least any world wars, during his four years in office.

A lot of people don't like him, though. Before he was elected, he had promised he was going to lower taxes, balance the budget, and solve all of America's problems. But three years into his Presidency, we seemed to have

all the same problems and a few new ones, too.

The Democrats seemed to be against

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everything President White did simply because he was a Republican. Republicans were always criticizing him because they said he wasn't Republican enough, whatever that meant.

Sometimes I think people didn't like President White simply because he was the President and they weren't.

To make things worse for the President, in January during a ceremony on the White House lawn, his dog went to the bathroom on the ambassador from New Zealand. It was pretty hilarious, and the video of it was on the news about a hundred times.

Some commentators said the President can't be expected to manage the country when he can't even manage his own dog.

Anyway, his approval rating went way down after that incident.

The Democratic challenger was Senator Herbert Dunn of West Virginia. You'd recognize him right away because his

hair looks like it was made of Styrofoam and surgically fused to his head. Lane and I always say he must comb his hair with a blowtorch.

Pols and Polls

Senator Dunn was always attacking President White, saying his policies were leading to the decline and fall of civilization and stuff like that. He was angry all the time. A real downer. I couldn't believe anyone would ever vote for him, but he'd been a Senator for about a hundred years, so people must like him. In West Virginia, anyway.

To be perfectly honest, I thought President White and Senator Dunn were a couple of windbags.

In February, USA Today took a poll of the American people and this was the result...

President White: 53%

Senator Dunn: 43%

Judson Moon: 1%

Other: 3%

"One percent of the vote!" I complained to Mrs. Syers. "That's pathetic! We're doing even worse than Other!"

"Honey," she said, "do you realize a hundred million

people are gonna vote on November seventh? You get one percent of that and you got a million votes! A million grown-ups who

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would vote for you, a snot-nosed, twelve-year-old kid, to be President of the United States! Think about that, child!"

Meanwhile, the money kept pouring in from kids all over America. Poor Gus hurt his back lugging all those sacks to my house every day. In March, he turned in his resignation to the post office. Somebody told me Gus had decided to enter politics himself.

I came home from school one day and there were a dozen or so kids helping out with all the mail, working like little gerbils. Lane called them his "Moonies."

"How'd you get them to do this?" I asked Lane.

"I promised them you would establish a minimum weekly allowance for kids," he replied.

"I can't do that! That's their parents' decision!"

"It's just a campaign promise. Moon," he said, as if I was dumb. "You don't have to actually do it."

By April, Lane said we had enough money to buy some air

time and do TV commercials. This

Pols and Polls

was my favorite part about running for President. I'm a natural ham, and it was really cool to shoot the commercials and watch them on TV.

Mrs. Syers and I made a whole bunch of goofy commercials together, but the one I liked best I did by myself. It was shot at the local high school football field. I started at the one-yard line to show that I had one percent of the vote so far. As I talked, I walked upfield with a football in my arm. Lane and I made up this script.

..

"Hi My name is Judson Moon and Vm running for President. I know a lot of you out there think that's crazy. You re saying a twelve-year-old kid knows nothing about politics. And you know what? You re absolutely right! I dont know anything!"

The script called for me to pause for a moment at the ten-yard line while some guy tried to tackle me. I threw him a hip fake and he flew by me. Then I continued ...

"/ don't know how to raise your taxes or waste it on things America doesn't need. I don't know how to make secret deals with nutty foreign dictators. I don't know how to ruin our environment. I don't know how

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to pander to special interest groups. I don't know how to get us into a war. I wouldn't even know where to begin!"

I paused at the twenty-yard line to evade another tackle. Then came the big finish ...

"Look, I'm just a kid. I don't know anything. That's why you should vote for me on November seventh. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to run."

At that point a bunch of grown-ups start chasing me down the field — politician types, lawyers holding briefcases, ex-hippies, criminals with knives, housewives, soldiers, terrorists. I break tackles left and right and fake them all out of their shoes. Finally, I high-step over the goal line and spike the ball.

As I was doing my dance in the end zone, a voiceover went, "Vote for Moon. He doesn't know anything."

I just wanted to get a few laughs. But the commercial must have struck a nerve with the American people, because the day after it aired, I shot up to ten percent in the polls.

Some of that gain was at the expense of President WTiite, whose dog happened to bite a little boy during a White House tour. The poor

Pols and Polls

kid had to get stitches in his leg. It was all over the news. I think a lot of people felt so bad about the boy that they switched their votes from White to me.

I felt sorry for the President. It wasn't his fault that his dog was out of control. He was in a tough spot. If he got rid of the dog, people would say he was only doing it to win the election.

But that was his problem. We were six months away from Election Day, and the polls showed us at...

President White: 43%

Senator Dunn: 43%

Judson Moon: 10%

Other: 4%

At least I was beating "Other."

The Virtual Candidate

When school let out in June, Lane and I were able to devote ourselves to the campaign full-time. That's when we discovered a secret weapon we didn't even know we had.

We logged on to America Online one night. I changed my user name from JMOON to JSUN so people wouldn't know who I was. We clicked over to "People Connection" to see what people were chatting about.

Astonishingly, the screen was filled with people talking about me . . .

TinCan: Moon is the one!

Ox: I told my mom I would run
away unless she voted for Moon.

