



Dreamball

by Benjamin J. Stein

Monday

A listless, quiet day. No calls to do commercials, no calls to be in movies, just lying on my couch and reading about two intensely active, bad-acting miscreants of the world of financial fraud. I had a stack of SEC filings, clippings, and trial pleadings next to me. Little by little, I plowed through them, feeling lonely and sorry for myself. Why aren't I president? Why aren't I making an offer to buy Paramount? Why aren't I host of a talk show?

K., a young woman who wants to be a star, came over to help me unpack a huge stack of boxes of books, and then we went to lunch at Hugo's. K. is a model, and there were photos of her up on the wall. They were nice, and I had a truly fine lunch, but how I wish the phone would ring with an acting gig.

After lunch, I took a short nap, lying on my hard working couch, listening to Mozart's Waisenhausmesse, bathing in the greatness of the sound like a courtesan bathing in champagne, or maybe just like bathing in something better than water, something that bathes the soul.

Then, redemption. I drove over to see my son, little Mr. Delicious Perfect, who had just gotten home from school. "Daddy," he said, "will you throw this ball to me?" He produced from his toy box—a chest the size of a Lincoln Continental—a battered yellow tennis ball. Mommy's house doesn't have a backyard except for a swimming pool, so we went out into the street, which is little

used. Except for the rock star across the way, hardly anyone comes down this road. It's great for throwing a ball.

It was a hot and smoggy day. We both stood outside in the soup and tossed the ball back and forth. Now, Daddy—that's me—is not much of an athlete. But I still managed—at 48—to throw him the ball, and he made as if to catch it. At first he'd drop it most of the time, but then, little by little, he started to catch it.

"Great," I said. "Great catch."

For the first ten minutes, Tommy made a big effort to throw the ball over my head, past me, along the pavement, anything to keep me from catching it. Finally, I said, "Any time you purposely throw it past me, I'm going to make you go chase it."

After a few chases by him, he pulled himself together. With a look of intense concentration, he rotated his arm around like an old-time pitcher, squinted in my

direction, and then took a step forward and hurled—not threw—the ball at me like Walter Johnson in old newsreels. The ball literally zinged through the smog right at my face.

I caught it, said, "Great, fantastic throw," and tossed it back. He threw it at me again, a high, hard one that would have hurt like hell if I hadn't caught it inches in front of my nose.

Then, for about five minutes, he threw ball after ball at me, always zingers, always right in the strike zone or just above.

This little angel, I thought, is a six-year-old Nolan Ryan, the next Whitey Ford.

Then he threw one past me, and scampered off after it. He said he was thirsty, so we went inside so he could have a ginger ale. He drank it in loud, incessant gulps, and then said, "More ball throwing, Daddy. Was I great?"

"You were great," I said.

"Really, really great."

He threw the first few past me, more or less on purpose, but then I did something very out of character. I leapt up in the air and by a miracle of luck, caught one. I tossed it back to him, and from then on, every time I caught it, he threw it back high and hard and true. It was imitation or a pact or something deeper, but when I caught what he was throwing, showed the example of straight, decent play, he did the same.

Zing, zing, zing, one after another, the ball came racing toward me at frightening speed, and the thought came through my mind, "This kid is a star."

All sorts of other thoughts came through my head as well.

Damn the disintegration of public schools, I thought. Why



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can't he be in a public school with a playground and playing field instead of a private school that barely has a jungle gym in the parking lot? Because at the public schools in Mommy's neighborhood, first graders get shaken down for lunch money by other kids.

Why can't we live in a neighborhood where the houses have backyards big enough for tossing a ball around? Because the recession notwithstanding, houses like that are still a million five in halfway-safe neighborhoods.

Why can't I take him to a park and throw the ball with him on grass, under trees? Because the closest park is about a half hour from here, through traffic that would frighten Rommel.

And then another thought: Why let anything cast a pale pall over a moment that's still perfect? Forget the smog and the traffic and the collapse of the public schools. I'll think about that tomorrow.