KitKatK: fyi, moon rally in
boston tomorrow at 3:00 . . . tell
everyone u know!

BigDog: Moon is our only hope.

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CarGirl: Down with grown-ups!

HHOK :-)

Coboe: Moon rules! Yesssssssssss!

TNX KitKatK!

W01f: MOONMOONMOONMOONMOONMOON-
MOONMOON!

It went on and on like that. Just for the fun of it, I typed this . . .

JSUN: Put an "R" in the middle of Moon and you'll know what he is.

In seconds, the screen was filled with people flaming me, telling me to get off the system, threatening me, and typing all kinds of vile things. Not a single person online had a negative word to say about Judson Moon.

We jumped off AOL and surfed around Prodigy, CompuServe, and the other online services. Each of these networks had millions of subscribers, and it was the same thing wherever we looked. Those same kids who were holding yard sales and selling lemonade were burning up the nation's telephone lines trying to whip

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up support for the Moon & June team by modem.

Some kids established a World Wide Web site where people could download photos of me and Mrs. Syers, read our life stories, hear us speak, and find out how to start a

petition to get us on the ballot in their state.

While President White and Senator Dunn were wasting their time visiting flag factories and giving speeches to try and get themselves noticed, I was campaigning where the people actually were — glued to their computer screens.

And the best part was, I didn't even have to do the work! My supporters were in cyberspace campaigning for me. There were millions of Moonies out there.

I was the first "virtual candidate."

"Why didn't I think of it sooner?" marveled Lane. "The world is run by computers now, and most grown-ups still don't know how to use them."

"My dad doesn't even know where our computer's on/off switch is," I said.

The work kids were doing online was definitely having an effect. The election was

The Virtual Candidate

getting closer, and every day my ranking in the polls climbed a few points higher. By September, this was the way we stood . . .

President White: 33%

Senator Dunn: 39%

Judson Moon: 24%

Other: 4%

Noon, You DOII*t HAVE

^ Any Opinions! ^

I was over at Lane's house when he flipped on the news and we saw Chelsea Daniels's face fill the screen. She and a group of her friends were marching around the state capitol carrying signs that said "S.O.S." on them.

"Save our silkworms!" they were chanting. "Save our silkworms!"

The reporter pulled Chelsea aside and asked her how she and I got along.

"Oh, Judson and I have our little spats like any other couple," she said. "But he always finds a way to patch things up. If we can settle our little differences, Fm sure he can bring our country together, too. That's the kind of person he is. I'm sure he'll be a wonderful President. And I'm really looking forward to being First Lady. Save our silkworms! Save our silkworms!"

no

Moon, You Don't Have Any Opinions!

"She hardly knows me!" I said disgustedly. "We've never even spent five minutes together!"

"I'm telling you. Moon," Lane said, "that girl has the potential to go far."

We turned off the set and Lane dropped a bombshell — the League of Women Voters had invited me to debate President White and Senator Dunn live on national television a week before Election Day. Immediately, I started to panic.

"Debate those guys?" I said. "I can't even talk my parents into raising my allowance. Can't we just make a videotape and send it in?"

"Stop worrying so much," Lane said. "I've got a plan."

Lane always seemed to have a plan. He flipped on his Macintosh and clicked open a file titled "Debate Strategy"

On the left side of the screen was a long list of all the "hot button" issues Americans are always arguing about. On the right side were numbers indicating how Americans feel about each issue. He had downloaded the data from the latest Gallup Poll.

It looked like this . . .

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And it went on like that for dozens of issues.

"It's simple/' Lane explained. "This is how the average American feels about every important issue. All you have to do is memorize a paragraph about each issue that reflects that opinion. Average Americans will agree with you and they should vote for you."

"But what if my opinion is different from the average American's?" I asked Lane.

"You have opinions. Moon?" he asked with a sneer.

"Sure I have opinions!"

"Then tell me," Lane asked. "Where do you stand on endangered species?"

"Well, if they're endangered I wouldn't stand on them."

"Seriously now. No jokes."

Moon, You Don't Have Any Opinions!

I thought about it for a moment. "We've got to protect animals that are endangered so they don't become extinct/' I said.

"Okay/' Lane replied. "Would you protect some owls if it

meant hundreds of loggers would lose their jobs?"

"Human loggers?" I stammered. "I guess not."

"Okay, what's your position on gun control. Moon?"

"I'm definitely in favor," I replied confidently "If we get guns off the streets, fewer people will be shot and killed."

"But Moon, the Bill of Rights specifically gives citizens the right to bear arms."

"Oh," I replied. "Well, if that's in the Bill of Rights, then people should have the right to own a gun."

"You can't take both sides on every issue. Moon!"

"Why not?" I complained. "I can see both sides of every issue."

"You look wishy-washy," Lane said. "The public wants its leaders to have strong opinions."

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"But what if both sides of an issue have a good argument?"

"Then you follow the opinions on the computer/" he said, gesturing toward the numbers on the screen. "Those are the opinions the public wants you to take. People vote for

politicians to represent them. So doesn't it make sense that the politician's opinion should be the same as the public's opinion?"

"That feels backwards to me/' I said. "I think the President should form an opinion first and inspire the public to agree with that opinion/'

"Moon, you don't have any opinions!"

He was right, I suppose. Taking sides has always been a problem with me. I can form an opinion, but as soon as somebody comes along and explains the opposite view, I change my mind. The last person I speak with always sounds right. Maybe that's why people like me.

Lane and I spent the next three weeks cramming for the debate. He wrote out my opinions on all the major issues and I memorized them. I didn't learn a whole lot about the issues, but I learned which ones

Moon, You Don't Have Any Opinions!

America was in favor of and which ones America opposed.

Lane would grill me by firing questions at me repeatedly — "What should we do about illegal immigration? Unemployment? Medicare? The minimum wage?" I had all the answers on file cards. It was hard to keep everything straight in my head.

Boning up for the debate was much tougher than school, which I was missing more and more of as October went by and the debate got closer.

Time to Panic

With my army of Moonies all over the country working on our behalf. Moon & June kept rising in the polls. We were just ten points behind President White and five points behind Senator Dunn on the day of the big debate.

Lane and I took a limo out to Chicago that morning and checked into the Palmer House hotel. What I found most amazing was that everyw[^]here I went, people knew me. I had hardly traveled out of Madison in my life, and everybody in Chicago knew me!

People in the airport rushed over to shake my hand. The hotel staff treated me like a visiting dignitary. Kids on the street looked at me like I was a rock star.

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Time to Panic

The debate was two hours away. I started putting on my gray sport jacket and Lane stopped me.

"Gray is boring," he said, picking out a dark blue jacket and bright red-striped tie. "The camera will love you in this. Wear colors of authority."

I started to protest, but decided against it. Lane had gotten us this far. It wouldn't be fair to start calling the shots myself now.

Lane called a limo to take us to McCormick Place, a convention center where the debate was to be held. Security was tight. There were police and Secret Service agents everywhere, talking into their sleeves, constantly scanning the crowd for potential troublemakers.

The thought crossed my mind that it would be cooler to be a Secret Service agent than to be the President.

When we got inside, we were escorted to a room for our last-minute preparations before air time.

"This is it. Moon," Lane said. "What you say tonight can put us over the top. You can do it. I

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know you can." He sounded like my Little League coach.

I was nervous as a cat in a vet's waiting room, and it showed. Sweat was coming through my shirt. I couldn't stand still.

"Relax," Lane kept telling me. "Take a deep breath. Remember what I told you. Don't put your hands in your pockets. Don't look at your watch. Make eye contact at all times."

"With who, the moderator?"

"No, with the camera," he said. "You want to connect with the people of America."

I tried to go over my opinions on the issues. There were so many facts buzzing around my head that I started mixing everything up. I felt like my brain was overloading, and the circuit breakers were shutting the system down.

I started to panic. I forgot what affirmative action was. I couldn't remember if I was for or against gun control. I could barely think of my name.

What a time for my mind to go blank!

And what a time for somebody to knock on the door and usher me to the podium.

I was in a fog. I barely noticed President White

Time to Panic

and Senator Dunn smiling at me from their podiums. The director stood before us and whispered . . .

"We're on the air in five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . lights, camera . . ."

ir The Great Debate

As I stood behind my podium and looked at the President of the United States fifteen feet away, a thought hit me that should have hit me about ten months ago.

Who am I fooling?

I don't have opinions on any important issues, I thought to myself. I have no business being here. I only wanted to run for President as a goof. I never thought it would go this far. I can't run a country

I'm like one of those idiots who runs on the field in the middle of a baseball game!

But it was too late to back out. I couldn't just walk off the stage.

It was at that moment that I figured out my only option was to sabotage my own candidacy.

no

The Great Debate

I decided to do what I always do when I'm in a jam — play it for laughs and act like a jerk. Maybe America will forgive me for wasting its valuable time. Maybe people will say boys will be boys and let me go back to my normal life.

The League of Women Voters, who sponsored the debate, had decided on a format designed to prevent candidates from rambling on and on — each candidate would be asked a question by members of a panel and have twenty seconds to complete his answer. The three of us would take turns fielding questions.

The moderator introduced President White, Senator Dunn, and me. The panel of journalists fired the first question at Senator Dunn and the next one at the President. Each of them gave a very thoughtful, rehearsed, and (to me, anyway) boring response. Then everyone looked at me.

"Mr. Moon," I was asked, "a third-party candidate has never won the Presidency. What makes you think your Lemonade Party can?"

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Lane knew I would be asked that question, and he had written a good answer for it. But I improvised.

"I look at it this way," I said. "The two-party system is an improvement on a one-party system. Therefore, three parties should be an improvement on two parties. Americans love parties, and I believe the more parties we have the better. I would start a fourth party if I could, but I can only start one party at a time. So, in conclusion, I say . . . let's party, America!"

The place erupted. The studio audience was screaming. Half of them were laughing their heads off. The other half were demanding that I be removed from the auditorium. The panel of journalists stared at me, openmouthed. It took a while for order to be restored.

As soon as I finished giving that answer, a sense of calm came over my body. I stopped sweating. I wasn't nervous anymore. It was as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I felt like I was back in the school cafeteria, goofing on Arthur Krantz and his jerky friends.

The three candidates took turns. Every time

The Great Debate

the panel of journalists threw a question at me, I threw the answer right back . . .