For now, I'm with young Ryne Duren, and it's a great day for being a father.

"Am I doing great, Daddy?" he asked. "Can we keep doing this?"

"You're doing great," I said. "We can keep doing this until it gets dark," and we did.

Tuesday

Trixie is dying. She has terrible arthritis, fusing of joints, destruction of cartilage, myelopathy along crucial nerve routes to her lower body. She cannot stand up for more than a few seconds any longer. She collapses on her hind legs and cannot get up. She lies there, helpless, sometimes trying to pull herself with her front legs, more often than not just lying in a sad heap.

This has been coming on for some time. At least a year ago, she had some damage, and some inability to move. She stopped walking up and down the steps at my house in Malibu. One day she fell between two stones in my garden and couldn't get up. One leg was stuck between two cruel rocks. She didn't even whimper. On another morning, she saw a rabbit and started after it. She fell down a steep hill and I had to clamber down and pull her up through the brush and the rattlesnake lairs.

Sometimes when she falls, she fouls herself and cannot move out of her mess. To see that proud, perfect German short-

haired face in her own dirt is enough to make anyone cry.

We've taken her to the vet many times. At first, he gave her hydrocortisone. That helped, but it also broke down her resistance to the disease, so that the help was temporary at best. Then he recommended that I take her to a "holistic" healer. That lowlife tried to sell me books about how to get rich by thinking about it and kept me waiting for an hour. I left. I didn't want anyone insensitive enough to keep a dog waiting for an hour to work on my dog. I also don't like hucksters in white smocks.

Just two days ago, I took her to a vet in West L.A. He recommended something called Adequin, which is supposed to be what race horses use when they have arthritis. It has not helped. She's still staggering around, mostly in a state of collapse, voiding in cascades without any warning.

The vet says she's not uncomfortable, but I don't believe him. People with arthritis have terrible pain, and why should Trixie be any different?

I keep thinking of how, two years ago, when we had terrible floods in Malibu, I was at my house, without a phone, without electricity, with water coming down the street in torrents, and I was in my bed with my Trixie in my arms, and I felt as safe as I have ever felt.

Trixie, who put my wife in the hospital because she once arrived home from a trip without me.

Trixie, who bit the plumber because that man came too close to me while fixing a drain.

Trixie, who used to lie in the back seat of the car for years waiting for me to come out of auditions.

Trixie, who had more dignity than I will ever have, more loyalty, and more sensitivity, who used to be able to leap off the ground to seven feet in the air, is now in a heap in the kitchen, and I have to wash her twice a day. But I remember when she was a young dog, and would put out her paw every time I came in the room. I remember when she was newly adopted and shook from head to paw at nervousness on meeting her new family.

Open my heart and there you will see, engraved upon it, My Little Trixie.

Monday

Ah, but then there is Hollywood. I'm on the set of "Full House," over on the Warner lot. I'm

playing a snobby, horrible food critic who torments the regulars about their new nightclub. I only have a few lines, but you may be sure I live them and love them.

We're on stage 24, right next to a lot of other shows, and Warner is really the cutest of lots, and everybody is being very nice to me.

Bob Saget, the star of this and of "America's Funniest Home Videos," is particularly kind, but everyone is nice to me, the wayfaring day player.

Scott Weinger, a teenage heartthrob, showed me his Apple PowerBook. Dave Colieu, an astonishing voice talent, did his Vietnamese voice for me. Lori Loughlin told me about her investment banker hubby. John Stamos, an adult heartthrob, played drums.

A teenage extra asked if I would say "Bueller, Bueller."

A UCLA co-ed asked me if I could help her get into graduate school at Yale.

"What did you want to study?" I asked.

"Well," she said, "maybe map making. I've always been interested in maps and geography. I grew up in Indiana,

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—Rex Vardeman
Circulation Manager

where it's really flat, and then moved here where it's really hilly, and so I'm interested in maps."

"Did you say India or Indiana?"

"Indiana," she said, "but I've always wanted to go to India."