Q: You re on record as saying your first official act as President will be to abolish homework. What will your second official act be?

A: To abolish making beds. Why make a bed in the morning? You re only going to sleep in it again that night.

Q: What do you plan to do about jobs?

A: I plan to get one as soon as my term as President is over.

Q: WJiich President do you most admire, and why?

A: Grover Cleveland. Because he became President despite the fact that he was named after a character on Sesame Street.

Q: How do you feel about school prayer?

A: Every morning I pray that school will be closed.

Q: What do you intend to do about teenage pregnancy?

A: My dad says we're going to sit down and have a talk about that, but he keeps putting it off.

Q: It takes a tremendous amount of desire to

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€ome President. Do you have the fire in the belly?

A: Yeah, it must have been those tacos I ate for dinner.

Q: What's the toughest part about running for President?

A: Learning not to pick my nose in public.

Q: What do you think we should do about hazardous waste?

A: Vd suggest you try a strong laxative.

That ought to do it, I thought to myself. I couldn't say anything more disgusting, juvenile, or unpresidential than that. Nobody could possibly take me seriously as a candidate for President.

President White and Senator Dunn stood there during my answers. Both of them were flustered. When the journalists asked them a question, they fumbled all over the place trying to look dignified. I guess they weren't used to obnoxious kids.

For our final statements, all three of us were asked to address one issue we would be likely to

The Great Debate

face as President — how to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President gave a little speech about how he had formed deep relationships with all the Mideast leaders over the last four years. Senator Dunn said that the United States had to back up its friends in the event of a conflict.

I didn't have any strong opinion on the subject, and I couldn't think of a good wisecrack. So I told a little story

"One time I was at a baseball card show and some kids got into a big argument over whose cards belonged to whom. I stepped in the middle of it and looked over their

collections. I told one kid that if he gave the second kid his Ken Griffey Jr. rookie card and the other kid gave him two Randy Johnson cards, they would be even. I told the third kid that if he gave each of the other kids his Barry Bonds and Matt Williams cards, they would probably give him the Frank Thomas and Cal Ripken Jr. cards that he wanted. To make a long story short, they made all the swaps and everybody was happy afterward. So I think I could keep everybody in the Middle East happy the same way"

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"I don't believe the Iraqis collect baseball cards/" the moderator chuckled.

"Well, maybe they should," I said. "It's better to fight over cards than it is to fight over countries."

And that was the end of the debate. The moderator came over and thanked all three of us for participating. I shook hands with the President and even got his autograph.

When I came off the stage. Lane was sitting on the floor with his knees up and his head buried in his hands. He looked like a kid whose pet had died or something.

"I'm sorry. Lane," I said. "I guess I just don't have the fire in the belly to be President."

He didn't say a word to me on the ride back to Madison.

He just stared out the window.

The Runaway Train

I had trouble sleeping after the debate and got up very early. I went downstairs to get the morning paper. The reporters camped out across the street weren't even awake yet.

The headline on the front page nearly knocked me over:

MOON WINS DEBATE, SURGES AHEAD!

By Ralph Hammelbacher

12-year-old Judson Moon cleverly turned the tables on President White and Senator Dunn last night, shocking the nation in the most freewheeling evening of political debate in memory.

Instead of engaging in a conventional debate, the youngster used the opportunity to thumb his nose at the political system in front of the entire nation.

President White and Senator Dunn were reduced to dumb-

The Kid Who Ran for President

founded onlookers as Moon deftly and hilariously controlled the proceedings with snappy retorts and off-the-wall opinions that threw his opponents off their stride.

"Moon knew exactly what he was doing," said political analyst Morton Fishwick. "He knew he couldn't beat his opponents by debating the issues, so he made the issues go away. I've got to hand it to him. It was brilliant strategy on the kid's part."

In telephone polls taken immediately after the debate, an overwhelming majority of people — young and old — named Moon as the victor.

With just five days until the election, the Moon & June steamroller has a three point lead over President White, according to an Associated Press poll. Senator Dunn trails by seven points.

Mom was so happy, she invited just about everyone we'd ever known over to the house to celebrate. Lane was happy again and even congratulated me for relying on my "political instincts" instead of taking his advice. My folks beamed. Arthur Krantz steamed.

June Syers just looked at me with that look that said she'd known it all along. Abby called and said she was too busy to make the party but

The Runaway Train

I think she didn't come because she knew Chelsea would be there.

Chelsea had her arm snaked around my elbow like we were stuck together. She had to leave early, though, explaining that she had to begin the long and arduous task of shopping for clothes she would wear as First Lady.

I pretty much sat there, dazed, during the whole party. I couldn't figure out how Yd messed up messing up the debate.

The candidacy was like a runaway train now. Nothing could stop my momentum. I had done everything short of dropping my pants to wreck my chances of winning the election. It didn't work. Unless something disastrous happened quickly, I was going to be the next President of the United States.

And then something disastrous happened.

^ Noonsiate ^

In the middle of the celebration at my house, I received a phone call from Pete Guerra, my reporter friend who wrote the first article about the lemonade stand that started the whole ball rolling.

"Congratulations," Pete said. "That was quite a show you put on last night."

"Thanks, Pete. Listen, I can't talk now. There are a lot of people over here."

"Lemme ask you one quick question, Judson."

"Go ahead, Pete."

"Did you break into some kid's locker and steal his term paper when you were in fourth grade?"

I remembered the incident. It was that jerk Arthur Krantz. He had put a sign that said.

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Moongate

"KICK ME" on my backpack, so I stole his term paper and threw it down the sewer. It wasn't any big deal.

"Yeah, Pete, I did that. Why?"

"Just checking," Guerra said. "Enjoy your party"

I forgot all about it until the next morning, when Lane called early and shouted, "Did you see today's paper?!"

I ran outside. The reporters swarmed all over me, sticking microphones in my face. "Is it true? Will you drop out of the race?"

I dashed inside with the paper and read the story that was splashed across the front page.

MOONGATE! Young Candidate Rocked By Scandal

By Pete Guerra

Judson Moon burglarized another student's locker and deliberately destroyed important papers, according to an informed source. With just three days remaining until Election Day, the young candidate is faced with a personal scandal that may derail his presidential hopes. The incident took place two years ago. After an argument with

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the other student. Moon used a metal ruler to pry open the locker. Several papers were removed and never recovered. It is unclear at this time what information was on those papers.

Principal Harold Berlin is cooperating with the FBI on the investigation.

"If Judson Moon did this," he says, "I would have to reconsider whether I would want him to be the leader of our country."

Other problems are beginning to surface for the young candidate, who up until now has seemed like the perfect ail-American boy. It has been learned that aspiring "First

Lady" Chelsea Daniels did not even know Moon's name until he decided to run for President.

"He thought he'd have a better chance of winning if he was with a cute babe," one student revealed.

Also, it has been revealed that Moon changed the name of his parakeet to make it more acceptable to the American public. "Cuddles'" real name is apparently "Snot."

So Booger Boy Krantz went and gabbed to the press. That jerk! He would do anything to bring me down.

"Is it true?" demanded Lane when I got back on the phone.

"Sure it's true," I replied. "So what?"

"It's going to cost us the election, that's what!

Moongate

I worked so hard to make the public think you're an innocent kid who doesn't have a bad bone in his body. And now this. What was on those papers you stole?"

"It was Arthur Krantz's stupid term paper. I

threw it down the sewer."

"What was the term paper about?"

"The Constitution and the Bill of Rights."

"You threw the Constitution down a sewer?!"

"It was just a goof!"

"That's the problem. Moon. Everything is a goof with you!" Lane slammed down the phone.

The press jumped all over the "Moongate" scandal. I tuned into a couple of talk radio shows and it seemed like all the people who had been saying how wonderful I was now wanted to ride me out of town on a rail.

I pretended to be upset about what happened, but on the inside I was secretly happy. Thanks to Booger Boy Krantz, I found a way to lose the election.

Still, it bothered me that Pete Guerra wrote the story. I didn't care about being Presi-

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dent, but I wasn't happy that everybody knew about Snot and Chelsea. It made me look like a phony.

I picked up the phone and dialed Guerra's number.

"Pete/" I said. "I thought you were my friend."

"Remember what I told you at the beginning. Moon? Nobody is your friend. Everybody wants a piece of you, and that includes me. I'm a reporter. My job is not to help you become President. My job is to find great stories people want to read so they'll buy my paper."

"Breaking into a kid's locker is a great story?" I asked.
"Changing my parakeet's name is a great story?"

"If you're the presidential front runner those are terrific stories!" Pete exclaimed. "Like I said. Moon. America chews up celebrities and spits 'em out. And America is about to clear its throat with you."

Lane was furious at me, but he wasn't ready to give up the fight. There were still two days until the election. He decided our only chance to

Moongate

save the campaign was for me to go on national TV and talk directly to the American people.

I didn't want to do it. "Look," I pleaded with Lane, "let's just forget about it. I never really wanted to be President anyway It was just a —"

"A goof. I know. Moon. Everything is a goof with you. But when we got started on this thing, we agreed on one thing — I'm in charge of the campaign. After Election Day, you're in charge. But up until then, I call the shots. I tell you what to do, what to wear, what to say and when to say it. Remember? I didn't work my tail off for the last year to see you quit two days before the election. You owe me. Moon."

I may have lied and faked my way through the campaign, but I am a boy of my word. I agreed to go on national TV and read a statement.

"You've got to read it word for word," Lane warned me. "No improvising. No jokes. No goofing around."

"Word for word," I agreed.

^ Word for Word ^

The Moongate scandal definitely had an impact across America. People had thought I was squeaky clean. They didn't want to hear that I used dirty tricks. Moon & June dropped ten points in the polls instantly. President White was back in the lead, with Senator Dunn and me five points behind.

Lane drained the last dollars from the money we raised to buy ten minutes of air time during halftime of Monday Night Football. He wanted to make sure all of America was watching. It was the night before Election Day.

We did the filming in front of my house, with my parents standing behind me. Lane dressed me in a plain gray suit. "I want you to look boring," he said. Just before the camera started

Word for Word

rolling. Lane told my dad to put a hand on my shoulder.

"My fellow Americans/' I read somberly off the cue cards Lane held up, "in the last few days a story came out that I broke into someone's locker and stole some papers. I can understand if you have second thoughts about voting for me. I wouldn't want to have a President who did that sort of thing, and I'm sure you wouldn't, either.