"Do you know where India is?"

"Ben," she said with a scowl, "I'm a senior at UCLA. I hope I know where India is."

"Where is it?"

"Somewhere in South America?" she said with a smile on her face. On my look, she said, "Well, where then?"

I continued to stare, so she said, "Don't tell me it's in Indiana."

Tuesday

A visit with poor Miss Trixie on the way to Stage 24, and then the long walk to the stage from parking. As I passed the guard gate, a guard asked me where I was going. "To 'Full House,'" I said. "I'm a lowly actor."

"There're a lot of people lower than you," the guard said.

I spent most of the day rehearsing, with occasional long stretches of sleeping in my dressing room. The plot is about three elderly women who show up at the club when everyone is expecting a major rock act called REM. My dressing room is next to the room of the elderly women guitarists and singers, who are called The Del Rios.

Now, I would swear that the Del Rios have Yiddish accents. If not Yiddish, then Polish. Big thick accents. But they claim to be Mexicans. As I was seated in the hair room getting my huge wig attached to my head, one of the Del Rio sisters sat next to me.

"Pardon me," I said, "but where is your accent from?"

"Accent? Vot accent?" she demanded.

"I think you have a fairly distinct accent. Is it Polish? Czech?"

"But vee haff no accent," she said.

"All right," I said. "Have it your way."

"Possibly is Southern accent," she said, "because vee from Vashinkton."

"Possibly," I agreed.

Thursday

This is the day we shoot "Full House" before a live studio audience. I'm in my dressing room doing a slow boil though as I read in the

Wall Street Journal about the Clinton health plan, or as I like to call it, The Clinton Bolshevization Plan.

I don't get it. Why do they have to screw around with health care for middle-class people? Why not just assure health coverage for the poor or those unable to get health coverage at their jobs, and then leave everyone else alone? Why do they have to get me to join a Bolshevik experiment where my doctor—if I can still see him—is going to be watched and harassed by a "gatekeeper"? If my insurer and I can pay for it, why torture us by making us peons of a bureaucrat in a gray building? Let's face it: this is raw dictatorship, slipping under the tent by controlling us through the most vulnerable, scary part of our lives: our health and that of our families.



I don't like it. It's hard for me to concentrate on my role. I have to artfully put my nose into a cappuccino cup and get whipped cream on it. I can't do that when I'm thinking about how Hillary is trying to control me and hurt me to work out some crazed agenda of her own. (Wasn't her father in the health field?)

The audience cheered wildly for Bob Saget and John Stamos, shouted "Bueller, Bueller" when I appeared, and in no time at all, the show was over. My friend Barron, who had come from Phoenix to watch, wandered around the lot with me. Over on stage 20, or nearby, there was a party for the launch of a new Steven Spielberg cartoon called "Animaniacs," on which I once played a small part. I wandered about the party with Barron, eating strawberries. Then I showed him the Spanish-style main administration building, and some sets of a city street, and then we left.

I'm telling you, if Americans generally knew what a great life even a very

small player has, L.A. would collapse under the weight of the accountants, lawyers, foundation directors, and economists who would come here.

Tuesday

A meeting with my pal A., at an extremely successful TV production company in Beverly Hills. I was there because I have written a spec script for a sitcom. A spec script means no one has paid me for it. I did it just to try to sell it, and particularly to try to sell it because it stars little me.

In it, I play a middle-aged detective who is a single father to a rambunctious, extremely clever little six-year-old angel boy.

It only took me three days to write it. When I was finished, I sent it over to A. so that he could tell me what was right and wrong with it.

He sat at his desk while I sat on a tiny couch and took notes. It was a fascinating experience.

"There are rules," A. said. "Your main character has to be likeable. You've given yours a blond girlfriend with a mink coat. That means she has money, and that makes her unlikeable."

I wrote it down.

"Also, you have a white character who makes racist jokes about a black character. The networks won't like that."

"But the black character is always making racist jokes about white people," I protested.

"You can try it," A. answered with a shrug, "but I'm telling you, the network won't like it, and my company won't like it."

"All right," I said.

"Plus, the little boy has to be more sweet. This one is always pestering his father for a twenty-speed bike and trying to catch him in a trap and that doesn't make him sweet."

"I think it makes him sweet," I said.

"No, Benjy," A. said. "That makes him obnoxious. The audience has to like him, has to have a rooting interest in him. It doesn't matter what you think of the little boy, the audience won't like him if he's that much of a pest."

Then A. gave a little talk about how the plot has to begin by page six, how the meter of a joke must be two short lines and then one long line, and how the subplot must be clearly resolved when the A plot is resolved.

This is really interesting, but somewhat out of my league. I guess I'm a journalist more than a sitcom writer. Still, I'll try again. I want this to get on the air.

Sunday

Dinner and a screening at the simply incredible home of L., a major TV producer, one of the most successful TV producers in history. The host is a genial, genuinely wonderful man with twinkling blue eyes. His wife is a younger, kind, lovely woman who lights up the room when she comes in. Their house is on a hilltop on the Westside, overlooking the Westside and the Santa Monica Bay.

We had a buffet light dinner while we watched the sun set over the bay. A well-known left-wing columnist from the *L.A. Times* and I had quite a cordial talk about Nixon, whom he swears he secretly admires. Then I had a long talk with a legendary movie star about which airlines have the best service. Then I talked to the teenage daughter of another Hollywood mogul about Georgetown, and then we had a screening of *The Age of Innocence*.

The movie makes mowing the lawn seem exciting, and Daniel Day-Lewis must be the worst actor in Hollywood, but the set-up at L.'s projection room was beyond belief. Perfect sound out of his Frazier and JBL speakers and Dolby amplifying system. Perfect projection. And a perfectly comfortable seat surrounded by happy people.

On the screen, simulacra of rich, inside people from Edith Wharton's New York. In the screening room, reality of rich, inside people one hundred and twenty years later.

On screen, they have their rituals of eating oysters and roast beef and turkey and many different kinds of wine. In Bel-Air, we have our rituals of not eating red meat, not drinking alcohol.

On screen, they have their codes of no divorce and not indulging their emotions. In the screening room, we have our rituals of animal rights and protecting the environment. Both groups are doing what they think is morally and ethically right. Both groups have codes to protect themselves, and who are we to scoff at what they thought was protecting them?

The Latin word for law is "lex," which also means "protection." A lot of Americans have forgotten that.

Monday

A furtive call from my pal Staci. "Do you want to hear something amazing?" she asked. "I'm interviewing for a job at"—here she named a major talent agency—"and when the agent saw that I had worked for you, he got excited and said he loved your articles in *The American Spectator*, and he read the *Spectator* cover to cover. Maybe you could call him and give him a pep talk for me."

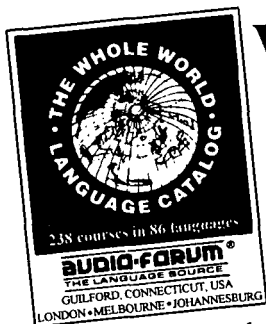
"Of course," I said.

I called the young man and told him who I was. "Listen," he said, "I love the *Spectator*, but I only get it at home. If people here knew I was a closet conservative, I'd be in hot water."

"I'll send you one of my books in a plain brown wrapper," I said. "Keep you out of trouble."

And meanwhile, I pray for Trixie, who will soon be immortal. ☐

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The Great Patriotic War

by Grover G. Norquist

On Monday, October 4, House minority leader Bob Michel (R-Ill.) announced that he would not run for another congressional term. Jerry Solomon of New York, believed to be Michel's favored successor as Republican leader, immediately announced his candidacy. But by Thursday, Republican whip Newt Gingrich stood outside the Capitol with seventy-five Republican colleagues to announce that he had firm commitments of support from 109 of 176 House Republicans. Official Washington was stunned by the speed and size of Gingrich's victory. Gingrich had garnered eighty-eight of those commitments—the required majority—within thirty hours of Michel's announcement, and won support from fully forty of forty-eight freshmen. Although it went unreported by the Gingrich-demonizing press, Gingrich won the support of moderates and conservatives alike. They were voting not simply for a conservative but for an aggressive political fighter who has campaigned hard for Republicans of all stripes. The combative Gingrich is now the unchallenged leader of his party in the House.