"I'm here tonight to come clean with America. Yes, I admit it. I broke into Arthur Krantz's locker and threw his term paper down the sewer. It was a childish prank.

"I know that what I did was wrong. I was younger then. I'm much more mature now. I learned a valuable lesson from this experience and I will never, ever do anything like that again. You have my word on that.

"And yes, my parakeet's name is Snot. I thought the American people would not accept that, so I changed it to Cuddles.

"One other thing I probably should tell you, because if I

don't they'll probably be saying this

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about me, too. I did get something, a gift. A man down in Texas heard that I would like to have a dog. And, believe it or not, one day I got a message that the post office had a package for me. I went down to get it. You know what it was? It was a little cocker spaniel dog, in a crate that had been sent all the way from Texas — black and white, spotted. I named it Chester. And you know, I love that dog. And I just want to say this, right now, that regardless of what they say about it, I'm gonna keep it. Thank you, and enjoy the rest of the game."

That was it. I took off the microphone and breathed a big sigh of relief. The campaign was finally over. Lane shook my hand and told me I did a great job.

"Where did you come up with that bit about Chester?" I asked him. "It was really corny."

"I didn't write it."

"Who did?"

"Richard Nixon."

"The President?" I asked. "Isn't he dead?"

"He wrote it in 1952, when he was running for Vice-

President," Lane explained. "Nixon had

Word for Word

received some shady campaign contributions and Eisenhower was going to drop him and pick another person to be his running mate. Then Nixon went on national TV right after Milton Berle's show and made this speech. His dog was named Checkers and the speech came to be called the Checkers speech. It saved his career."

"You mean I just gave Nixon's Checkers speech?"

"Well, I changed a word or two," Lane said, with a wicked smile on his face.

Election Day

Election Day is always the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. When I woke up that morning, I had a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach. If the Checkers speech worked for me like it worked for Richard Nixon, I might actually win the election.

The overnight polls showed that the speech hit home with at least some Americans. Moon & June jumped up a few points and President White dropped down a few. Good Morning America said the race was too close to call.

Senator Dunn had dropped down to a distant third. It

looked like it was all over for him.

School was open on Election Day and I decided to go. Staying home all day would only make me more nervous than I already was.

My school is the place where grown-ups in the

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Election Day

neighborhood go to vote. Every Election Day, the gym is emptied out and filled with those big voting machines. I always thought of Election Day as a drag, because we wouldn't get to have gym that day.

It was pretty weird seeing all those grown-ups lining up to vote, and thinking that some of them would be voting for me. It was the first time I really understood or appreciated that this is how we make important decisions in this country.

It was impossible to pay much attention to school. Everybody was looking at me, asking me how I felt, requesting autographs. The teachers didn't seem to be able to concentrate on their lessons, either.

Chelsea caught up with me after homeroom. "I'm so excited!" she said. "I'm going to wear my red silk dress with the shoulder ruffles to the party tonight!"

"I'm sure you'll look terrific," I said with as much fake enthusiasm as I could muster. Chelsea was really starting to get on my nerves.

Lane had booked the Presidential suite and the big ballroom at the fancy Edgewater Hotel

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for the evening. Just about everybody in town was going to be there to watch the election returns on TV.

Lane and I didn't get the chance to talk until lunchtime. I told him what I'd heard about the latest polls. For the first time, he didn't seem that interested.

"Polls mean nothing at this point," Lane said. "It's the electoral votes that matter now."

I never really understood that whole electoral college thing, so Lane explained it to me. It turns out that each of the fifty states is given one electoral vote for every member it has in Congress. That includes the state's two Senators plus however many members it has in the House of Representatives.

The states with higher populations have more representatives, and more electoral votes. So states like New York, California, Texas, and Pennsylvania have more electoral votes than less populated states like Nevada, Alaska, and Rhode Island.

Lane explained that whichever candidate gets the most votes in a state wins all the electoral votes in that state. And whichever candidate

Election Day

gets 270 or more electoral votes wins the election.

It didn't seem exactly fair to me. A candidate could become President if he just won a few of the big states, even though he lost all the smaller states.

Lane said it was even possible to win the election on electoral votes even if more people voted for the other candidate. In fact, that actually happened in 1824, 1876, and 1888.

"What if nobody gets 270 electoral votes?" I asked.

"Then the House of Representatives votes to decide who will be President."

After school I went home and Mom fussed over me, making food and helping me pick out clothes for the evening. I think it was the longest time Fd ever spent with her when she didn't mention carpet tiles once.

After dinner. Mom, Dad, and I checked into the Presidential Suite at the Edgewater Hotel. Lane was already there, running around, completing last-minute

details for the party afterward. June Syers was wheeled in by her

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kids, who were older than my mom and dad. Mrs. Syers looked great, in a new print dress and lace hat.

All my aunts, uncles, and cousins milled around, scarfing down chips and those little hot dogs wrapped in rolls.

Chelsea looked fabulous in her silk dress, of course. I invited her to stay with us in the Presidential Suite, but she said she was too nervous and would watch the results in the ballroom downstairs. I think she just wanted to be where the most people would see her dress.

Lane's plan was for me to come down to the ballroom as soon as the TV networks declared a winner. He had written two speeches for me — an acceptance speech in case I won, and a concession speech in case I lost.

He also arranged for the hotel to put four TV sets in our room so we could watch ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN all at the same time. When the polls started to close on the East Coast at 8:00 P.M., we pulled chairs around the glowing screens.

For about an hour, none of the results were in

Election Day

and the announcers filled the time by talking mostly about me. They went on and on about how historic it was for a kid to run for President.

This being the year 2000, the experts all had a lot of overblown stuff to say about the last millennium and the new millennium.

"In the year 1000 the printing press had yet to be invented and America had yet to be discovered/' one expert commented. "Imagine what life will be like in the year 3000! This is the turning point in the history of the earth."

Lane and I made gagging noises and pretended to stick our fingers down our throats.

"If the earth knew it was gonna be around this long," Mrs. Syers said, "it woulda taken better care of itself."

A little after 9:00 o'clock Eastern time the results started coming in. We stopped talking among ourselves and pulled our chairs closer to the screens.

"With thirteen percent of the votes in," the CNN announcer suddenly said, "we are projecting the state of Delaware and its three electoral votes will go to President White."

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"Booooo!" everybody hooted, but nobody was too upset. "Three lousy votes/' my dad said. "It means nothing."

A few minutes later, the ABC commentator stopped in the middle of a sentence and announced, "We are projecting the state of Maine and its four electoral votes will go to young Judson Moon!"

Everybody yelled and screamed. "We're winning!" my mom shouted. "We're actually winning^

"Calm down," Dad grumbled. "That's just four lousy votes. They mean nothing."

Then the results started pouring in. CBS projected President White was the winner in Connecticut. NBC picked me to take New Jersey. President White picked up Vermont, Rhode Island, Florida, and New Hampshire. I won in New York, with its thirty-three big electoral votes.

Senator Dunn won West Virginia's five electoral votes, but he's from West Virginia. I figure if you can't win your own state, you must be really pathetic. Outside of West Virginia, he wasn't doing very well. It was going to be White against Moon for all the marbles.

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Moon & June pulled ahead of President White in the electoral vote tally, but only slightly The polls were now closed on the West Coast and it was looking like the

election was going to come down to California and its fifty-four electoral votes.

President White would win a state, and then I would win one. Every time a winner was projected, Mrs. Syers would shriek with glee or disappointment depending on whether or not we won the state. Dad was trying not to appear nervous. But he was pacing the floor and mumbling to himself, which he always does when he's uptight.

Lane was very calm and serious. He had his laptop computer with him and he kept recalculating the electoral vote totals every time one of the TV networks projected a winner for a state.

By 11:30 P.M., the results were tabulated from every state except California. All four TV networks said the vote was still too close to call there. I was stuck at 217 electoral votes and the President had 164.

"If we win in California, Moon & June is the

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winner by one electoral vote/' announced Lane. "If White wins in California, the election is thrown to the House of Representatives to decide."

The voting was over. It was out of our hands. There was no speech anybody could make, no hand anybody could

shake that would make a difference. There was nothing to do but sit there and watch.

Sitting there, I felt like I must be in the middle of a dream. This Judson Moon everybody was talking about was some other kid. It wasn't me. It was too unbelievable to think that I was actually running for President of the United States. Or that I might actually win.

It had to be a dream. Or maybe a nightmare. Sometimes it's hard to tell one from the other.

I was shaken from these thoughts when the CNN anchorman suddenly announced, "This just in!" with some urgency in his voice.

Everybody stopped talking.

"At 11:52 P.M., Eastern Standard Time, on November seventh, in the year 2000, CNN projects the state of California will go to ... "

He paused for just a moment to take a breath.

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"Moon & June! Judson Moon will become the next President of the United States! For the first time in American history —"

I didn't hear the rest. A roar went up in the hotel room.

Mom and Dad and Mrs. Syers were all over me, hugging me, kissing me. Car horns blared from the street outside.

"Kings of the hill!" Lane shouted, jumping all over the couch like a maniac. "We did it, Judd! We're kings of the hill!"

I think Lane was happier than anybody. He grabbed me and thanked me for letting him run the campaign. "This is all I ever wanted," he whispered in my ear. "Remember our deal? I'll never tell you what to wear or say or do again. Now you're in charge."

I shivered when he said that. I'm in charge.

After the commotion had subsided a bit, we all tumbled downstairs to the ballroom where a few thousand people were waiting. When the elevator door opened, a spotlight found me and Mrs. Syers and a deafening roar exploded. Hundreds of red, white, and blue balloons fell from the ceiling. The band struck up "Shine On, Harvest Moon."

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Men pummeled me on the back and women kissed me. Some people just reached out and touched me, like I was a religious object.

Lane guided me to the podium and handed me a sheet of paper.

"What does it say?" I asked.

"It's a pretty standard acceptance speech," he said. "The usual patriotic stuff."

I looked out into the crowd. They wouldn't stop cheering. I held up my hands. I shrugged my shoulders. I put my finger to my lips as if to say "Shh!" They kept right on screaming.

I spotted Chelsea in the crowd, clapping as hard as she could without ruining her nails. On the other side of the room I saw Abby, smiling at me like a mom watching her kid at his first piano recital.

It must have been fifteen minutes until the noise level died down enough for me to speak.