The accommodationist politics of the Michel years is thus nearing an end, and the Republican leadership is set on a conservative and confrontational path for the foreseeable future. Dick Armey has announced that he will run for re-election as conference chairman and is presently unopposed. Tom DeLay of Texas, Bill McCollum of Florida, and Bob Walker of Pennsylvania, all conservatives, are vying to replace Gingrich as whip. Ohio Republican John Boehner, the aggressive young chairman of the Conservative Opportunity Society, is expected to enter one of the leadership races as well.

While the timing of Michel's announcement was driven by Illinois' filing deadlines, it came at an important

juncture—on the eve of what is to be the decisive congressional battle over what kind of government and society Americans are going to have. For just twelve days earlier, Bill Clinton had announced his plan to have the government take over the health-care industry. Clinton, elected with a vote midway between Mike Dukakis's losing 46 percent and Jimmy Carter's losing 41 percent, will lose the presidency in 1996, barring a three-way race or a fundamental change in the political landscape. And effecting that change is the goal of this "health-care reform" package.

Some Republicans, traumatized by the loss of the White House, fail to see the fundamental shakiness of the present Democratic coalition. Labor unions continue their decline. Hispanic voters are not cooperating with the plans of Democrats who hoped another "minority" would accept dependency status and join blacks as a non-demanding voting bloc for Democrat candidates. Homosexuals are hardly as numerous as the Clintonites had led themselves to believe—when polls last year showed Clinton winning 85 percent of the gay vote, Democratic campaign workers predicted the emergence of a gay bloc that would provide 8.5 percent of the vote in any election, a bloc equal in size to the black vote. But this was based on a naive belief in the Kinsey claim that homosexuals comprise 10 percent of the population—when the actual number may be closer to 1 percent. Meanwhile, the New Deal Democrats who came of age in the 1930s are now aged 72 to 82 and passing away.

Clinton can also see the campaign for choice in education as the beginning of the privatization of 6 percent of the nation's economy. Choice will undermine the monopoly of 3 million unionized school teachers who, through the National Education Association, provide millions in political cash and plenty of well-distributed muscle into every congressional district.

And despite conservative frustration at the failure of initiatives in Colorado and Oregon, liberals know that the fight for school choice is like a nuclear attack . . . you only have to get one through the defenses. A large enough pilot program will show the strength, popularity, and success of choice and undermine the scare tactics of the left. Of course, the Democrats' most dwindling asset is the belief—now discredited even in the Soviet Union and Mexico—that government can effectively run large parts of the economy.

With a shrinking political infrastructure and a discredited ideology, the Clintons have decided to attack. They will nationalize 14 percent of the economy and politicize health care. Then 14 million workers' livelihoods will be dependent on government decisions. Companies and individuals that were once independent will have to come to grips with Democratic power. Opposition to government spending and taxes, once derided simply as "greed," will now be the cause of sickness and death. (Senator Ted Kennedy has already voiced such a claim.) Washington, which today claims control of 25 percent of the nation's economy, will soon control 100 percent of your health.

For several weeks the establishment press fawned on the First Lady and Republicans in the Senate appeared to be falling all over themselves to apologize for their beastly opposition to Clinton's budget and "stimulus package." But the pleasantries exchanged with Hillary Clinton—in meaningless hearings over a vague 237-page outline of intent—only masked a growing understanding by the Republicans of the stakes of Clinton's challenge.

Gingrich says that the "health care debate is the decisive battle about whether we become a free society or become a socialist state." The Clinton plan, he says, "will transfer so much money and power to the government that it would change

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