"I shouldn't be here," I finally said into the microphone. "It's way past my bedtime."

The ballroom exploded in another roar and I had to wait five more minutes for everybody to quiet down.

"I have a prepared victory speech," I said,

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"but I'm not going to use it/' I glanced at Lane and saw his eyebrows shoot up into his forehead.

"First of all, I want to thank the people who got me here. Mom and Dad, of course. June Syers. Lane Brainard. All the volunteers and kids across America who worked so hard to make this impossible dream happen. And of course, all the people who voted for me."

I paused for a moment to let that sink in. Because I knew that what I was about to say was going to blow their minds.

"I have a question for the grown-ups of America," I said seriously. "Are you out of your minds? Are you expecting me to enforce the Constitution? I never even read it. I was absent from school that day.

"You want me as Commander in Chief of the armed forces? What if somebody attacked the United States? Would you really really want me in charge? I don't know the difference between North Korea and North Carolina.

"You expect me to sign bills into law? You expect me to appoint Supreme Court justices? I'm just a snot-nosed kidV

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For once in my life, I wasn't goofing. And it felt good.

"To win this election," I said, "I became everything I always hated. I turned into a liar, a fake, a fraud. The saddest part is, it worked.

"America must be in really bad shape if you elected me President. You better get it together and find some qualified people to run this country or we'll all be in big trouble.

"In conclusion," I said, "I hereby resign as President-elect of the United States of America."

Have you ever heard three thousand people gasp at the same time? It's really cool. For a second, I thought all the air was going to be sucked out of the ballroom.

It was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop in there, at least until my mom fainted and hit the floor with a thud.

The press were all over me like ants at a picnic. "Does this make Mrs. Syers President?" somebody asked. "Will you reconsider? What about all the kids who worked so hard to get you elected? Are you finished with politics?"

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What are you going to do with the rest of your life?"

"Ladies and gentlemen of the press," I announced, "I don't even know what I'm going to do tomorrow, much less the rest of my life. To use the words of my running mate, June Syers, the future will tell us what will happen when it's good and ready"

As I trotted off the stage, everybody was looking at me like they were dead fish in a fish store.

The first person to come over to me was Lane, of course.

"Once again, your political instincts are brilliant. Moon," he said, clapping a hand on my back. "You make a much better candidate than you would make a President. Perfect career move."

June Syers rolled her wheelchair over to me. "Now I know for sure you're crazy, Judson Moon," she said.

"You're probably right, Mrs. Syers."

"Too bad you're out of the race, though," she continued.

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"Why?"

"'Cause you're just the kind of man I would vote for," she said. Considering that she hadn't voted since 1944,¹ I was very flattered.

"Hey," Mrs. Syers said before rolling away. "You promised you'd kiss me on Election Night. So pucker up, big boy!" She wrapped her arms around me and for the life of me I can't figure out how such a tiny little woman could squeeze so hard.

Chelsea Daniels was sobbing uncontrollably, so Lane and I went over to comfort her.

"Hundreds of thousands of silkworms are going to die a horrible death," she bawled, "and I won't be able to do a single thing about it!"

Tears were running down her face, making little dark streams when they dissolved her makeup. Lane pointed to himself to let me know he would take care of Chelsea.

"You know, Chelsea," Lane said, "I've been thinking about you. Have you ever considered entering the Miss America pageant? You have the looks, the personality, and a cause you believe in. I think you can win, and I can help you do it."

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"Really?" Chelsea said, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief and pulling herself together. "But I'm only twelve years old. Don't you have to be eighteen or something?"

"There are ways around that," Lane said, flipping me a wink and leading her away. "Here's what we have to do ..."

"So long, king of the hill!" I called after him.

Abby came over to me with a big smile on her face. "I

don't know much about politics," she said as she straightened my tie, "but that was a great speech!"

"You really think so?"

"Oh, yeah. I told you you'd make a great President, Moon. I just think you make a better kid."

"You're probably right," I said. "Hey, Ab, I was wondering. Maybe you wanna come over tomorrow after school?"

"And do what, Judd?"

"Oh, I don't know. Play a game of Life maybe."

"Sounds fabulous!"

• You Peeked! ^

Nice try. That was pretty clever, going straight to the back of the book to see how the story turned out. But you don't want to spoil the ending for yourself, do you? Now go back to the beginning and read the whole thing.

There are no shortcuts in life.

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Dan Gutman is best known for his many nonfiction books, including several about the history of baseball and the

recently published biography *Taking Flight*, the story of a twelve-year-old transatlantic aviator. His first novel was *They Came From Centerfield*, also published by Scholastic.

In addition to writing books, Dan enjoys visiting schools and talking to kids about sports, reading, and writing. He lives in Haddonfield, New Jersey, with his wife and two young children.



"Hi! My name is Judson Moon. I'm twelve years old and I'm running for President of the YOU-nited States."

That's how I introduced myself to about a zillion people last year. I must have kissed a zillion babies, said a zillion hellos, shaken a zillion hands...

I got a lot of votes. Enough to make me President of the United States? Well, you can peek at the last page of the book and find out.

That is, if you're a total weenie with the attention span of a flea.

Or you can read this book and get the whole story. Me? I'd read the book, but hey, it's your choice. It's a free country, right?

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